

ESPN To Work Stats' Optical Tracking Data Into MLS Cup Telecast

By **Eric Fisher**, Staff Writer, SportsBusiness Journal

ESPN will incorporate Stats LLC's new optical tracking data into its broadcast of MLS Cup on Sunday, marking another advance for the emerging technology. Data such as the distance and average speed players travel during the game, the number of sprints taken, and the amount of time spent in various parts of the field, often known as "heat maps," will be shown graphically on screen. Because of the continual flow of soccer, ESPN will primarily show the data during game breaks such as halftime and postgame, and previously collected location-based data from the conference title games will be used for pregame programming. Real-time optical tracking data from MLS Cup will additionally be available at Stats.com. "This is an experiment for us, but we definitely think this is going to be a great tool," said ESPN Senior Coordinating Producer Matt Sandulli. "What we're working through now is figuring out just how much of this we can relay and how to best present it." Stats late last year purchased SportVU, a Tel Aviv-based optical tracking outfit, and since then has been active testing the technology at numerous MLS regular-season and playoff games. Stats additionally has implemented the motion tracking data on a more developed level with several international soccer properties, including UEFA and the Asian Football Confederation. The company is actively exploring deployments of the technology for basketball and football in the U.S. "Since the U.S. is already accustomed to progressive graphics in their sports, we think this will catch people's eyes," said Stats Exec VP Steve Byrd. "We're excited, and we think this will help pave the way for even bigger opportunities in this market."

