

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Play Ball: Opening Day is Here

With every **MLB** team starting their season today—the first time they've all begun on the same day in more than 50 years—there was plenty of excitement in the air for Opening Day. But there is also an undercurrent of uncertainty surrounding a fan's most frequent question: Where's the game on?

For now, games are mainly being telecast where fans expect them to be, though it's unclear how long that will be the case. **AT&T SportsNets** are business as usual, even though **Warner Bros. Discovery** has said it plans to exit the business. It gave teams a deadline of March 31 to re-obtain their rights, though [most think](#) the process will take a while to sort out. **Bally Sports** RSN owner **Diamond Sports Group**, which [filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy](#) in mid-March, did come through on its rights payment to the San Diego Padres this week, according to [Sports Business Journal](#), though the pub cites sources as saying the team didn't give up streaming rights to Diamond for the Bally DTC service. Diamond still has to pay rights fees for the majority of the 14 MLB teams it broadcasts by April 30.

There are new ways to watch this season, with **YES Network** unveiling its new subscription DTC product just one day before the Yankees' 5-0 Opening Day rout over the Giants. That, of course, didn't give fans much time to test things out. We spotted a few [tweets](#) from pay TV customers who were having trouble authenticating to use the app, with YES Net responding that it is "implementing a fix for this issue this morning" and advising subs to log out and back into their

account before selecting "Login with TV provider." There were also some issues using **Roku** to watch after the app update. The complaints however seemed to be the minority, with *New York Post* reporter *Andrew Marchand* [tweeting](#) that he was told it had more than 1,000 subscriptions hours after launch.

The YES Network app, which uses the **QuickPlay** platform, retails for \$24/month, putting it in between **NESN 360's** \$30/month price tag and Bally Sports+'s \$20/month fee. Notably, given the short sign-up time before Opening Day, YES Net only took \$4 off the retail price for its introductory promotion. NESN 360 launched with a \$1 for-the-first-month offer. Not sure if there's a takeaway there for the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry!

For national telecasts, **ESPN** and **MLB Network** will continue with daily programming and live broadcasts, but even those will undergo changes this season. MLB introduced new rules for the game in an effort to shorten the length of games and improve the on-field product, including the rollout of a pitch clock and banning of defensive shifts. Viewers may enjoy the faster pace, but it changes the game for broadcasters, especially when it comes to cadence and delivery.

"[The announcers] know that they're going to have to make their points quickly, clearly and concisely in between the pitches," MLB Network SVP, Production *Marc Caiafa* told **CFX**. "We had some rehearsals for the different shows last week and we talked about that. You've got to essentially get to your point relatively quick."

The league is making its out-of-market viewing option **MLB.TV** available for free through Monday. For MLB Network, its 2023

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show lineup includes a new look to its “MLB Tonight” crew led by former player *Harold Reynolds* and *Adnan Virk*. That will air daily at 6pm. The network will have the Mets-Marlins game Friday at 6:30pm, followed by the Rockies-Padres at 9:30pm and Dodgers-Diamondbacks on Saturday at 9pm. Additionally, the network’s weekly program “Play Ball” will return Saturday at 10am.

ESPN will have Sunday Night Baseball for a 34th consecutive year, and it’ll be joined by the alternate “KayRod” telecast featuring *Alex Rodriguez* and *Michael Kay* on **ESPN2** for a second year. Throughout the year, select non-Sunday night games will also be available on **ESPN+**.

**Apple** is also prepping for its second year of Friday Night Baseball, but it won’t be free like it was in the company’s debut season. It’s going to require a subscription to **Apple TV+**, which currently runs at \$7/month in the U.S.

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**CURIOSITYSTREAM HAS THE CASH**

