

## “Virtual Reality Could Transform Sports for Players and Fans”

Adapted by Newsela Staff

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Imagine the feeling of swinging at a baseball going 100 miles per hour — without leaving your living room. Or being in a bone-rattling race car as it roars down the track, while you are sitting on the couch.

These are just some of the ways that sports business leaders say virtual reality (VR) will revolutionize how people train for and experience sports.

In VR, users typically wear a headset that holds a screen up to their eyes. The screen changes based on how the user moves. The results can be dramatic. Rather than feeling as if they are seeing another world through the headset, users feel as if they are actually inside another world.

For two days in early October, sports business leaders met in London, England, to discuss VR.

"It's going to disrupt all aspects of sport that you can imagine," virtual reality expert Michael Ludden said. He spoke in front of the Leaders Sport Business Summit at Stamford Bridge stadium in London.

### **A Whole New World**

Virtual and augmented reality are together known as mixed reality (MR). Augmented reality involves placing computer-generated images over real-world surroundings. That is, you are looking at the real world through a screen that adds to it. "Pokemon Go" is a phone app and a popular example of augmented reality.

Ludden said mixed reality would transform sports for professionals, amateurs and spectators.

"American footballers are already using VR to better train their minds, read the field," he said. This can allow quarterbacks to perfect their skills without risking injury.

"You can train with a real baseball bat that's tracked in virtual reality against real pitchers using data from those pitchers," added Ludden, who has worked for IBM and Google. This could give a batter detailed information on the swing and its performance.

Mixed reality surrounds the user sonically and visually in another world. However, other developing technologies are beginning to re-create the physical reality of top-level sports. They're opening a whole new world of possible spectator experience.

### **From Theater Seats To Race Car Seats**

Canadian company D-BOX Technologies designs and manufactures moving seats found in cinemas and theme parks. It is now moving into sports, and showed its Formula One (F1) racing simulator at the London

event.

The seats mimic the force of gravity, speed and every vibration as F1 champion Lewis Hamilton zips around city streets.

The simulation seat uses pre-programmed data now. Someday, though, it could use real-time information sent by the car. This would allow spectators to pick their driver and experience that driver's full racing adventure live, said Veronique Maheu, a director at D-BOX.

"They could broadcast live content through a network in pop-up theaters around the world," she said. Maheu added that the company intended to roll out the experience at fan zones at F1 racing events.

The technology can be adapted to help train athletes in other sit-down sports such as rowing. Maheu said she had also received interest from members of the horse-racing world.

Sensors could also soon be placed on sports fields, balls and on players. All together, these would remotely re-create the reality and feel of pro football, soccer or baseball, or even make reality feel more intense.

Say you wanted to experience the true stress of a batter being up against major-league baseball pitcher. "You can have a heartbeat added to the sensation on the seat and then you can feel it, boom, boom," Maheu explained.

"When he swings and hits the ball, you can have an impact," she added.

The seats currently cost \$10,000 each, putting them out of the reach of the average fan.

However, the price of VR headsets such as Oculus Rift is falling.

### **A Stadium Of The Future?**

Headsets and the development of VR suits present another possibility. One day, fans around the world could physically experience every tackle and goal from their favorite player in real time.

VR expert Ludden also said that current and near-future technology could create "augmented stadiums" for live spectators.

Panasonic pitched its "Smart Venue" plans at a technology fair in Las Vegas, Nevada. These included the overlaying of graphics, advertisements, player statistics and replays on the field of play at a pro football game.

"If you are sat in the nose-bleeds (cheap seats), I can see this being really useful," Ludden said.

Mixed reality could also revolutionize halftime entertainment. Fans may someday join in stadium-wide games, using the field as a virtual gaming platform, he added.

"Virtual Reality Could Transform Sports for Players and Fans." Newsela, *Agence France-Presse*, 17 Oct. 2018, [newsela.com/read/virtual-reality-revolution-sports/id/46804/](https://newsela.com/read/virtual-reality-revolution-sports/id/46804/). Accessed 23 Oct. 2018.