

# Cablefax Daily™

Tuesday — November 5, 2019

What the Industry Reads First

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## Tip Off: ACC Network Gears Up for Basketball

It's been a busy fall for **ESPN-run ACC Network**, which launched Aug 22 just in time for college football season. But now the net is ready for basketball tipoff, with the conference boasting strong talent from ranked teams Duke, North Carolina, Louisville, and, of course, defending champ Virginia. "From a starting point in terms of overall strategy, we've long known the strength of the ACC across men's and women's programs," *Stacie McCollum*, sr director, programming and acquisitions for ESPN, told **Cablefax**. "We focused on the launch at football, but we've always known we've wanted to own basketball. When you think about ACC basketball and you want to learn more and go really deep, you're coming to the ACC Network to do that." The net's signature show "Nothing But Net" will air Sunday evenings and preview the week's slate of basketball games and recap the previous week while keeping fans up to date. The 2019-2020 season starts off strong Tuesday evening, with a 6:30pm matchup between Louisville and Miami, followed by Georgia Tech at NC State at 8:30pm. In its first year, ACCN will have 110 men's matchups and 60 women's. This marks a 46-game increase in the number of ACC women's basketball events available on ESPN's linear networks over last year. "The other thing that was really important was just increasing exposure," said McCollum. "Every game across the conference will be televised, which is just a tremendous feat with a significant amount of that programming elevated." The net is putting a heavy emphasis on women's basketball, an area that had been undervalued in the past. "We've worked really hard to make sure that we're highlighting women's basketball and strong matchups," said McCollum. ACCN will feature 18 doubleheaders and five women's tripleheaders on Thursdays and Sundays throughout the season, with conference play beginning Dec 29 when Boston College hosts NC State. Additionally, the net aired a behind-the-scenes look at the 2019-20 Notre Dame women's basketball program at the end of September. Of course, the full television schedules for games isn't set, depending on how the season shakes out. Schedule changes will be made depending on how play goes, but reigning NCAA champ Virginia is confirmed for six appearances, beginning Wednesday against Syracuse. ACCN is working closely with both ESPN and the schools within the conference. "Our teams work side by side as we go by the basketball schedule. It's the first time for our team, but it's a very collaborative process," said McCollum. "Our schools have been producing live games for several years. We don't anticipate any challenges or surprises from a production standpoint because everyone is so

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seasoned.” When the net first launched, it had carriage with **Charter/Spectrum** but lacked deals with **Comcast, DISH** and **Cox**. DISH and ACCN struck a deal at the end of August, and Cox jumped on board in early September. The net still lacks carriage with Comcast, and there doesn't seem to be any signs of that changing. Fans in Xfinity footprints have been vocal, with several schools, including FSU and Clemson, encouraging supporters to contact providers. “We know that ACC fans are avid sports fans, and amongst most avid fans when it comes to college sports,” said McCollum. “I would expect there to be some interest, and I would say we’ve seen a continued interest from Comcast fans and subscribers that don’t have access to network. We’re incredibly pleased with where we are, we have a very strong list of providers both regionally and nationally that are carrying the network. There are ways for ACC fans to access the network.”

**Sprint’s Decline Continues As T-Mobile Fails to Extend Merger Deal:** With no word on if **T-Mobile** extended its merger agreement with Sprint (the deal expired on Friday), **Lightshed Partners** believes that T-Mobile parent company **Deutsche Telekom** should renegotiate to pay a lower price for **Sprint**. “We are currently focused on working very diligently to complete the last remaining steps to be able to close the merger in early 2020. And I think that says everything that we need to say about that date,” T-Mobile CEO *John Legere* said when asked about the expiration date during the company’s earnings call last week. Sprint’s continued struggles were illustrated with the release of its 3Q19 earnings Monday where the wireless carrier recorded a net loss of \$274mln (down from a net income of \$196mln YOY) and operating income of \$237mln (down from \$778mln YOY). Net operating revenues were \$7.8bln, a \$638mln decline YOY. “It is no longer controversial, nor even interesting, to observe that Sprint isn’t doing well,” **MoffettNathanson** wrote in a note. Sprint’s continued decline has only fortified the argument that as much as Sprint needs T-Mobile, T-Mobile may not really need Sprint. “It’s losing subs, churn is approaching 2%, and its wireless service revenue is in decline,” Lightshed wrote in a blog post. “The 2021 consensus EBITDA estimate for Sprint has been revised down 13% since the deal was first announced and could fall further following Sprint’s weak quarterly report this morning.” The best part of the deal for T-Mobile would be its acquisition of Sprint’s spectrum assets, but MoffettNathanson pointed out that should the deal not go through, Sprint will likely have to sell its spectrum anyways. That would give T-Mobile an opportunity to purchase the spectrum it needs without adding the struggling business to its balance sheet. Lightshed also believes that a new deal could even help T-Mobile and Sprint fight their case against the state AGs that have sued to block the deal. “It would underscore the effective ‘failing firm’ argument the companies have been making more aggressively since the deal approval process has lengthened,” it said. “We do not believe a re-cut deal would alter the terms of their agreements with the **FCC** or the **DOJ**. In fact, it might provide FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* with additional talking points in support of the deal.”

