

# "I'm not surfing. This is my job."

by James R. Meier

Serious sports fans, like their teams, can be quite aggressive and demanding in their requests for information. They don't want to know just how many career wins Warren Spahn had, but how many he had against each team. They don't want to know just how many receptions the Baltimore Ravens had last year, but how many were by their tight ends. Besides statistical questions, there are also rules interpretations, genealogical and biographical requests, sports law and business inquiries, and questions on the language of sports.

## Kickoff

Each day in my role as Senior Editor for News Research for *The Sporting News* magazine, I answer these types of questions from both internal customers and the public. Because I have at my disposal a 10,000-volume sports monograph and reference collection, thousands of individual team media guides, and a roomful of expert sportswriters and editors just down the hall, I do not have to turn to the Internet often for reference purposes.

Still, there are times when the only source for a needed piece of information is a Web site or other electronic resource. The 41 sites described here have impressed me as being especially useful for reference purposes. With the exception of a few good indexes, most of these sites are "destination" sites that attempt to have the answer to users' questions on their pages, as opposed to "intermediary" sites that link to other sites or merely give contact information for people who could help. The vast majority of the clients I serve are adults interested in the sports that our magazine covers — baseball, football, basketball, and hockey — and the sites reflect this demographic group and its needs, though many are appropriate for all ages.

Some of the most valuable "intermediary" sites are association sites. Although these sites have varying amounts of historical information immediately available, being able to contact an expert researcher in a specialized sports field can be the difference between satisfying a client's request or failure. Besides information professional communities such as the North American Sports Library Network (NASLIN) and the International Association of Sports Museums and Halls of Fame (IASMHF), researchers in the major sports have formed groups such as the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), the Professional Football Researchers Association (PFRA), and the

Society for International Hockey Research (SIHR). Of these types of sites, the Association of Professional Basketball Researchers (APBR) site at <http://hometown.aol.com/bradleyrd/apbr.html> has the most depth of content on the history of its sport. There are also associations for sports history, law, literature, sociology, and philosophy. The "Associations" section of Gretchen Ghent's directory (see below) has an excellent list of links to these groups and others.

I have not included the major sports news sites. While they all do a fine job on current sporting events, no one site in particular stands out from the others. Also, their usefulness as reference tools for historical sports information is limited. The special features they create frequently disappear from their sites within a few days or weeks. For example, ESPN's collection of short athlete biographies that make up their excellent "SportsCentury" package <http://espn.go.com/sportscency> is buried deep within their site.

Finally, as with the other lists in this issue, these sites are just one person's opinion. If your favorite tool is not included, please contact me. With the existence of thousands of sports-related sites, no doubt there are many excellent ones that I have overlooked or have never seen. As the title to this article indicates, I do spend some of my time searching the Web for good sites, but I also enjoy the site review columns in both *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN: The Magazine*.

## The Main Event

### Directories and Indexes

#### *Yahoo's Sports and Recreation Index*

<http://dir.yahoo.com/recreation/sports/index.html>

I still find myself going here for its ease of use, depth, and breadth. While certainly not all-encompassing, it is an excellent starting point for several types of searches.

#### *SPORTQuest*

<http://www.sportquest.com>

An alternative to Yahoo, *SPORTQuest*, which is maintained by the Canadian National Sports Library, has an excellent index. Its focus is on coaching, physical education, and international organizations.

#### *Gretchen Ghent's Scholarly Sport Sites: A Subject Directory*

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/library/ssportsite>

Compiled by the chair of the North American Sport

Library Network, this index is designed for the university or college researcher and is especially good in the areas of kinesiology and the sports sciences. Includes links to full-text documents and databases with sports-specific information.

*Statistics in Sports: A Section of the American Statistical Association*  
<<http://www.amstat.org/sections/sis/>>

This is not the place to go to find someone's batting average (though they do have links to others' sports stats pages), but rather is the place for heavy academic statistical analysis.

*Ralph Hickok's Sports History*

<<http://www.hickoksports.com/history.shtml>>

A very good starting point for learning the history of a specific sport. This is a fun site that would be appropriate for middle and high school students as well as adults.

*The Sports Hot Sheet*

<<http://members.xoom.com/hotsheet/sports.html>>

Fan-produced sites with unreliable information are a huge problem for sports researchers; therefore, using only official team sites and the sites for major publications is highly recommended. To that end, Jack Styczynski of NBC has created a site with links to all the official team and league sites and many major newspapers' sports sections. Although the site itself is slow to load, this is one of the best sites out there.

