

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Let's Extend: ESPN, NCAA Re-Up Media Agreement

Some things change while others stay the same. ESPN announced a new eight-year media rights agreement with the NCAA on Thursday, encompassing the domestic and international rights to 40 total NCAA championships and the international rights for the Division I men's basketball tournament.

ESPN will carry all rounds of 21 women's and 19 men's events as part of the agreement, which is worth \$920 million total or \$115 million/year. That's good for about a 3X increase from the old deal, and at least 25% of that number includes production and marketing investments that ESPN will make.

It extends the network's current coverage of several events including the Division I women's basketball tournament, softball, volleyball, baseball, FCS football playoffs and others, and adds the men's and women's tennis team championships and the men's gymnastics championship. The men's National Invitation Tournament, Women's Basketball Invitation Tournament, Division II and III men's and women's basketball and women's volleyball will also shift under ESPN's umbrella.

ABC will air the national championship games of D-I women's basketball, women's volleyball, women's gymnastics and FCS football each year. ABC will also expand coverage of the overall softball and baseball tournaments. At least 10 of the championships will have their respective selection shows aired on linear ESPN networks, and select rounds of tournaments will stream exclusively on ESPN+.

"Today's media landscape is fragmented. We hear about it all the time from sports fans," ESPN Chairman Jimmy Pitaro said on a call with media. "It's now rare for a league, a conference or a sports organization to have a single media partner with this amount of content. But the NCAA understands the value ESPN brings, and that value is from our brand, our commitment on production and quality storytelling to our studio, digital and of course our social offerings. And perhaps most importantly, we'll continue to be a multi-platform home for NCAA championships."

The deal was largely driven by the increased interest in women's sports and the Division I women's basketball tournament. Endeavor's IMG and WME Sports, which served as the NCAA's media advisors during negotiations, estimated that the women's tournament accounts for about \$65 million of the overall deal annually.

What that also allows for is the NCAA to look at adding revenue distribution units for the women's tournament like it does for the men's edition. Those revenue units are awarded to conferences based on the number of teams that qualify for March Madness and possible subsequent wins, meaning even those not participating in the postseason can still benefit financially. The Division I Board of Directors Finance committee has already begun discussing possible models and philosophies for the units to be adopted for the women's tournament, though there's no exact timeline for when it'll be implemented.

As for why the NCAA decided not to break the women's tournament out and create a deal as its own entity, it was about

# Corporate Licenses

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obtaining the best deal for the most number of sports. “We knew there was interest in [the] women’s basketball championship, but maybe at the end of the day [it was] not quite as deep of interest as we anticipated,” *Dan Gavitt*, SVP, Basketball for the NCAA, said. “The totality of all of these championships and the incredible home that they have on the ESPN family of networks was what led to the decision not to test the open market and potentially risk losing other incredible opportunities for women’s and men’s championships on ESPN.”

That \$65 million estimation for the women’s tournament caught some by surprise. In 2021 when the NCAA was criticized for differences in facilities and resources given to the men’s and women’s tournaments, the law firm Kaplan Hecker & Fink LLP conducted an outside review of gender equity within the NCAA. Known as the “Kaplan Report,” it found the annual broadcast rights for the women’s basketball tournament alone would be worth between [\\$81 million and \\$112 million](#) in 2025.

When asked about the discrepancies in those figures, NCAA President *Charlie Baker* revealed Endeavor “has huge issues with that particular estimate.” Gavitt added the marketplace has undergone numerous changes in recent years, especially when considering the women’s tournament was valued at \$6 million or \$7 million/year four years ago.

“It’s unfortunate to me in some ways if there’s disappointment with the valuation of the tournament at \$65 million because of maybe an inflated expectation on an evaluation that was done a couple of years ago, that we believe after doing a lot of due diligence with media experts, was flawed in many ways because of too much emphasis on affiliate fees and inflated valuation,” Gavitt said.

What’s notable about the length of ESPN and the NCAA’s deal is that it lines up with when the men’s basketball tournament rights expire in 2032. **Warner Bros. Discovery** and **CBS** currently hold those rights, but it sets up an eventual conundrum for companies that may also be interested in pursuing the **College Football Playoff** rights that are up after the 2025 season.

