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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

First and 10: CBS Sports, Pluto TV in Super Bowl Spotlight

It's that time of year when football fans and beyond gather around TV screens to watch the culmination of another football season and the highly coveted commercials that come with the big game. Just as the 49ers and Chiefs have capitalized on their opportunities to reach the NFL's championship game, **Paramount** and **CBS Sports** are looking to do the same as the world turns its attention to Las Vegas.

Sunday's showdown is slated for a 6:30pm kickoff on **CBS**, though that time is flexible when considering pregame entertainment usually pushes things back a few minutes. The game will be available in both 1080p HDR and 4K HDR on select MVPDs like **DirecTV** as well as on higher-priced tiers for vMVPDs such as **Fubo** and **YouTube TV**. **Paramount+** will have the game available to stream, and for those worried about a carriage blackout interrupting Super Bowl plans, TV provider credentials can presumably be used on CBS' website to access programming. **TelevisaUnivision** will be the home for Spanish-language coverage this year.

Fans can also "slime" things up with the first-ever Super Bowl alternate telecast as **Nickelodeon** will host "Super Bowl LVIII Live from Bikini Bottom" starting Sunday at 6:30pm. The telecast will feature enhanced graphics, augmented reality and even live appearances from SpongeBob SquarePants and Patrick Star.

But another player Paramount is making sure is getting its time in the spotlight is its free, ad-supported streaming service **Pluto TV**, which will have a commercial during the Super

Bowl for the first time ever to flaunt its recent brand refresh and updated logo. It's using that ad spot as a catalyst for a widespread marketing campaign that'll be rolled out across linear, CTV, radio, streaming audio, social media and other places, but it reflects how much the ad-supported category of TV viewership has grown as of late.

"At the highest levels we want to drive awareness. We want to be top of mind for consumers and advertisers alike, but I think even more than that, we really want to make sure we're conveying the unique DNA of who we are as a brand and how that translates into the Pluto experience ... We see this as a big coming out moment for the new look and feel [of Pluto TV]" *Valerie Kaplan*, Pluto TV's Global SVP, Head of Marketing, told **CFX**.

The Super Bowl falling under Paramount and CBS Sports' purview this year is an opportunity Kaplan has been strategizing for since she joined Pluto TV last March. The streamer's Super Bowl festivities began mid-January when it rolled out a pop-up **NFL Super Bowl Classics** channel that offers every Super Bowl minus Super Bowls I, II and V through Feb. 21. It precluded the on-the-ground activations that Pluto TV is hosting throughout the week in Las Vegas in addition to the larger "[Couch Potato](#)" ad campaign that'll begin in a few days.

"If you leave Vegas after this weekend and didn't see Pluto TV, then we didn't do our job right," Kaplan said.

However, the Super Bowl won't always be on Paramount's mountain. That's why Kaplan and Pluto TV are keen to jump on future opportunities to attach the streamer to high-profile

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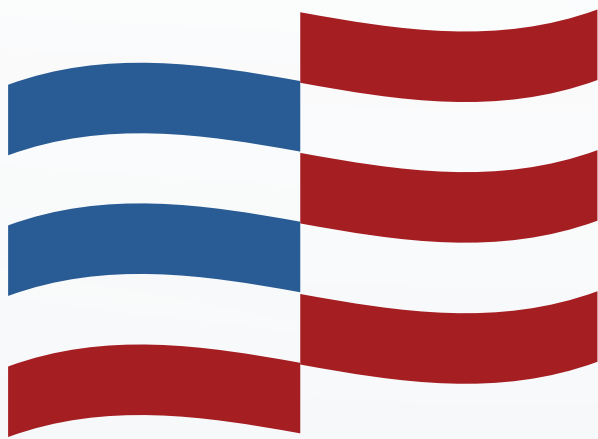
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events under Paramount's umbrella such as **Big Ten** football, the **UEFA Champions League** or even outside of the sports world with the Tony Awards.