Factual streaming company **CuriosityStream** ended 2022 with zero debt impacting its bottom line and more than \$55 million in cash, a big win at a time when it’s tough to be an independent SVOD. Its Smart Bundle, which includes **CuriosityStream**, **Tastemade**, **One Day University** and four other streaming services, grew 32% YOY with the company seeing record monthly subscriber net additions in December. The standalone Curiosity Stream service recently upped its pricing to \$4.99/month from \$2.99/month and to \$39.99 annually from \$19.99. President/CEO *Clint Stinchcomb* said on the company’s 4Q22 earnings call that the decision to do so came after a rigorous process of testing and analysis that examined the estimated subscriber acquisition and retention impacts of different pricing combinations. “We analyzed more than three million sessions during the course of many weeks, using nine different combinations of pricing and messaging,” he said. “Even at a higher price point, we continue to believe our service represents an extraordinary value compared to other offerings in the market.” CuriosityStream’s financial position has drawn attention from others in the media ecosystem, and the volume of inquiries it has received from potential strategic and commercial partners has substantially increased. Some of those have been looking to acquire the streamer, but Stinchcomb isn’t quite as interested in those during this season of the company’s management. It’s also given the streamer more power when it looks at how it structures partnership agreements. “Nearly everything is on sale today. By that I mean certain acquisitions, advertising inventory, certain influencer marketing services, technical products and services, even non-core assets of other companies,” Stinchcomb said. “We are aggressively taking advantages of these discounts which may result in more cash out over a short period of time, but which we would trade for improvement in

our longer-term performance.” The company’s revenue dropped to \$14.5 million in 4Q22 from \$27.3 million in 4Q21, and part of that is because the company is taking a strategic decision to not renew a bundled distribution agreement that didn’t have very good economic terms for the programmer. A minimal amount of revenue came from FAST platforms in 2022, but the executive team is considering dipping a toe deeper into those waters this year and next. Stinchcomb admitted that some could argue that CuriosityStream should have gone deeper into FAST earlier, but it was wholly focused on building its premium streamers. “It’s not just monetization for our brand partners. It’s also a platform to promote our direct services, and this becomes even more valuable as we move to performance-based marketing,” he said.

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**NAB BACKS STANDARD GENERAL**

**NAB** is supporting **Standard General** in its appeal of an **FCC** Media Bureau decision that sent its proposed **TEGNA** acquisition to an Administrative Law Judge for a hearing. “NAB rarely, if ever, participates in proceedings to review its members’ license transfer applications. But the Media Bureau’s actions in this mat-

**Cablefax Executive Round Up**

**What makes March Madness the spectacle it is today?**



**Kevin Grigsby**  
Executive Producer/SVP of TV  
**FanDuel TV**

“Fans love to root for upsets and underdogs and March Madness tells those stories better than anyone in sports. The unpredictability provides FanDuel TV a unique opportunity to drive viewership as we see a huge increase in College Basketball interest from our viewers. To service our viewers, who are often also FanDuel Sportsbook bettors, we are updating our on-screen scrawl with schedules, lines and live scores on in-play markets in real time and airing regular appearances with college basketball experts like Jon Rothstein on ‘Up & Adams’ and ‘Run It Back.’”



**Hania Poole**  
SVP, Digital and Product  
**Warner Bros. Discovery Sports**

“There are very few national events existing today that can command the attention, capture the imagination, and own the conversation across the nation as much as March Madness. It’s a perfect formula, mixing sports—which consistently break through the clutter—the immediacy of a one-and-done game with potential for Cinderella stories, and a condensed timeline, that creates a special moment in time. We are seeing this first-hand on our March Madness Live streaming platform, which has experienced record numbers for engagement and time spent this year with the average user spending more than two hours watching games across devices.”

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ter—designating matters for hearing that cannot form the basis of a public-interest rejection of a license application, knowing that the hearing designation will kill the deal before a decision on the merits—inject untenable unpredictability into license transfer applications,” the trade association wrote in a brief filed with the DC Circuit Court of Appeals Thursday. In a separate statement, NAB President/CEO *Curtis LeGeyt* said unappointed FCC staffers have sent the proposed deal to “regulatory purgatory,” with the move threatening future investment in local broadcast stations.

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## KEEP CALM AND STREAM ON

Rep. *Anna Eshoo* (D-CA) and Sen. *Sheldon Whitehouse* (D-RI) reintroduced bicameral legislation that would update the CALM Act, a law adopted in 2010 to limit the loudness of TV ads. The CALM Modernization Act would extend the CALM Act’s prohibitions to all ad-supported streaming services to ensure the volume of commercials is now louder than regular programming. It would also boost the ability of the FCC to investigate and enforce any violations by broadcast, cable and satellite operators and require a study into the overall effectiveness of the CALM Act. Eshoo and Whitehouse are the original authors of the CALM Act.

