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Suit accuses MLB of online patent infringement

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An intellectual-property holding company is suing Major League Baseball for what it considers patent infringement on its real-time sports technology.

The holding company, DDB Technologies of Austin, Texas, filed the lawsuit last Friday against [MLB Advanced Media](#), the league's interactive division. The suit alleges that MLB.com used technology covered by many of DDB's patents. Features allegedly infringing on DDB's patents include its Gameday simulations of live baseball games, its condensed video highlights, its searchable video highlights and its live fantasy baseball stat tracker.

A DDB spokesman said the lawsuit stemmed from failed talks to secure a license from MLB.

"Negotiations broke down, and DDB had to move forward with litigation," said Michael McLaughlin, a spokesman from Intellectual Property Asset Corporation, which manages DDB's intellectual-property assets. "Hopefully, MLBAM will take the license to DDB's patents, and eventually, we hope, others will as well."

McLaughlin said DDB is currently talking to other Web sites, but he declined to name them. He noted that Sportsline.com in 2003 struck a licensing deal with DDB for its own interactive live sports features. Other Web sites that run fantasy sports and live scoring features include Yahoo and ESPN.com. McLaughlin declined to comment on whether DDB is talking to the two giants.

MLBAM said the courts will decide whether the patent claims can be legally enforced.

"We have preliminarily reviewed the allegations," MLBAM spokesman Jim Gallagher said. "We believe the suit to be without merit, and we will see them in court."

The issue of Internet patents continues to raise controversy. Smaller companies that have secured patents have sued giants such as Microsoft, cable networks and, in this case, a sports league. However, legal experts question whether these patents are enforceable and whether these lawsuits amount to industry blackmail.

A start-up called Eolas last year won a \$565 million judgment against Microsoft. The ruling said the software juggernaut had violated a patent that lets Web browsers support third-party plug-ins. Microsoft has won a number of legal victories since the judgment, most recently winning a [ruling from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#) that sided with the software giant.

Earlier this summer, patent holding company [Acacia Research](#) sued major cable and satellite networks, such as Comcast and DirecTV, for violating its media-streaming patents.

Acacia has also forced some pornography sites to shut down due to alleged patent infringement. It has secured licenses with major media companies such as Walt Disney and [Radio Free Virgin](#).