"Depending on the sport and the league—sometimes the economics of it are challenging—that's where being part of Paramount Global and being part of this larger footprint, we can be innovative with our models to think about things like the Super Bowl Classics channel. And if the live event doesn't necessarily live on us, how do we supplement it in a very Pluto way," Kaplan said.

It's been quite the journey for the NFL this year. It had its second season of Thursday Night Football on **Prime Video**, which saw 24% growth in viewership behind an average of 11.86 million viewers. Peacock also had the first streaming-exclusive playoff game, which broke U.S. streaming records with an average minute audience of 23 million viewers and set the stage for future, similar deals to be made.

There are several others hoping to cash in on the Super Bowl. **ESPN** is on hand with multiple shows being aired from Vegas including "First Take," "NFL Live," "ESPN BET Live," "The Pat McAfee Show" and certain segments of "SportsCenter." Sunday's "NFL Countdown" will air from inside Allegiant Stadium in an extended four-hour format starting at 10am. That's all in addition to the international distribution of the Super Bowl, which ESPN will deliver to over 140 million homes across 129+ countries and territories outside of the U.S.

NBC Sports will have over 40 hours of coverage from Vegas as well, with much of its weekly content streamed on **Peacock**. "The *Dan Patrick Show*" will continue its 9am-noon slot before "Fantasy Football Happy Hour with *Matthew Berry*" takes over until 1pm and "PFT Live" and "Brother from Another" fill in the 1-3pm and 3-4pm spots, respectively. **NFL Network** will of course have plenty for fans to consume. It'll have more than 70 hours of Super Bowl programming this week in addition to over 11 hours of pre- and postgame coverage Sunday starting at 9am.

It's not just programmers getting in the Super Bowl spirit. **Comcast's** Xfinity Rewards is introducing the "1st and 10G" sweepstakes, which will give \$10,000 to a new winner every time there's a first-and-10 situation during Sunday's game. Participants can enter through Friday online or through the Xfinity app, and the winners will be unveiled via Xfinity's Instagram stories. Additionally, Xfinity Rewards members can enter to win a 50-inch **Xumo TV**.

FOX, WBD, DISNEY PLAN A STREAMING HOME FOR SPORTS

MVPDs, and the rest of the industry, are trying to digest what the late-breaking news of a **Fox Corp.**, **Warner Bros. Discovery** and **Disney** joint streaming sports service means. Is this the great rebundling? What's it going to cost? And what's the story for linear

TV? Details are sparse at the moment. The three programming giants announced plans to bring together their respective sports properties under one roof in a standalone app. The content on the new product will include coverage of all major professional sports leagues and college sports, and it is scheduled to make its debut this fall. The programmers are seemingly not leaving their linear networks behind in this deal, with their announcement saying fans will have access to linear nets including **ESPN, ABC, Fox, FS1, TNT, TBS, truTV** and more. It will be interesting to see how MVPDs respond as they begin drawing lines in the sand and saying they won't have their customers pay twice for the same content. **ESPN+** will also be included in the new package. Subscribers will have the ability to bundle Disney+, Hulu and/or Max with the standalone app. More details, including pricing, will be announced later, and we're sure to hear more when Fox and Disney hold their earnings calls Wednesday.

CABLE OPERATORS STAND BY TERMINATION FEES AT FCC

The **FCC** is examining preventing cable operators and DBS providers from using early termination fees and mandating that they issue partial month refunds for customers terminating service, and those that may be impacted by the regulation are calling the proposal a bad idea. In comments to the agency, **NCTA** said mandating partial month refunds for customers choosing to terminate their service would ultimately alter the terms under which those subscribers accepted service. That change could highly encourage subscriber churn, raising provider costs across the board. "The Commission's refund proposal would therefore put upward pressure on cable rates for all subscribers, as the operator would have to set the rate high enough to offset losses from subscribers who cancel partway through the month," NCTA said. **DirectTV** said it understood the FCC's goals, but that the policies would actually make life harder for consumers. It also questioned the agency's authority to regulate satellite providers in this manner, and said the Commission would do better to consider options like requiring providers to make available options without ETFs. "If prohibited from using ETFs, DirectTV would—as a matter of basic economics—seek either to recoup costs up front or to do so over time by raising monthly bills. This, naturally, would harm consumers—especially lower income consumers who can least afford to pay upfront for a truck roll and a set-top box," it said. **NAB** took a different approach in its comments, weaving the subject of ETFs into the larger dispute surrounding retransmission consent. During disputes over retransmission consent rates, it is possible that customers will lose access to programming.

