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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Where's the Money: MLB Demands Diamond Sports Pay Rights Fees

The **Diamond Sports** bankruptcy case is heating up as **Major League Baseball** is standing up for teams that haven't received their most recent round of rights payments. While Diamond Sports has been able to make some payments to the teams that are covered by a **Bally Sports** RSN, it continues to owe money to the **Minnesota Twins** and the **Cleveland Guardians**.

MLB filed a motion last week in the **Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Texas** calling for the teams to get their fair payments or be allowed to be freed of their existing contracts. Another payment is due to the Guardians on May 1, and MLB and the two teams argued in another filing Tuesday that Diamond Sports is continuing to make revenue off of content that it should be able to afford.

"With each broadcast, the Debtor RSNs are generating revenue that funds their cases from the exploitation of the valuable, unique and exclusive intellectual property granted by the Clubs, but without paying any compensation," the filing said. "Yet the Debtor RSNs have selectively chosen not to pay the Clubs for the right to broadcast their games, despite the Debtors' claims that they have sufficient cash to operate in the ordinary course and continue paying their ordinary course debts as they become due."

Diamond Sports told the court that MLB is crying wolf when it comes to the urgency of the situation with the teams that haven't yet received payment. Part of Diamond's argument is

that its Telecast Rights Agreements with both teams provide a grace period during which it could make payments. Because of the length of those grace periods, outside of bankruptcy, those teams would still not be able to terminate their rights agreements for some time.

Diamond added that it has made offers to the Guardians and the Twins to place the full amounts that were due to those teams into escrow to quell concerns those teams may have about Diamond's ability to make good on payments. It has asked for a denial of emergency consideration for the motion as well as a similar one from the Arizona Diamondbacks and requested the court schedule a hearing for May 12 for a full discussion on the motions.

MLB wants closure on this issue much sooner and has asked the court to hear the issue on April 19 unless Diamond Sports immediately pays all amounts due. A delay of the hearing could result in more missed payments, and the league said an escrow wouldn't be a sufficient remedy to the situation.

"The Debtors are trying to have it both ways. They want to continue using the Clubs' intellectual property and telecast rights because they recognize how fundamental these rights are to their business, for without them, they cannot generate revenue—they simply do not want to pay for them," the league said. "The Debtors are functionally holding the Clubs captive as involuntary unsecured creditors with no assurance that they will ever be paid for the use of their intellectual property."

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YOUTUBE'S SUNDAY TICKET PRICE

YouTube TV opened its first presale of NFL Sunday Ticket, and subscribers to the vMVPD will get a major discount. YouTube TV subscribers can get the package for \$249 for the season. The Sunday Ticket and NFL RedZone bundle will come in at \$289. For comparison, the cheapest Sunday Ticket price for DirectTV subscribers for the 2022-23 season was \$293.34. Those that don't subscribe to YouTube TV will be able to buy it during the presale at \$349 and the bundle will come in at \$389. All prices will go up by \$100 once the presale ends.

WBD PREPARES FOR COMBINED STREAMER EVENT

Warner Bros. Discovery is finally ready to show the world its plans for a combination of **discovery+** and **HBO Max**, but some of its details are leaking ahead of the Wednesday reveal event. According to a *New York Times* [report](#), the merged service will be called Max and feature several pricing plans, including at least one with advertising. Some lawmakers are keeping a close eye on the company ahead of its big reveal event. Last week, Reps. *Joaquin Castro* (D-TX), *Pramila Jayapal* (D-WA), *David Cicilline* (D-RI) along with Sen. *Elizabeth Warren* (D-MA) sent a letter to DOJ officials asking them to investigate the programmer and determine if the merger of WarnerMedia and Discovery has been harmful for competition and workers in the media industry. "As the Department continues its laudable work to protect workers and consumers, we urge the Department to closely examine consummated mergers that merit a subsequent review in light of post-consummation actions—such as those of WBD," the lawmakers told Attorney General *Merrick Garland* and Antitrust Division head *Jonathan Kanter* in the letter. "It has enabled the combined WBD to take aggressive measures, harming workers and creatives in the media and entertainment industry while eliminating the disciplining forces of competition that provide workers with the freedom to change jobs or negotiate for better pay and working conditions."