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## NAB THREATENS TO SUE FCC

NAB gave the FCC a deadline to respond to its request to pause its 2022 review of broadcast media ownership rules and expeditiously release its 2018 quadrennial regulatory review. “Unless the Commission acts on NAB’s Request by April 12, 2023, NAB will deem the request denied and reserves its right to seek judicial relief to protect its interests in lawfully conducted quadrennial broadcast ownership reviews,” the group said in a filing at the FCC Wednesday. The FCC is required every four years to examine its media ownership rules, which include a provision generally prohibiting two Top 4 broadcast stations in a local market from combining. The 2018 review was on hold pending legal proceedings that have largely been resolved, but action on the review seems unlikely given the FCC’s current split 2-2 by party.

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## CARRIAGE

AMC Networks struck an expanded partnership with VIZIO that will include more of the programmer’s content to the smart TV platform. FAST channels including **Portlandia**, **MSG Sports Zone**, **ALLBLK Gems** and **Overtime** will now be available, and more than 150 AMC on demand films have been added to VIZIO’s AVOD, **WatchFree+**. – **Speedvision** is joining **Amazon Freevee**’s lineup in the U.S., giving customers more than 500 hours of content across its shows. Programs include “Graveyard Carz,” “Two Guys Garage” and “AmeriCarna.”

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## STREAM TV HITS CONNECTICUT

**Breezeline** is rolling out its Stream TV service in its service areas

in Connecticut this week. The cloud-based product has already been introduced in New Hampshire, Maine, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Florida and Ohio, offering live TV as well as on-demand, DVR and streaming apps all in one location. Customers can also record up to 300 hours of HD content with Cloud DVR Max, which can be viewed on-the-go via the Breezeline Stream TV app.

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## WINDSTREAM SAYS BYE TO HUAWEI

Windstream announced it has cleared all **Huawei** equipment from its network. The gear within Windstream’s network was acquired as part of its 2017 purchase of **Earthlink**, and the operator said it represented a small fraction of its routing and transportation capabilities.

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## TELENET LEVERAGES PLUME FOR WIFI UPGRADE

European operator **Telenet** has partnered with **Plume** to launch a new WiFi system to consumers in Belgium. The adaptive WiFi service will be integrated into the Telenet app to unlock simple user self-installation and more advanced controls for managing the home network. The company will also offer Plume’s SuperPod designs to create an uninterrupted signal throughout a customer’s home.

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## GOING ONCE – ADAPTIVE SPIRIT SILENT AUCTION BIDS

Time’s running out to get bids in for **Adaptive Spirit**’s [Silent Auction](#), which directly benefits the athletes of the U.S. Paralympics Ski and Snowboard team. The auction, sponsored by Samsung, ends Saturday evening and has a little bit of everything for sale—from electronics to sporting event tickets to executives for sale. As of Thursday, **Charter** EVP of Connectivity Technology had the highest bid at \$650, giving him a nice lead over his boss and Adaptive Spirit Event Co-Chair *Rich DiGeronimo*’s \$350 price. Last year’s auction raised a record \$172,000. Adaptive Spirit, previously known as **SkiTAM**, is holding its annual networking gathering in Vail this weekend, with plenty of networking, educational panels and time on the slopes. More than 20,000 telecom execs and guests have participated over the years, with Adaptive Spirit (formerly **SkiTAM**) raising more than \$11 million for the U.S. Paralympic Alpine, Nordic, Snowboard and Biathlon teams.

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## CALL FOR ENTRIES

**C2HR** has introduced the HR Game Changers awards program to honor professionals that go above and beyond their typical duties to elevate the employee experience. The program is open to talent at all levels of HR across all disciplines, and nominations can be [submitted](#) for any one person or a team. Entries are due April 30. Winners will be honored during the C2HR Con on August 8 in Brooklyn, NYC.

# PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

## Reviving the 'Royal Crackers' Brand

Everyone's buzzing about the Season 4 premiere of HBO's "Succession," but if you're looking for its adult animated cousin, then **Adult Swim** has the show for you. "Royal Crackers," debuting Sunday at 11pm and coming to HBO Max the next day, tells the story of a crumbling snack empire. With the company's founder in poor health, the family's remaining members band together to hit the board room and attempt to restore the company to its former glory. Developing a new show can always be a bit of a challenge, but the biggest uncertainty for Creator/Executive Producer *Jason Ruiz* and Executive Producer *Seth Cohen* came in not knowing if Royal Crackers would be put on the chopping block at a difficult time economically for media companies. "Luckily, we just had some advocates at Adult Swim who really believed in us. I don't have any reason to believe we were ever on the chopping block, but it was just nice to feel supported in that time that a lot of people in Hollywood felt uncertain," Cohen told **CFX**. It received another vote of confidence when it was renewed this week for a second season, news that has allowed the entire creative team to relax and start drawing out larger storylines. "The reward that I get from just writing and what these writers on our staff bring is just incredible," Ruiz said. "It is the part I'm the most in love with, for sure, is just the creative process. Editing too... editing is the second writing phase. It's really a creative and not that technical of a process. It's super organic." When asked what snack food he would develop and market if offered the chance to start his own company, Cohen didn't hesitate: "A microwaveable cheesesteak that's actually good." – *Sara Winegardner*

### REVIEWS

"Great Expectations," streaming on **Hulu**. Watch several minutes of the opening episode of this adaptation of the *Charles Dickens* novel (1861) and some viewers will be hooked. Indeed, the escape from of Magwitch from a prisoner ship bound for the penal colony of Australia and introduction of Philip "Pip" Pirrip are compelling segments. And later, we meet the eccentric Miss Haversham, in a dominant performance from the wonderful *Olivia Colman*. On the other hand, many TV critics have decried this 6-part series, blaming writer *Steven Knight* ("Peaky Blinders") for offering yet another version of Dickens, and one that's longer and slower than other adaptations. Your critic disagrees. This is an acceptable effort. For those who've not seen earlier iterations, it's well worth a look. – "Carpool Karaoke," streaming on **Apple TV+**. We'll let others wax on about the 4th and final season of "Succession" (**HBO Max**), whose initial season raised the bar so high, its subsequent seasons seemed flat by comparison. As such, critics are ecstatic this season's initial ep has the adult children of media magnate/megalomaniac/bully Logan Roy (*Brian Cox*) emerging victorious, for the moment. Still, viewers will have a hoot watching Cox, with fellow Scot *Alan Cumming*, crooning and gossiping. Cox is a closet fan of the Spice Girls, has a good sense of humor and not a bad singing voice. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(03/20/23-03/26/23)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
<b>TBSC</b>	<b>0.743</b>	<b>2319</b>
<b>FNC</b>	<b>0.648</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b>ESPN</b>	<b>0.368</b>	<b>1150</b>
<b>MSNBC</b>	<b>0.364</b>	<b>1136</b>
<b>HGTV</b>	<b>0.300</b>	<b>935</b>
<b>HALL</b>	<b>0.236</b>	<b>736</b>
<b>INSP</b>	<b>0.217</b>	<b>678</b>
<b>FOOD</b>	<b>0.216</b>	<b>675</b>
<b>DISC</b>	<b>0.193</b>	<b>602</b>
<b>TLC</b>	<b>0.190</b>	<b>593</b>
<b>HIST</b>	<b>0.187</b>	<b>584</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>0.180</b>	<b>562</b>
<b>CNN</b>	<b>0.173</b>	<b>541</b>
<b>ID</b>	<b>0.151</b>	<b>472</b>
<b>TVLAND</b>	<b>0.147</b>	<b>458</b>
<b>A&amp;E</b>	<b>0.119</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>GSN</b>	<b>0.117</b>	<b>366</b>
<b>LIFE</b>	<b>0.116</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>BRAVO</b>	<b>0.110</b>	<b>342</b>
<b>REELZ</b>	<b>0.106</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>TNT</b>	<b>0.103</b>	<b>322</b>
<b>NBA</b>	<b>0.099</b>	<b>308</b>
<b>OXY</b>	<b>0.097</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>WETV</b>	<b>0.096</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>HMM</b>	<b>0.094</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>NATGEO</b>	<b>0.092</b>	<b>288</b>
<b>FX</b>	<b>0.092</b>	<b>286</b>
<b>ESPN2</b>	<b>0.086</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>PRMNT</b>	<b>0.086</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>BET</b>	<b>0.081</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>NAN</b>	<b>0.080</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>SYFY</b>	<b>0.080</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>AMC</b>	<b>0.080</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>APL</b>	<b>0.071</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>FETV</b>	<b>0.071</b>	<b>221</b>

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

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