## **Cablefax: What’s Happening... November & December**

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### **NOVEMBER**

#### **Cablefax: The Magazine – November Issue Most Powerful Women**

Cablefax’s annual Most Powerful Women magazine honors the female executives and media influencers whose outstanding leadership, innovation and community continues to change the industry for the better.

#### **Holiday Programming**

With unprecedented amounts of holiday programming in 2018, what are the lessons learned for 2019? We’ll look at how programmers are carving out a space in the crowded seasonal programming environment.

#### **Get SMART**

From smart homes to smart cities, Cablefax has you covered. We’ll examine the latest developments in the space and how the industry is playing a pivotal role.

### **DECEMBER**

#### **Augmented & Virtual Reality**

Is it really happening this time? We’ll take a look at VR and AR, as well as the opportunities (and pitfalls) for distributors, programmers and vendors.

### **Events**

**Most Powerful Women  
Luncheon  
December 5  
NYC**



**NBC Veteran Producer Exiting:** Olympic-sized change over at **NBC**, with veteran *Jim Bell* leaving his post as pres, NBC Olympics Production & Programming. He also is stepping down from “The Tonight Show,” where he’s served as showrunner for the past year. Bell, who has been with NBC for 29 years, said he wants to delve into something new.

**Graham Weighs in on STELAR:** While the head of **Senate Commerce** has signaled a reauthorization of STELAR, **Senate Judiciary** chmn *Lindsey Graham* (R-SC) seems ready to let it expire. In a letter Friday to each of the Big 4 broadcast heads, Graham asked about their plans to transition to a free market at the end of 2019. If the law sunsets, satellite operators would no longer have a compulsory license to import distant signals in some markets. Graham wants to know by Nov 12 if the broadcasters will provide a one-year license to satellite providers for network-owned shows and if they’re willing to commit to negotiate with **DirectTV** and **DISH** during the one-year transition period on a carriage agreement in areas without local affiliates. **NAB**, which wants STELAR to sunset, threw its support behind Graham. “This is a business decision that AT&T is making to underserve these viewers through continued use of STELAR’s subsidy, and we thank Sen. Graham for offering a better path for local viewers and local communities,” NAB pres/CEO *Gordon Smith* said in a statement. DISH carries all local stations in 210 markets, but DirectTV currently has 12 markets where it isn’t offering locals.

**Another AT&T Retrans Renewal:** And then there were seven. **Second Generation of Iowa** reached a retrans renewal with **AT&T/DirectTV** late Friday. In June, AT&T filed a retrans good faith complaint at the **FCC** against nine different independent broadcast station groups, each with Sinclair shared service agreements. Second Generation was part of that complaint, so was **GoCom Media of Illinois**, which reached a retrans deal with AT&T last month. GoCom has been removed from the complaint, and Second Generation will likely be deleted as well. Friday’s deal saw KFXA-FOX in Cedar Rapids, IA, return to AT&T and DirectTV’s lineups.

**CenturyLink, West Safety Settle with FCC Over 911 Outage:** **CenturyLink** and **West Safety Communications** agreed to pay \$400K and \$175K, respectively, to the **FCC**’s Enforcement Bureau to settle investigations into a multi-state 911 outage on Aug 1, 2018. The two also committed to three-year compliance plans that require them to identify risks of disruptions to 911 service, protect against those risks, ensure the detection of outages and respond quickly to restore services. The outage occurred after a West Safety Services tech made a configuration change to its 911 routing network that caused a failure across both companies to route 911 calls to dozens of call centers. The outage lasted 65 minutes. FCC commish *Geoffrey Starks* said the Commission should have taken stronger enforcement action in the case, pointing back to an April 2015 consent decree where CenturyLink agreed to pay \$16mln to put an end to an investigation into a six-hour 911 outage. The consent decree does not address the 911 outage CenturyLink experienced on Dec 27, 2018. The investigation into that outage, which impacted as many as 22mln customers across 39 states, remains ongoing.

**GTCR Completes Vyve Buy:** Private equity firm **GTCR** completed its acquisition of **Vyve Broadband** through its portfolio company **Mega Broadband Investments**. Vyve offers broadband, video and voice services in rural markets across OK, KS, TX, AR, LA, TN, GA and WY. Vyve is the third system acquisition for Mega Broadband Investments, precluded by the buys of **Northland Communications** in Oct 2018 and the broadband assets of **Eagle Communications** in August.