GOOGLE TV REVAMPS LIVE TAB WITH FAST, VMVPD CONTENT

Google TV has integrated more than 800 free channels into its Live tab. FAST channels from **Tubi**, **Plex** and **Haystack News** joined existing offerings from **Pluto TV**, and Google TV has contributed its own built-in channels to the lineup. Programming is available in more than 10 languages including Spanish, Hindi and Japanese. The new TV guide also provides integrated access to content from **Sling TV** and **YouTube TV** for those users that are subscribed to the vMVPDs. The upgraded

experience is available now on all U.S. Google TV devices, and will be coming to certain Android TV devices later this year.

FCC OPENS SPACE BUREAU, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The FCC officially launched its new Space Bureau and Office of International Affairs Tuesday, and the staff leading these new spaces were unveiled during a kickoff event at agency headquarters. *Julie Kearney*, an FCC veteran known also for her work at **CTA** and **National Public Radio**, will serve as the Space Bureau's first chief and *Ethan Lucarelli* will hold the same role in the Office of International Affairs. He most recently served as Legal Advisor to FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* on wireless and international policy issues. During his time in the private sector he worked for **Inmarsat** and practiced law at **Wiley Rein**. During the kickoff ceremony, Kearney identified issues like orbital debris, space safety and fostering transparency as being of priority for her bureau in its first weeks. "We want to have people visit us. We also want to be out there in D.C., outside of D.C. to have some hands-on experience with the tech that we're seeing on paper," she said. Lucarelli said the creation of an international office acknowledges the global component of so much of the agency's work at this moment in time. "We're going to be giving our resources to and borrowing resources from the rest of the agency, but there's also important substantive policy expertise in issues like foreign ownership, licensing and international communications licensing, so it's a very exciting time to be setting up this office and I'm very proud to be heading it up," he said. In separate announcements, *Joel Taubenblatt* and *Ronald Repasi* were named Chiefs of the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau and the Office of Engineering and Technology, respectively. Both had been serving in the roles in an active capacity previously.

MSG'S DTC TO USE QUICKPLAY

MSG Networks revealed its upcoming DTC product **MSG+** will utilize **Quickplay's** cloud-native OTT platform. MSG+ will use the CMS, edge services and player—which all operate on **Google Cloud**—to facilitate data-driven content delivery that's based on a viewer's specific interests. Set to release this summer, MSG+ will also be able to create new features to improve the viewing experience with the Quickplay platform.

COMCAST HITS A HOME RUN

The 2023 baseball season is in its early stages, and **Comcast** is now up to bat. The company will be installing a full WiFi 6E-ready network at Oracle Park, the home stadium of the San Francisco

Giants. It's doing so in partnership with **Extreme Networks**, and once complete it'll make Oracle Park the first professional sports venue to come with WiFi 6E. Extreme will have approximately 900 of its WiFi 6E access points throughout the stadium, and its ExtremeCloudIQ toolset will be used to manage the wireless network. That'll be used alongside ExtremeAnalytics, which gives insight into network activity to spot any connectivity issues, streamlines operations and obtains data on fan behavior and interests. Installation is expected to wrap up this month.

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CRACKLE CONNEX INKS VIDGO DEAL

It's [only been a week](#) since the unveiling of **Chicken Soup for the Soul Entertainment's** ad sales platform, and Crackle Connex inked an agreement with **Vidgo** to represent its ad sales and operations in the U.S. The streamer will use Crackle Connex's technology and performance tracking to help with purchasing ads across its more than 200 live channels that span news, entertainment, sports and Spanish-language programming.