*Rick Johnson's Sportspages*

<<http://www.sportspages.com/>>

Similar to the *Hot Sheet*, *Sportspages* is very popular with my colleagues at *The Sporting News*, as it has links to many newspapers' sports sections.

## Baseball Sites

*Official Rules for Major League Baseball*

<[http://www.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/baseball\\_basics/mlb\\_basics\\_on\\_the\\_field.jsp](http://www.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/mlb/baseball_basics/mlb_basics_on_the_field.jsp)>

The official rules online. No index and no search function limit its functionality, but still useful to have available.

Historical statistics

You can find historical player registers and information on a number of sites including

*Total Baseball* <<http://www.totalbaseball.com/>>

*The Baseball Archive* <<http://www.baseball1.com/>>

*The Baseball Almanac* <<http://www.baseball-almanac.com/>>

and *Baseball Reference* <<http://www.baseball-reference.com/>>.

*Total Baseball* is the official encyclopedia of Major League Baseball. *The Baseball Almanac* might be better for younger audiences with its non-traditional sections on "U.S. Presidents," "Quotations," "Poetry," and "Humor." *The Baseball Archive* has a good, though not updated, section on baseball economics. Any of these sites will work, but as of November 2000, I favor *Baseball Reference* due to its ease of navigation and its statistical currency.

There are no comparable online historical player registers for minor league baseball, football, or basketball, although a basketball statistics database can be downloaded from the Association for Professional Basketball Researchers site. For a historical hockey player register, use *Fox Sports' NHL Historical Almanac* <<http://www.foxsports.com/nhl/history/index.sml>>. How-

ever, as of April 1, 2001, Fox Sports is redesigning its site and this almanac is not available.

## Other Sports Sites

For coverage of sports besides baseball, you're best off working with a major index or one of the official sites. Despite my earlier criticism of fan-produced sites, however, several valuable and well-done sites are worth examining.

*Jerry Palm's RPI and BCS Duplicators*

<<http://www.collegerpi.com/>> and <<http://www.collegebcs.com/>>

I go to these sister sites every week during the fall and winter. Palm provides excellent duplications of the NCAA's official Ratings Percentage Index for basketball and the Bowl Championship Series' rankings, and adds his own commentaries, predictions, and other valuable college football and basketball information.

College football records

Chris Stassen has year-by-year records for every team in a database that is sortable to create tables and rankings over any time period <<http://football.stassen.com/records>>. If you need to go down one more level to individual game scores for every team, J. J. Hulsebus has compiled these in a non-sortable database <<http://www.michigan-football.com/ncaa/ncaa.htm>>. A third excellent site for college football facts and figures is *WJL10.com* <<http://www.wjl10.com>>, and the NCAA is beginning to make available all of its official record books in Adobe Acrobat PDF files on its site <<http://www.ncaa.org/library/records.html>>.

*Jayski's Winston Cup Silly Season Site*

<<http://www.jayski.com>>

Despite its unofficial status, this self-proclaimed "portal to the world of Internet NASCAR info" is valuable as a central location for finding rumors and news on the sport and for its many links to official sites for drivers, teams, and sponsors.

Defunct leagues

Information on leagues that no longer exist is surprisingly popular, yet difficult to get. Paul Reeth's United States Football League site <<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Field/8520/>> is the best I have found on the USFL, and Arthur Hundhausen has a good site on the old American Basketball Association that includes a link to a list of other sites devoted to extinct leagues <<http://www.geocities.com/~arthurh/>>.

*International Association of Sports Museums and Halls of Fame (IASMHF)*

<<http://www.sportshalls.com/>>

Hall of Fame sites tend to be marketing-driven rather than research-driven, so returns can be mixed. Almost all the sites, however, will have short biographies and statistics on those enshrined. The IASMHF site has a searchable directory of its members with links to each hall's site.

## Extreme Sports Sites

No, I am not talking about motocross or snowboarding. These are sites that have an extremely narrow focus on one area of sports off the field.

*Sports glossaries*

<<http://www.firstbasesports.com/glossaries/>>

Has basic glossaries for football, soccer, ice hockey, and



basketball. I have not yet found a good baseball dictionary online to compete with Paul Dickson's print edition (*The New Dickson Baseball Dictionary*. Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999).

#### Ballparks

<<http://www.ballparks.com>>

The definitive site for information on ballparks and arenas for the major sports. Site navigation could be improved, but the content is absolutely first rate on both current stadiums and those no longer active.

