



October 5 2023

## Man jailed for selling illegal Firesticks showing Premier League matches

The individual behind a sophisticated illegal streaming service which showed Premier League matches has been jailed today for two and a half years.

The conviction and sentencing of Steven Mills (age 58 from Shrewsbury) follows a joint investigation by the Premier League, West Mercia Police, and anti-piracy organisation FACT.

Mills, who ran the organisation which sold so-called 'Firesticks' via a closed Facebook group and claimed to have more than 30,000 subscribers, pleaded guilty in June earlier this year to multiple fraud offences at Shrewsbury Crown Court.

He was also convicted of a separate offence for watching the illegal content that he was supplying to others, with the court recognising that his own use of the unauthorised service was a distinct crime in itself. Mills received a separate prison sentence for this offence.

The service provided customers with a bespoke app and streaming devices, including so-called "Firesticks", to view a wide range of sport and entertainment content. Mills took significant steps to disguise his activity from detection including posting bundles of cash to suppliers and operating under a number of aliases.

In his sentencing remarks the judge in the case commented on the sophistication of the operation. The judge highlighted the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and recorded tutorial videos which supported his customers to access the illegal content.

Trading under the names *Pikabox* and *Eyepetevee*, the organisation received more than £1million in five years. The service was primarily provided to UK-based customers and was also sold to a network of resellers, who are currently under investigation.

The enquiry and subsequent raids by police provided intelligence which identified more than 1,000 of his customers. In January this year police and FACT officials visited a number of those individuals, serving notices to cease illegal streaming activities with immediate effect. [Link](#).

Kevin Plumb, Premier League General Counsel, said: "The sentence handed down by the Crown Court today once again clearly demonstrates the severity of piracy-related offences and the consequences that come with them.

"It is vital that the public continue to be made aware of the dangers and criminality associated with using illegal streaming services.

"We are aware that so-called 'Firesticks' are being sold as a means of illegally accessing all kinds of content, and today's judgment should remove any doubt that it is illegal and treated very seriously by the courts."

# Premier League Media Release



Detective Inspector Matt McNelis, Senior Investigating Officer, West Mercia Police, added: "This was a great example of partners from law enforcement and industry coming together to have a profound effect on this type of criminality.

"It's clear that no single agency alone can be as effective as closely coordinated teams working towards achieving an objective. The investigation, run by the Force Cyber Crime Unit, utilised sensitive tactics to increase the preventative messaging during the arrest phase before following up again with FACT to disrupt and educate others linked to Mills earlier this year.

"We are grateful for the advice provided by the Premier League legal team and of course to colleagues in the Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) and look forward to working with the team again in the near future."

Kieron Sharp, CEO of FACT, added: "FACT are proud to have supported the Premier League in this major investigation. This successful outcome would not have been possible without the collaboration and support of West Mercia Police and GAIN. FACT are committed to safeguarding the broadcast rights of our partners and we hope that the severity of the sentence sends out a clear message that piracy is a crime that is taken very seriously by the courts."

Today's judgment follows the successful prosecution earlier this year which resulted in five individuals being jailed for a total of 30 years and seven months in what is thought to be the world's largest-ever prosecution of an illegal streaming network which offered illegal access to Premier League matches. [Link](#)

**-Ends-**

## **Notes to Editors:**

### **Premier League's anti-piracy programme**

- The Premier League has one of the most comprehensive anti-piracy programmes in the world, working with broadcast partners and authorities to bring down illegal streams and investigate and prosecute suppliers of illegal streaming services.
- Since March 2017 the Premier League has been operating highly sophisticated blocking Orders obtained from the UK High Court, requiring Internet Service Providers to block access to illegal live streams in real-time, during matches.
- These have been regularly enhanced to address evasion methods deployed by pirate operators.
- The successful prosecution of Mills for watching Premier League content follows a similar prosecution in 2021 in Liverpool. Paul Faulkner was jailed for 16 months for supplying access to unauthorised Premier League content and received a separate sentence of four months' imprisonment for using the service. [Link](#).
- In 2021 the world's largest infringing streaming app ceased all operations after a major investigation and criminal referral by the Premier League and the Alliance for Creativity and Entertainment (ACE) resulted in law enforcement action by Spanish police and Europol. [Link](#)

# Premier League Media Release



- Advice for fans on how to report illegal broadcasting of Premier League matches can be found [here](#).