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## YES-MSG FORM STREAMING JV FOR THIRD PARTIES

**YES Network** did it. So did **MSG Networks**. Now they want to help others launch streaming services, forming jv **Gotham Advanced Media and Entertainment** (GAME) to capitalize on their expertise and synergies in the streaming space. Both RSNs launched their DTC products last year, with GAME to provide a turn-key solution to third parties. It also lets the two RSNs pool resources for their own streaming products, YES App and MSG+, which could include new product offerings and premium features. The two services have their own tech stack, but already share many of the same

third-party vendors. GAME is sort of analogous to **BAMTech**, the video streaming technology company that has provided platforms for **ESPN** and **HBO**. Originally known as MLB Advanced Media, BAMTech was acquired in full by **Disney** in 2022. While the announcement of a 50/50 streaming JV is sure to draw speculation of a MSG-YES streaming service that would feature a combined lineup of NY-area teams (Yankees, Knicks, Rangers, Nets, Liberty, Islanders, Devils and Sabres), there’s no word of such an offering. Instead, it seems like GAME’s initial focus will be on teams looking to launch their own DTC offering, something that could be necessitated if a team loses its media rights deal—see the ongoing **Bally Sports** saga and **Warner Bros. Discovery**’s exit from RSNs. No word on which entities may have approached the pair, but MSG Networks President/CEO *Andrea Greenberg* [told Sports Business Journal](#) that “we have independently each received inquiries from various rightsholders outside of our market, looking to see if there were any opportunities to utilize the operational and technical expertise that we had garnered.” YES and MSG said streaming products will be customizable and capable of delivering locally branded customer experiences, catering to a client’s particular needs. The YES App’s DTC option debuted before MLB opening day last year at a price point of \$24.99/month. MSG+ launched in September at \$29.99/month, but the option to stream single games for \$9.99.

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## FREE DISNEY+ ARRIVES FOR SOME CHARTER SUBS

The ad-supported tier of **Disney+** is now available as part of all Spectrum TV Select packages nationwide. The move comes as a result of the unique distribution deal the pair struck back in September that saw **Charter** drop networks like **Freeform**, **Nat Geo Wild** and **Disney Junior** in favor of a model that better balances the value of linear networks and the boom in streaming popularity. Charter also plans to begin including access to **ESPN+** at no additional cost to customers in its Spectrum TV Select Plus video package in the coming months.

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## CARRIAGE

**Sinclair** struck network distribution agreements with **CBS** to expand the presence of its free OTA networks **Comet**, **CHARGE!**, **TBD**. and **The Nest** to additional CBS affiliates. Comet and CHARGE! will be added to top-10 DMAs, with Comet now on WCBS in New York and KPX in San Francisco and CHARGE! on KCAL in LA, WBBM in Chicago and KYW in Philadelphia. TBD. and The Nest added a handful of top-20 markets. TBD. was expanded to Miami’s WBFS and Philadelphia’s WPSG while The Nest grew to LA’s KCAL. Both also added San Francisco’s KPYX.



A Cablefax feature highlighting marketing efforts spotted in the real world.

We're used to **Hallmark Channel** being front and center in December, but its annual "Countdown to Christmas" marketing and media push sparkled more than ever this season. And some of the most compelling efforts featured other cable nets as well.

On Christmas Eve, *The New York Times* put together a deep dive analysis of 424 Hallmark and **Lifetime** holiday movies to determine just how formulaic they are. Findings included that 22% of female protagonists hold corporate jobs, almost on par with the percent who work at a local shop or are employed as writers or reporters.

Other stats: about 20% of male love interests are locals that women meet on a visit to a small town, 10% of women protagonists are single moms and the most common name for a female lead is Emma (nine movies).

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**All of the women's jobs:**

87 Corporate jobs

- 19 Advertising, marketing or P.R. workers
- 14 Lawyers 10 Real estate workers
- 9 Tech workers 7 Architects
- 5 Holiday or dating app developers
- 1 Corporate fixer 1 Greeting card executive
- 1 Stockbroker 20 Others

73 Retail and hospitality jobs

- 27 Store owners or employees
- 11 Bakers or pastry chefs
- 10 Restaurant owners or employees
- 8 Hotel owners or managers
- 8 Toy store owners or employees
- 3 Book store owners or employees
- 1 Candy cane company C.E.O. 1 Chef
- 1 Cookie company C.E.O. 1 Sommelier
- 1 Tour guide 1 Turkey hotline operator

66 Media jobs

- 21 Journalists 9 Book authors 8 Photographers
- 7 Editors 6 Columnists or bloggers
- 4 Romance novelists 3 Television producers



Another Hallmark twinkle that caught our eye was created in association with **ESPN**. The short video likens the 2023 NFL season to a Hallmark Channel holiday movie, and features screenwriter Julie Sherman Wolfe, who has written 24 Hallmark Channel movies and is a huge 49ers fan.

