

Illegal Sports Streaming in UK Soared 33% in First Half of 2025

By Olivia Solon

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Illegal sports streaming is surging in the UK, fueled by sites that are largely funded by advertising from unlicensed gambling operators, as fans seek to dodge rising subscription costs on legitimate platforms.

The top 10 unauthorized pirated sports sites in the UK drew 1.6 billion views in the first half of 2025, up by a third from the previous year, according to a report from data analytics firm Yield Sec published Thursday.

These sites stream popular sports such as soccer, boxing, tennis and cricket, as well as movies and TV shows, for free or for a small fee and heavily promote unregulated gambling and cryptocurrency services. Fans can find these sites via extensive promotion on mainstream social media sites.

“Illegal gambling is the commercial engine for illegal streaming and illegal gambling grows off the back of illegal streaming,” said Ismail Vali, founder of Yield Sec, which was recently bought by regulation consultancy Gaming Compliance International. “It’s a symbiotic relationship.”

Yield Sec collected the data by tracking activity across websites and apps, with some work carried out undercover. It only counted “stream views” that lasted longer than 90 seconds.

As live sports shift behind paywalls with rising subscription fees, people are increasingly turning to pirated livestreaming sites as a cheaper, frictionless alternative to watch their favorite events. Most fans don’t see a problem with using illegal streaming services, with 58% in the UK saying it’s socially acceptable, according to data from Nielsen. A UK government report found 38% of people watched pirated live sports in 2024.

While criminal prosecution or civil claims against viewers of illegal sports are extremely rare in the UK, sports leagues, rights holders and gambling safety advocates warn that the shadow ecosystem carries other dangers. Users are exposed to unlicensed gambling sites and malware, which puts them at risk of identity theft and scams. An analysis by cybersecurity company OpenText found that 90% of these websites featured threats including malware, phishing, fake security software and other scams.

Unlicensed gambling operators have used pirated streaming sites to grow in the UK to 9% of the county’s gambling market, according to Yield Sec’s report, which was funded by gambling reform group The Campaign for Fairer Gambling.

These sites avoid taxes and other restrictions imposed on regulated operators, allowing them to offer generous sign-up bonuses and promotions to lure customers to products with fewer safeguards, Vali said. Their advertising spending also helps sustain illegal streaming sites, he added.

Rights holders have been fighting back, deploying takedown notices, court orders and real-time monitoring to shut down pirate operations. The Alliance for Creativity and Entertainment, which counts sports rights holders UEFA and DAZN Group among its members, works with law enforcement to get major piracy sites taken down.

In September, it cooperated with police in Egypt to close down what it described as the world’s largest piracy network, StreamEast. The network of 80 domains offered streams of Premier League soccer, Formula One and the National Basketball Association and had been visited more than 1.6 billion times in the past year, ACE said in a statement at the time.

Even so, enforcement is still a challenge. When a site or a stream is blocked, alternative domains quickly pop up, often hosted in places with weak rules.

Cracking down on these sites is a game of whack-a-mole, according to ACE’s Dani Bacsá, so his group focuses on pursuing and disrupting larger operators. Sports content is a strong catalyst for piracy sites because “a live game loses almost all its commercial value the minute it ends,” he said.