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Stats Plus Security = A Winning Formula

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Notwithstanding the glitz and glamour of multi-millionaire race drivers and champagne, Formula One is all about data. Analytics are fundamental to understanding Formula One races. Teams are fueled by data, and around every corner you'll find a car fitted with over 150 sensors monitoring car and driver behavior. These sensors track vital stats such as brake wear, tire life and driver biometrics. In one lap, they can transmit 2GB of data; over the course of a full race, 3TB of data.

NBA teams too are now using a form of technology, called "Player Tracking," that evaluates the efficiency of a team by an analysis of player movement. According to the SportVu software website, teams in the NBA are now using six cameras installed in the catwalks of arenas to track the movements of every player on the court and the basketball 25 times per second. The data collected provides a plethora of innovative statistics based on speed, distance, player separation and ball possession. Examples include stats on how fast a player moves, how far he travels during a game, how many times he touches the ball, how many passes he makes, how many rebounding opportunities he has, and much more. The information is available to fans on NBA.com and NBA TV. Data analytics are also common in the MLB, NFL, MLS and other professional and collegiate sports, where statistics have become vital in analyzing games and players.

But gathering data in the volume and depth that is necessary to make accurate predictions comes with risks. What if the data falls into the wrong hands? How valuable would detailed statistics be? Of course, teams have traditionally monitored their opponents by sending scouts to games, or watching hours of video re-runs, while meticulously making notes on individuals' performances; but access to the "fire hose" of data collected during training would provide a huge shortcut.

For example, in Formula One, a data or system loss, or even a malware infection, and the race is lost. Formula One teams have data centers on the side of the track, processing every nanosecond of the race. If any of that data fell into the wrong hands it could be disastrous, which is why Formula One teams take data security extremely seriously.

Interestingly, tools needed to make sure data can be collected safely and kept only in the hands of those who it's intended for are already available. The problem is that outside of a few highly data-driven sports, such as Formula One, most clubs and teams just aren't aware enough of the dangers to have implemented them. Like businesses gathering data, sports teams too should have a full understanding of any and all obligations and requirements under relevant data protection legislation.

Communication is also critically important, i.e., appropriate disclosure of what data is being collected and how it is stored. It's also important to learn about and put in place the appropriate security measures to guard data, and to implement the necessary policies on deleting data a sports team no longer needs. The digital revolution engulfing sports has many challenges to overcome, but the point is that whether in sports or business, when data becomes an important asset that drives important decisions and competitiveness, it needs to be protected like any other important asset.



Article By [MintzSports Law Matters](#)
[Joshua Briones](#)

[Communications, Media & Internet](#)
[Entertainment, Art & Sports](#)
[All Federal](#)

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