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CARRIAGE

Factual media company **Curiosity** is expanding its footprint across Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Australia thanks to a slew of new partnerships. Among the deals it struck for its linear channels and flagship SVOD **Curiosity Stream** include **Fetch TV** in Australia, **Prime Video** channels in India, **Ziggo** and **NLziet** in the Netherlands, **Izzi** in Mexico and **MTS, Telekom Slovenia** and **Megafon** in central and eastern Europe. – Three of **Cinedigm's** FAST channels are headed to **Amazon Freevee**. **RetroCrush**, **The Dove Channel** and **Docurama** are now available to Freevee users, joining Cinedigm's other channels already on the platform like **Midnight Pulp** and **Realmadrid TV**. – A new FAST channel dedicated to professional pickleball **PickleTV** will be available on **Amazon's Prime Video** and **Freevee** services in the U.S. The 24-hour channel will also feature instructional content and other Pickleball-related events.

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RATINGS

Fox News swept the primetime and total-day ratings for a second consecutive week among cable nets. It led the way with 2.36 million viewers P2+ in prime, followed by **MSNBC** with 1.5 million and **HGTV** with 884,000. **ESPN** and **History Channel** rounded the prime top five with 799,000 and 768,000, respectively. Fox News had 1.43 million viewers in the total day category, with MSNBC second as well at 950,000. ESPN (605,000), **CNN** (586,000) and **HGTV** (458,000) took Nos. 3-5. – The Liverpool vs Arsenal match on **Peacock** had an average minute audience of 872,000 viewers, making it the largest streaming audience ever for a Premier League match. The number includes Peacock's English- and Spanish-language and "Data Zone" feeds. – Despite a weather delay, **ESPN's** telecast of Day 2 of the Masters peaked with 3.1 million viewers prior to when play was called off. Last year's broad-

cast of the second round averaged 3.5 million viewers, headlined by the return of *Tiger Woods*. – **Bally Sports Southeast** averaged a 4.15 household rating for the Braves' home opener Thursday against the Padres. That lifted the RSN to be the most-viewed network in primetime in the Atlanta market and the highest rating for a Braves home opener on the network since 2017. Viewership peaked at 10:30pm while the Braves won in dramatic fashion, and the network had over 100,000 impressions during the last three hours of the game's telecast.

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FIBER FRENZY

Zipty Fiber rolled out 10-Gig symmetrical home internet service across its footprint in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. Pricing comes in at \$300/month as well as a one-time \$300 installation fee. Customers can use their own router with an SFP+ port capable of delivering 10-Gig speeds, or they can lease a router from Zipty for \$10/month.

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ON THE CIRCUIT

The third edition of BravoCon is set for Nov. 3-5 at Caesars Forum in Las Vegas. The event will have behind-the-scenes looks and VIP experiences related to the **Bravo** brand, topped off with "Watch What Happens Live with *Andy Cohen*" live from the City of Lights. Ticket and other information will be revealed at a later date.

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PROGRAMMING

A new competition series mixing the game show and survival genres is coming to **TBS**. "I Survived Bear Grylls" will premiere May 18 at 9pm. Contestants will compete in various wilderness-based tests, with each episode's winner being awarded a cash prize. – A new season of "Celebrity IOU" will begin May 15 at 8pm on **HGTV**. Guests for the upcoming campaign include *Heidi Klum*, *Jay Leno* and *Emma Roberts*. – *Carl Higbie* will host a new 5pm program on **Newsmax** after the network decided to not continue with "Spicer & Co." "Carl Higbie Frontline" will debut today, featuring news analysis, interviews and breaking news stories. – The premiere of Season 2 of **Apple TV+**'s murder mystery comedy "The Afterparty" has shifted to July 12 from April 28. The season will have 10 episodes, premiering with two before releasing one each week until Sept. 6. – **MGM+** greenlit the four-part docuseries "Hollywood Black," which highlights stories of actors, writers, directors and producers who breached barriers for their place in film.

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PEOPLE

Nexstar named *Jamie Calandrucchio* EVP, Platform Monetization & Strategy. The newly-created role sees her developing Nexstar's revenue management strategy for its ad sales team, among other tasks. She joins from **Operative** where she served as SVP, Product Marketing & Partnerships.