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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

NFL Deals: League Dabbles in Digital Across Multiple Contracts

Digital is the theme running through the **NFL's** finally announced 11-year media rights deals, which reportedly exceed \$100 million collectively over the course of the deals.

ESPN+ has the opportunity to simulcast all **ABC** and **ESPN** games and picks up one International Series game on an exclusive national basis every season. All games broadcast on **CBS** will be streamed live on **Paramount+**. **FOX** expanded its digital rights, including for its AVOD streaming platform **Tubi**. It's planning to feature condensed games on Tubi throughout the NFL season.

NBCUniversal's Peacock will deliver an exclusive feed of a select number of NFL games over the course of the agreement. Peacock will also serve as the exclusive national home of six NFL regular-season games—one each year from 2023-28 (giving **NBC Sports** an additional regular-season game in those seasons). The streamer will launch a virtual NFL channel, highlighting classic games, as well as **NFL Films'** series, library, and archival content, which will all also be available on demand.

And the biggie is **Amazon Prime Video** nabbing the NFL's first-ever all digital package. It will serve as the exclusive home to "Thursday Night Football," with FOX's Thursday night package ending after the 2022 season. *Sports Business Journal* and the *WSJ* have sources putting Amazon at spending an average of more than \$1 billion per year for 15 exclusive games.

Despite all the buzz over new digital deals, traditional broadcast still rules the agreements. "While digital is growing the traditional TV ecosystem is still incredibly rich, incredibly deep, incredibly broad. We reach over 200 million people a year through television," said **NFL Media** evp/COO *Hans Schroeder* in a press call. "What a partner like ESPN and Disney do so well is continue that wide reach... but look for ways to add to that and augment to that. I don't think it's a question of either/or at this point."

The new slate of rights deals begins with the 2023 season and runs through the 2033 season, except for ESPN's which includes an additional bridge year in 2022. CBS kept the American Football Conference package of Sunday afternoon games, while ESPN will continue to be the home for "Monday Night Football." FOX is keeping its National Football Conference package of Sunday afternoon games that it first acquired in 1994.

NFL Sunday Ticket is not part of this mega rights fest. **AT&T/DirectTV** has two more seasons as the exclusive homes of Sunday Ticket, but many suspect it won't renew. There are plenty of players who might go after that loose ball, including Disney. ESPN chief *Jimmy Pitaro* told reporters Thursday that it's an incredibly valuable product. "When the League is ready, we're interested in having that conversation with them," he said.

ABC acquired the rights to televise two Super Bowls under the agreement, which could prove interesting. Pitaro is already talking about the possibility of alternative broadcasts, pos-

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sibly in the vein of ESPN' Megacast. He said it's premature at this point, promising to work closely with the League. NFL Media's Schroeder was quick to say the League is excited about such a play.

NBC and Peacock will broadcast and stream Super Bowls in February 2026, February 2030, and February 2034. CBS will broadcast three Super Bowls over the length of the deal, including the first in the new agreement, Super Bowl LVIII in 2024. Fox will broadcast four of the next 12 Super Bowls, including 2023 and 2025.

NFL Network will remain the exclusive broadcaster of a select schedule of NFL games on a yearly basis. Schroeder said the network is still a key part of the League's media strategy, noting that it will continue to offer the NFL RedZone. "We're continuing to make sure there's an opportunity to grow and build our own assets... We think there's an opportunity to do more with our assets to build more of a direct-to-consumer presence ourselves," he said.

NAACP NO FAN OF FOX-NFL DEAL

The **NFL** media distribution deals that have been written about for weeks are finally official, but that doesn't mean there weren't some surprises. **NAACP** came out and urged the NFL to rethink its relationship with **Fox Corp.** "For several decades, the Fox Corporation, and more specifically, **Fox News** has represented the worst traditions of American broadcasting. The media outlet has used its news division to sow bigotry and racism, create dissension, spread misinformation, and promote conspiracy theories that ultimately led to an insurrection against the US Capitol," said NAACP president/CEO *Derrick Johnson* in a state-

ment. "Fox actively exploits its Fox Sports licensing deal with the NFL by extracting increasingly high cable subscriber fees to subsidize Fox News programming. This is the same network that has used its hosts and personalities to regularly attack the NFL and its players for promoting racial justice." The NAACP is requesting a formal meeting with NFL leadership. Fox did not respond to a request for comment by deadline.

NEWS STILL RULES

More evidence of America's nose for news... Yes, the newsmen dominate the TV ratings each week, but it's bigger than that. Less than eight months after launch, **Charter's** Spectrum News app has surpassed one million downloads in the Apple App and Google Play Stores. The Spectrum News team feels good about its stats as well as its current 4.7 rating in the Apple store, higher than apps from *The NY Times*, *MSNBC* and **Fox News**. In further news bragging rights, **CNN.com** was the #1 digital news outlet in February, according to **Comscore** data. It saw 149 million unique multiplatform visitors. That's up 6.6 million (5%) vs February 2020, while several other outlets saw YOY declines *NY Times* (-19%), *Washington Post* (-10%) and **FoxNews.com** (-25%).