#### Athletes in court

<<http://www.cracksmoker.com>>

An alphabetical list of athletes who have been involved with the law in some way. Also includes links to major stories on their problems.

#### Sports Economics

<[http://www.sportseconomics.com/Academic/Links\\_of\\_Interest\\_/links\\_of\\_interest.html](http://www.sportseconomics.com/Academic/Links_of_Interest_/links_of_interest.html)>

A short list of links on sports economics and business. Fox Sports also had a very good resources section (<<http://www.foxsports.com/business/>>), but this area is unavailable during the current redesign.

#### Professional Sports Authenticators (PSA)

<<http://www.psacard.com>>

For information on sports collectibles and trading cards and authenticating items, try PSA or *Sportscard Guaranty* <<http://www.sgccard.com/main.html>>.

#### College Nicknames

<<http://www.smargon.net/nicknames/>>

What schools use the nickname "Angels?" According to Adam Smargon's site on college nicknames, only Meredith College in Raleigh. The site is arranged alphabetically by nickname, but if you use the "find" function on your browser, you can also search by school. The site gets bonus points for featuring links back to the schools' home pages.

#### School Fight Songs

<<http://www.1122productions.com/fightsongs/>>

Lyrics for over 400 school fight songs. Not a great design, but useful information. To actually hear the songs, try *Trevor Barnes' Fight Songs Page*, which has audio files for most of top football schools <<http://www.fightsongs.com>>.

#### Team and League Logos

<<http://emblems.tripod.com>>

*Chris Creamer's Sports Logo Page* has a list of over 3,000 logos. Unfortunately, several of the links to logo pages have died.

### A Great Triple Play

Individual game box scores

<<http://www.sportserver.com/SportServer/>>

Although box scores appear in almost every newspaper in the country, you may not have the microfilm in your collection or may want a faster method of access.

*NandO's SportsServer*, a national Web site produced by the Internet publishing division of The McClatchy Company, has archives of box scores for the four major leagues going back through July 1995. I have recently rediscovered this site and am wondering why I ever stopped using it. I know of no site that has historical

box scores for any sport better than this one.

#### Information Please Sports Almanac (IPSA)

<<http://www.infoplease.com/sports.html>>

When I put together my list of best sports reference books for a presentation to the News Division of SLA in 1999, the IPSA was at the top of that list <[http://metalab.unc.edu/slanews/conferences/sla1999/ref\\_sports.html](http://metalab.unc.edu/slanews/conferences/sla1999/ref_sports.html)>. Fortunately, it is also available online. Navigation on the site has improved over the years. It has a tremendous amount of information on the previous seasons of all the major sports, and the 'through the years' sections provide excellent historical information. It also has very good sections on stadiums and the business of sports.

STATS INC. on AOL

Keyword: STATS

All of the sites mentioned throughout are freely available through the Web, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention STATS INC.'s area within AOL. It provides the most detailed individual and team statistics available and has an excellent database of material going back through the 1990s. Of all the tools on this list, this is the electronic resource I would miss the most should it disappear. Unfortunately, their public Web site does not have this information; you must have an AOL membership to access STATS INC.

### Next Season

In 1998, I gave a presentation on historical research on the Web to NASLIN, and I identified three main problems: locating relevant sites, organizations not putting their catalogs or finding aids on their sites, and original material not appearing in full-text on the Web. Today, more organizations are posting finding aids and full-text documents in PDF files on their sites. The Joyce Sports Research Collection <<http://www.sports.nd.edu>> and the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles <<http://www.aafla.org>> are two excellent examples of this trend. Overall, however, these problems still persist for the academic or historical researcher who needs more than basic reference help.

In addition to the large research centers, some teams are putting significant portions of their media guides on their official sites. At least one school has abandoned printing media guides altogether and will be putting that information exclusively online. There is a short-term benefit to having the additional information more freely available to the public, but I fear that these schools, like many sites, will not archive their Web content and therefore, much of it will be lost.

Although only a few of the primary reference titles are showing up in electronic form today, I do anticipate that we will see the much needed all-time player registers for football and basketball soon. In addition to these titles, I would love to see a minor league baseball all-time register and an all-time uniform number resource, but I don't foresee either of those in the near future.

Finally, we get frequent requests from researchers asking when the full-text of our magazine, which has been published weekly since 1886, will be available in a searchable form online. This is a project that many publications face, but I believe it will not happen for several years until lawsuits regarding the copyrights of contributing freelance writers are settled, scanning and OCR technologies improve, and a profitable business plan for the electronic archives can be developed.