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## Ivy League joins digital trend

The Ivy League this month announced that it will join the Big Ten and the PAC-12 in launching its own digital sports network, giving fans of the conference and its teams unprecedented access to their favorite team's home and away games from a single Internet-based platform.

The newest digital network, which subscribers can access over the Internet through IvyLeagueSport.tv, will provide channels for each of the eight league schools, as well as a conference channel. Fans will have the choice of subscribing, on either a monthly or an annual basis, to one or more individual school channels, or opting for a conference package that affords them the ability see all of the available programming for all of the conference schools.

Programming on the network reportedly will include live transmissions of football and basketball games, as well as coverage of other collegiate sports, and on-demand access to games from the schools' archives. The digital network will launch in August 2013, just in time for the fall collegiate season.

At least at the outset, the Ivy League network appears to be starting out slowly, as compared to the much more robust Big Ten Digital Network and PAC-12 Now, which makes sense given the relative size of the conferences and their sport coverage capabilities. The Big Ten Network, the six-year-old conference cable network that is 51 percent owned by Fox, partners with CBS Sports.com to provide the digital platform for its content. The digital platform, which the network launched in 2011, offers an estimated 50 million subscribers live game broadcasts, streaming audio and video from all 12 of the member institutions, exclusive coverage of up to 500 additional contests, and

other content, including behind-the-scenes video, game highlights, press conferences and other original programming.

It covers 25 different men's and women's sports, including basketball, football, baseball and soccer, as well as swimming, gold, tennis, gymnastics, and track, with additional coverage from conference postseason tournaments and events. Fans can subscribe to a single school's channel, or pay for access to content across all of the channels, on a monthly or yearly basis.

The PAC-12 Network, launched in 2012, also offers subscribers digital access to its content through PAC-12 Now. Unlike the Big Ten Network, the PAC-12 Network is owned and operated by the conference, and its expansion into the digital space happened fairly contemporaneously with the launch of the network itself. The site offers subscribers coverage of 30 men's and women's sports, including rugby, rowing, water polo, swimming and diving, in addition to the standard offerings of football, basketball, baseball, and track and field. The PAC-12 reportedly had about a third of the subscribers of the Big Ten Network in its first year.

Another difference between the planned Ivy League digital network and the other two conference networks is that the other two conferences expanded into the digital space from an existing conference television network. While the Ivy League has a broadcast partner — NBC Sports Network — the conference does not operate its own network, and this will affect the content available on the digital network.

Content will come directly from the individual schools, with the schools handling production for those contests and events held on their campus. The Ivy League conference will handle



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production for conference events, including league championships. At least at the outset, games and events televised live by NBC Sports Network or games sold to any other TV network will not be available on the digital network — for example, the Ivy League men's lacrosse championship rights reportedly are owned by ESPN.

The potential does exist that that these games could come online at some point (live streamed under the particular network's branding), if the rights holders reach a deal to authenticate the video on the digital network.

The expansion into the digital space uses the so-called "TV Everywhere" model — allowing fans to watch sports and other programming on their small screens — over the Internet on computers, tablets and mobile devices. For fans, the advantage of these digital networks run by the conferences is that they can see most of the conference play on one platform and anywhere they want. For Ivy League fans, the single digital network — while not yet offering complete coverage of all live games — still offers them the advantage to being able to view more games all in one place, and digitally, rather than having to subscribe separately to each school's individual platform.

For conferences and their participating schools, these networks represent more than just a repackaging of their

content in a more accessible and fan-friendly form. They are part of the growing trend by both collegiate and professional sports organizations toward the expansion, control and monetization of the digital space, offering ever more sports content to fans who are willing to pay for 24-hour, customizable access on their small screens.

NeuLion, the technology company with which the Ivy League is working to create its digital network, works with both the Big Ten and the PAC-12 conferences on their digital offerings, as well as nearly 200 hundred individual schools (including four of the eight Ivy League schools, with the other four schools to come in 2013), and the NHL and NBA, as well as many of those league's individual teams. The digital broadcasting technology company reportedly estimates that 30-40 percent of its content is being viewed on mobile devices and tablets.

These digital networks represent the consolidation of digital rights in the hands of the conferences, rather than the individual schools. Depending on the success of the digital network (e.g., in regard to subscriber base and advertising revenue), the individual schools may gain a tremendous return for their rights through revenue-sharing plans that allocate revenues among the schools from subscriptions, advertising and cable contracts.