**CBS Changes Up Leadership:** Ahead of the pending **CBS/Viacom** merger, **CBS Interactive** is making some executive changes. *Marc DeBevoise* will become pres/CEO of CBS Interactive, while *Jim Lanzone*, who has led the company since 2011, will step down as planned at the end of 2019 to become executive-in-residence at **Benchmark Capital**.

**New Look for CTAM:** Marketing association **CTAM** unveiled a new logo Monday that is meant to better embody the group’s collective impact mission. In our opinion, the new look is reminiscent of a Spirograph drawing in multiple colors. “CTAM is a #marketing organization at the center of the TV/entertainment/tech industry where the pieces—and people—continue to come together in new ways. Now we look like what we do,” pres/CEO *Vicki Lins* tweeted about the new design. CTAM’s last brand refresh was a decade ago.

**Ready for Interactive Case Competition:** Cable’s always looking for ways to get a new generation excited about the industry. Enter the **Interactive Case Competition**, an annual event dedicated to educating graduate students about TV, broadband and online technologies. The competition, founded, produced and hosted by **Interactive TV Works’ Craig Leddy**, kicks off Tuesday. Now in its ninth year, the event features student teams from Columbia Business School, NYU Stern., MIT Sloan, Georgetown McDonough, Drexel LeBow, Carnegie Mellon Tepper and Pace Lubin. **A+E Networks** will host the student teams in NYC, with four finalist teams competing for the championship title and cash prizes. Teams present pay TV and OTT streaming models before a live audience and judges including **Comcast’s Daniel Spinosa**, **Univision’s Henry Ahn**, **A&E’s Richard Shirely** and **Advance/Newhouse’s Nomi Bergman**.

## CFX TECH

### The 5G Business Case

For years, folks have discussed the possibilities of 5G and how the technology will power the fourth industrial revolution in the US. But now it's time to take action, and everyone from municipal leaders to wireless carriers gathered at DC5G Monday to talk about deploying the technology and putting it to work.

**Sprint**, one of **Verizon's** 5G competitors, has been focusing on establishing private-public partnerships to launch the technology. One of its strongest launches has been with the government of Peachtree Corners, GA, which unveiled a 5G-powered smart city technology proving ground in September. The site includes a 500-acre technology park and a 1.5-mile autonomous test track.

The city has already seen it pay dividends, with the technology park attracting companies like AI firm **Cloud-Minds** and **Georgia Power**, which is developing smart light poles. Making use of the test track for their autonomous vehicle tests are **Kia** and **Local Motors**.

It should be noted that Peachtree Corners had some help that allowed it to embrace 5G faster than other municipalities. For one, it's young. The Atlanta suburb was founded just over seven years ago on July 1, 2012. "It was less than a year ago that we announced our partnership with Sprint... it's really been since then that we've made this happen," Peachtree Corners city manager *Brian Johnson* said. "When you're a new municipality, you don't have a lot of those legacy costs that some of the old ones have, so we had some advantages."

Peachtree Corners officials didn't face much pushback from citizens when moving to create the 5G-powered business park, but the initiative hasn't been void of challenges. "The big challenge became, and to a degree continues to be, who do you get into the space, how do you fill all of those technology needs so that you don't have any type of testing that you're lacking," Johnson said. The test track has allowed for the testing of package delivery robots and drones, and the sheer number of smart cities devices in the

business park makes it a prime location for cybersecurity testing. "We've created the city street of the future... there are now hundreds of breach points that have been created that offer up opportunities for there to be data penetration studies and simulations," Johnson said.

Sprint vp, IoT business development *Timothy Johnson* said that the Peachtree Corners model in which the government has the funds and support to move forward on its own is only one way to bring 5G to a municipality. Another is where there are private stakeholders within a locality that work together with their government to attract a 5G wireless partner. "Look around your neighborhood and your city and partner with those folks," he said. "Say... what can we do together to get the Sprints and the Verizons of the world to come here and deploy this must-have technology for the next 25-30 years because it's a win for everybody."

While the Peachtree Corners case study does illustrate ways in which 5G can bring major bucks to a locality, Wall Street is still skeptical that 5G can live up to the intense hype the technology has created over the years. That's partially because wireless carriers didn't make much money on 4G compared to their investment. "We're entering it with much skepticism as to revenue opportunities and it's very much a 'build it and we will come' scenario," **Wells Fargo** managing director *Jennifer Fritzsche*, said at DC5G Monday.

While consumers have heard all about the possibilities of 5G for some time, at the end of the day, Fritzsche believes it will be more of an enterprise product. "If you can go into an enterprise... and say you're going to save this much money by deploying this, this is something that any CTO will very much listen to and have the ear of both the CEO and CFO in that discussion."

Fritzsche said Wells Fargo is currently betting on Verizon emerging as the winner amongst carriers investing in 5G infrastructure with its "all-in fiber" approach.

– Sara Winegardner

**Cablefax**  
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