Over a collection of NFL clips, Wolfe narrates the similarities, such as "maybe someone's in a new town or starting a new job and we see the meet-cute, that spark" and "moments of pure joy." Of course, there was a nod to "unexpected romance" accompanied by Travis Kelce-Taylor Swift footage. For fans suffering from a rough New Year's weekend loss, take heart. "Eventually, everyone will have their storybook ending. It is Hallmark, after all," the spot concludes.

## PROGRAMMING

The second special part of **INSP's** Western anthology series "Legends Of" is set for a March 10 premiere at 6pm. "Legends of the Pony Express" will be an hour-long special chronicling the riders of the Pony Express. – *Eric André's* most recent comedy special is landing on **Adult Swim**. "Eric André Live Near Broadway" will debut on the network Jan. 18 at midnight. The special will be available the next day on Max. – Six-episode thriller "The Woman In The Wall" premieres on **Paramount+ with Showtime** on Jan. 19 ahead of its linear debut. It will come to the Paramount+ with Showtime network on Jan. 21 at 9pm.

## PEOPLE

Ad guru *Jeremy Helfand* is joining **Amazon** as its first VP/Head, Amazon Prime Video Advertising. The appointment comes as **Prime Video** prepares to introduce ads to its base tier on Jan. 29, and Helfand is more than capable of leading a ship through these waters. He joined **Hulu** as VP/Head, Advertising Platforms in June 2018 before transitioning into EVP, Advertising & Data Platforms for **Disney** Entertainment and **ESPN** Technology two years later. – **Fox News** is upping *Scott Wilder* from SVP, Field Production and Operations to EVP, Production and Operations. He'll head up all technical, field and production operations of Fox News' special events and breaking news coverage, which includes the 2024 presidential election. Wilder has been with Fox News since its formation in 1996 having started as a field photographer.

## OBITUARY

**Armstrong** Chairman *Jay Sedwick* passed away Monday evening surrounded by family. He graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 1957 before starting his electrical engineering career at Pratt & Whitney in 1957. He returned to Pennsylvania in 1960 and shortly after received a call from his father, *Jud Sedwick*, about joining the family business and exploring the world of cable TV. Jay largely built Armstrong's first cable TV system in Butler, Pennsylvania, with his own hands using vacuum tube amplifiers and first-generation coax. He brought his passion for engineering to Armstrong, creating a lab in the basement of its first office building with test equipment and leading multiple network rebuilds throughout his tenure. Now, **Armstrong Group** is led by Jay's son and CEO *Dru Sedwick*, and its cable division serves more than 350,000 customers in six states. "As a pioneer in the cable industry, Jay helped to lead Armstrong into becoming one of the largest, family-owned cable systems in the United States, and assisted in the creation of our organization, then the Pennsylvania Cable and Television Association (PCTA)," **Broadband Communications Association of Pennsylvania** President *Todd Eachus* said in a statement. "The cable and broadband industry will forever be grateful to Jay for his extraordinary talents and abilities and leadership."

# PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

## A&E's 'Secrets' Franchise Explores Polygamy

The latest installment of A&E "Secrets of" franchise dives into the world of polygamy, picking up where sister net Lifetime's previous series "Escaping Polygamy" left off. While the older series focused on helping people leave the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) and the Kingston clan, "Secrets of Polygamy's" first episode kicks off with former FLDS members reporting that their children have gone missing and they're fearful the church is involved. "We just wanted people to know that it continues—there are still these people out there breaking the law, abusing children. There are many charges and convictions against them for child abuse, child rape, human trafficking. The list is endless, and it continues," EP *Lori Golden-Stryer* told **CFX**. The FLDS was the focus of the popular Netflix documentary "Keep Sweet: Pray and Obey," which chronicled the rise and fall of FLDS prophet *Warren Jeffs*, who is serving a life sentence for sexual assault of a child. What many may not realize is that another man, *Sam Bateman*, has claimed Jeffs is dead and he's the new leader. Bateman is awaiting trial in Arizona on charges he sexually abused girls he claimed as wives, with Secrets covering some of the present-day developments. Golden-Stryer says filming a series like this is unpredictable. "These are not good people. I think that's the best way I can say it. These are dangerous people and what's so frightening is that they are among us," she said. 2023 saw a plethora of docuseries about cults and fringe groups, from HBO's "Love Has Won" to Hulu's "Stolen Youth: Inside the Cult at Sarah Lawrence." Is this a trend for television? "If it is a trend, then I'm glad that we're exposing them and letting people know what's happening out there. But how sad. How sad these groups still exist," said Golden-Stryer. "How sad that we do 30-some odd episodes showing what's happening and these people leaving and it continues. You put away one leader and the next one comes up." Secrets of Polygamy debuts Monday at 10pm on A&E. – *Amy Maclean*

