

ESPN Drafts Playdom to Build Social Games

Chris Morrison, *Inside Social Games*

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EA may have Playfish to help develop social versions its branded sports games, but ESPN is planning to take its own slice of the professional sports market on Facebook and other social networks. The broadcaster announced today that it has signed a two-year deal with Playdom to build games, starting with two planned for the near future.

The question is what sort of games ESPN wants to make. Its first move is to also announce that it has modified its two year old Sport Passport service, with which sports fans chronicle their fandom, to allow Foursquare-style check-ins at games and other events.

Details on future games are hazy, though. One will allow players to build their own college sports franchise, according to MediaBistro. That may or may not be the same game as ESPNUville, which SportsBusiness Journal's Eric Fisher reports (via Gamasutra) to be similar to FarmVille — although that name, happily, doesn't appear to be set just yet.

Whatever the name or details, it's looking increasingly like this will be the year that social gaming and sports finally come together — at least, if the large companies have their way.

We've already seen successful apps and games based on college basketball and soccer show up on Facebook, and EA has licenses with FIFA, the NFL and other organizations that it will be bringing into play. And ESPN itself is no slouch; it has kept up with the web throughout the years, and has a Facebook Page with half a million fans.