ONLINE VIDEO SUBS PASS 1 BILLION

Subscriptions to online video services surpassed the 1 billion mark for the first time in 2020. The total came in at 1.1 billion, according to the **Motion Picture Association's** 2020 THEME Report, a 26% increase from 2019. The global home/mobile entertainment market (content released digitally and on disc) reached \$68 billion. That's 23% higher from the prior year and was largely driven by digital. Still, cable television

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remains the highest revenue pay television market globally, bringing in \$111.6 billion last year. The amount of time US adults spent watching TV (live or recorded) increased by seven minutes to three hours and 34 minutes, the first increase since 2012. Time spent watching OTT video increased 34% to 71.8 minutes, exceeding one hour for the first time.

NAD EXAMINES COMCAST, BOOST MOBILE CLAIMS

The **National Advertising Division** found that certain disclosures on **Comcast's** website clearly disclose the limited availability of 5G, but it did recommend changes to a commercial and two related claims. The commercial starring *Amy Poehler* reasonably conveyed that there were limitations to Comcast's 5G service, but the disclosure was not conspicuous due to the size and color of the font, NAD said. It also recommended that Comcast add a clear and conspicuous disclosure on the Xfinity 5G website regarding the geographic limitations of its 5G service. Comcast agreed to comply with NAD's decision, saying it has "previously and voluntarily modified its advertising to more prominently disclose the limitations of its 5G availability." The claims at issue were challenged by **AT&T**. AT&T also challenged **Boost Mobile's** "Unlimited Data, Talk & Text" claim for its 4G LTE data plans because those data plans are throttled to 2G speeds after consumers hit the monthly data cap. NAD suggested Boost discontinue claims related to unlimited SD/HD streaming and data because they were not substantiated and could not be fixed with a disclosure. Boost plans to appeal NAD's recommendation regarding its unlimited data claim.

DOING GOOD

Charter Communications and **Ovation** will present a \$10,000 Stand for the Arts Award Tuesday to Writers & Books, a Rochester-based nonprofit. This expands on the 2020 partnership between Ovation and Charter via Ovation's advocacy platform, Stand for the Arts. Last year, the platform committed \$50,000 to support arts education in five of Charter's **Spectrum** markets across the country.

C2HR ASKS FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

C2HR is looking for companies to participate in its 2021 survey, which identifies industry-specific benchmarks for salaries, incentives and other compensation components. The survey will be separated into two participant categories: connectivity providers (including MSOs, satellite and telecom companies) and content developers (digital content creators, cable programmers and broadcast nets). C2HR has commissioned the **Croner Company** to collect and analyze the data.

AT THE COMMISSION

The **FCC** continued on its anti-robocall agenda Thursday, issuing cease-and-desist letters to six voice providers for apparently transmitting illegal traffic. The companies involved include **Yodel Technologies**, **Icon Global Services**, **IDT Corp**, **RSCo**, **Stratics Networks** and **Third Rock Telecom**. They have 48 hours to take steps to "effectively mitigate illegal traffic" before downstream US-based voice service providers may begin blocking their calls. – FCC commissioner *Brendan Carr* started

the week by calling for the Commission's improved broadband maps to be ready to go by the fall. Now he's celebrating news of a conversation between acting chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* and Sen *Maria Cantwell* (D-WA) where the maps were said to be just four months away. "This is an important development because completing these maps is key to unlocking the funding needed to further close the digital divide," Carr said in a statement. "It's great to learn about the new July 2021 timeline." – Commish *Geoffrey Starks* will virtually host a joint webinar with **NTIA's** Minority Broadband Initiative for Women's History Month. Scheduled for Tuesday at 1pm ET, "Women of Color and the Technological Frontier" will feature women of color who are thought leaders in broadband research.

RATINGS

YES is on track to have its best Spring Training since 2009. The RSN has counted 126,000 average total viewers for Yankees Spring Training games this year, putting it 26% ahead of 2020 telecasts.

NICK UNVEILS UPCOMING CONTENT SLATE

Nickelodeon revealed its 2021-22 content slate during its Thursday upfront presentation. On the animation front, the network has teed up 15 new preschool and kids' series. That includes the reimagining of "Rugrats" and *Spongebob Squarepants* spinoff "The Patrick Star Show," the latter of which will premiere in July on Nickelodeon. It's currently working on nine live-action efforts like "Warped!" and "The Loud House: A Very Loud Christmas!" They'll both arrive on the net this fall.