### REVIEWS

"Reacher," Season 2, **Amazon Prime**. Some male Hollywood stars who are small in stature have a talent for acting big when they play physical roles. *Tom Cruise* (5'7") is a modern-day example; *Willem Dafoe*, also 5'7," is another. For classic film fans, *Kirk Douglas* often seemed taller than his 5'9" frame. At 6'3", and with muscles on top of muscles, *Alan Ritchson* needs no help to look like Jack Reacher, or just Reacher, as the reticent, taciturn warrior of the *Lee Child* novels prefers. Despite his mountainous presence, Reacher finds multiple baddies interesting in punchouts in this entertaining series' sophomore season. Yet Reacher is more than beefcake, he also has a mind, honed for crimefighting thanks in part to his ascetic lifestyle: no wife, kids, car or home for him. A vagabond, Reacher's sole possession, besides second-hand clothes, is his toothbrush. On the other hand, this season's Reacher exhibits complexity. He displays several rare sides, including some romantic prowess and undying loyalty. In between is a crime syndicate that looks like it's responsible for the deaths of several former Reacher military comrades. Reacher makes the bad guys pay. – "Leave the World Behind," streaming, **Netflix**. "Maestro" is (unfairly) getting love, yet this engaging Obamas-produced film, starring *Julia Roberts* and a terrific *Mahershala Ali*, is loaded with intrigue, plot twists and contemporary themes. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (12/25/23-12/31/23)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
<b>ESPN</b>	<b>1.350</b>	<b>4255</b>
<b>FNC</b>	<b>0.342</b>	<b>1079</b>
<b>HALL</b>	<b>0.267</b>	<b>843</b>
<b>CNN</b>	<b>0.246</b>	<b>775</b>
<b>HGTV</b>	<b>0.221</b>	<b>697</b>
<b>MSNBC</b>	<b>0.199</b>	<b>627</b>
<b>PRMNT</b>	<b>0.197</b>	<b>621</b>
<b>INSP</b>	<b>0.187</b>	<b>590</b>
<b>HIST</b>	<b>0.186</b>	<b>586</b>
<b>HMM</b>	<b>0.173</b>	<b>544</b>
<b>TBSC</b>	<b>0.170</b>	<b>537</b>
<b>DISC</b>	<b>0.160</b>	<b>505</b>
<b>FOOD</b>	<b>0.144</b>	<b>453</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>0.135</b>	<b>426</b>
<b>TVLAND</b>	<b>0.135</b>	<b>425</b>
<b>TLC</b>	<b>0.132</b>	<b>418</b>
<b>ID</b>	<b>0.129</b>	<b>406</b>
<b>AMC</b>	<b>0.128</b>	<b>405</b>
<b>FX</b>	<b>0.118</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>A&amp;E</b>	<b>0.114</b>	<b>358</b>
<b>GSN</b>	<b>0.110</b>	<b>347</b>
<b>TNT</b>	<b>0.105</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>OXY</b>	<b>0.104</b>	<b>328</b>
<b>SYFY</b>	<b>0.103</b>	<b>325</b>
<b>LIFE</b>	<b>0.098</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>BET</b>	<b>0.097</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>FRFM</b>	<b>0.097</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>WETV</b>	<b>0.095</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>ESPN2</b>	<b>0.093</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>COM</b>	<b>0.084</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>NATGEO</b>	<b>0.078</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>E!</b>	<b>0.074</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>BRAVO</b>	<b>0.073</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>ADSM</b>	<b>0.071</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>NAN</b>	<b>0.071</b>	<b>223</b>

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

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