PROGRAMMING

Spectrum Originals greenlit 10-episode drama series "Joe Pickett." The series will be available exclusively on the streamer for nine months post-release. – **CLEO TV** will air "Urban One Honors" on May 16 at 9pm ET. This year's ceremony will herald accomplishments of women in business, media, health and politics leading change within the Black community. – **OWN** ordered five love-centered series to air during its Friday/Saturday unscripted programming block. "Ready to Love" will return with a 13-episode third season April 2 at 9pm. Season Two of "Put a Ring on It" and Season Three of "Love & Marriage: Huntsville" will premiere this summer. New seasons of "Black Love" and "Family or Fiance" have been greenlit for production and will air in spring and summer 2021, respectively. Gospel artist series "Young & Gospel" has been greenlit for production and is set to air later this year. – "Worst Cooks in America: Best of the Worst" returns to **Food Network** April 25 at 9pm with the addition of Iron Chef *Michael Symon*. – "Dirty Jobs" with *Mike Rowe* is back in production, and the series will premiere later this year on **Discovery**. The franchise first aired for eight seasons and ended in 2013. Last summer it rebooted as limited series "Dirty Jobs: Row'd Trip." – April on **Freeform** means two season premieres and the two-episode series premiere of "Cruel Summer" on April 20 at 9pm ET. "Good Trouble" returns for its third season on April 7 at 10pm ET and Season Two of "Everything's Gonna Be Okay" premieres on April 8 at 10pm ET.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

The Queen of Soul Reigns in 'Genius: Aretha'

There's nobody like the Queen of Soul. Memphis-born singer *Aretha Franklin* is at the center of "Genius: Aretha," the third season of **National Geographic's** Genius series. "She had an indomitable spirit. She fought to have a voice for civil rights and she fought to change the world for the better. She was the queen in every sense of the world," actress *Cynthia Erivo*, who plays Franklin in the series, said during the **TCA** winter tour. The show will air the first two episodes on Nat Geo Sunday at 9pm with the rest airing across the next three nights. All eight episodes will be available on **Hulu** on March 25, Franklin's birthday. The series was originally set to air last spring, but the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to production. But with Franklin's timeless music at the center, the show promises to make an impact no matter the premiere date. "Her music, her craft, her art, her genius was about connecting, connecting generations," cinematographer *Kevin McKnight* said on Nat Geo's "The Making Of..." podcast. "Her music still connects us." The series covers Franklin's life from the 1940s to the 1990s, and the crew used specific color schemes, time jumping and montages to help cover the vast time period while still keeping the episodes cohesive. The goal wasn't to build the ultimate biopic about Franklin and her rise to superstardom. It was to engage the audience with Franklin, create impact with the artist's highs and lows and to give some insight into her psychology. "We went with the celebrity of Aretha and we built from that growth. Our visuals grew with that," McKnight said. "We went from black and white, a world that was a little more black and white in attitudes and everything, and as we grew and matured with Aretha, we started bringing in our colors and building this narrative." – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

"Frontline: Death is our Business," Tuesday, **PBS** (check listings). The way traditional funerals are conducted in New Orleans' Black community is unique to the Crescent City. Often, they're jazz funerals, loaded with mourners and featuring 'second lines' of musicians playing and marching, along with a horse-drawn carriage carrying a coffin. People like *Ellis Marsalis*, who sired a small musical empire (and taught countless musicians), most certainly would've had a large New Orleans jazz funeral. Unfortunately, Marsalis's killer was COVID-19, which has halted lots of traditions, including the jazz funeral. He's mentioned in this timely doc, which looks at two Black-owned New Orleans funeral homes. Among the cruel ironies, of course, is that despite a lack of funerals, with members of Black and Brown communities dying at disproportionate rates from COVID-19, funeral home staff are working at unprecedented rates. – "Beartown," 9pm, Monday, **HBO**. Several weeks ago, we told you to catch this Swedish import about a small town and its juniors ice hockey team. The stakes couldn't be higher than they are for this week's fifth episode, the season finale. And while hockey is involved, it's far more than that. – "Doctor Foster," **Netflix**. Speaking of final eps of short series, if you want your socks knocked off watch the two seasons and finale of this, sometimes bizarre, yet compelling English drama. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (03/08/21-03/14/21)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.794	2,446
MSNBC	0.619	1,905
CNN	0.417	1,286
HGTV	0.373	1,150
ESPN	0.324	999
TBSC	0.311	956
HALL	0.301	926
HIST	0.297	914
DISC	0.267	823
TLC	0.255	786
FOOD	0.251	773
USA	0.235	723
INSP	0.231	712
TNT	0.210	646
ID	0.200	617
SYFY	0.182	560
TVLAND	0.177	546
LIFE	0.167	513
HMM	0.163	502
A&E	0.157	484
NATGEO	0.152	469
ADSM	0.151	465
WETV	0.142	438
COM	0.138	424
AMC	0.133	411
BRAVO	0.132	406
FX	0.128	393
GSN	0.120	369
BET	0.115	355
NAN	0.113	347
APL	0.108	332
MTV	0.103	318
OXYGEN	0.099	304
TRAVEL	0.098	302

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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