NAB said customers may want to shift to a new provider in order to regain access to that content, but that move could be cost-prohibitive in addition to being highly inconvenient. “Because MVPDs generally do not have exceptions to their ETFs for cancellations due to a loss of programming, subscribers are forced to choose between staying with their MVPD and losing valued programming (for which they generally are still required to pay) or forking over hundreds of dollars in fees to access the programming elsewhere,” the association said.

YOUTUBE TV CHARGES PAST EIGHT MILLION SUB MILESTONE

YouTube TV has exceeded more than eight million subscribers, **YouTube** CEO *Neal Mohan* announced in a letter communicating the company’s 2024 priorities. It’s an impressive milestone for the company as it focuses even more on taking over the living room and growing subscriptions in 2024. Viewers globally now watch more than a billion hours on average of YouTube content on their TVs every day, he claimed. According to **Nielsen’s** U.S. streaming report, YouTube was the leader in streaming watchtime for the past 11 months. With the official subscriber number in, **MoffettNathanson** estimates that YouTube TV has now surpassed **DISH Network** to become the country’s fourth largest MVPD of any kind, and there’s a possibility it could have passed **DirectTV** as well to step into the third spot. But the firm doesn’t believe these results sway things enough to change the Bear case on cord-cutting accelerating each quarter. “That’s because YouTube TV is clearly benefiting from the addition of **NFL Sunday Ticket**, plus some lingering disruption from the **Charter/Disney** dispute,” it said in a note to clients. “Given the history of cyclicity in vMVPD growth around football season—showing a spike and then a fade into 1Q—we need to see if YouTube TV is able to change this trajectory on its own, or if its own success is really just coming at the expense of other distributors.” Mohan also took a moment to discuss generative AI and the questions it raises around art and the automation of creative endeavors. He didn’t take a clear stance on the technology, but promised to embrace partnership as the company explores its potential. “We’ll develop entirely new ways of empowering creative expression, managing rights and driving revenue for our partners,” he said. “We’re at a key moment in history and I’m excited about what lies ahead.”

COMCAST NBCU OPENS DOOR FOR QUEER AND BLACK STORYTELLERS

Comcast NBCU is joining with queer media collective **News is Out** and **Word in Black**, a collaboration from 10 of the nation’s Black publishers, to create The Digital Equity Local Voices Lab. Together, the three organizations will work to shed light on issues within marginalized communities across 16 news publications and provide the training and resources needed to tell the stories properly. Black and LGBTQ+ perspectives will be elevated through content creation and content sharing with **NBCU** and NBCU Academy through a

year-long fellowship. The Local Media Foundation will manage the fellowship and the Digital Equity Local Voices Lab. Comcast NBCU is donating more than \$1 million to launch the effort.

RATINGS

Fox News swept the primetime and total-day weekly ratings for a second consecutive week. It led the prime category with 2.01 million viewers P2+. **MSNBC** and **ESPN** were the only other networks to break 1 million with 1.27 million and 1.09 million viewers, respectively. **HGTV** came in at 853,000 while **History Channel** rounded out the top five with 765,000. In total day, Fox News had an average of 1.31 million followed by MSNBC (794,000), ESPN (547,000) and HGTV (445,000). **CNN** capped things at No. 5 with 434,000.

ON THE CIRCUIT

Registration is [open](#) for the 2024 **Mid-America Cable Show**, set to take over Arlington, Texas, from April 3-4. It will be held at Globe Life Stadium and tackle issues like the state of broadband funding, applications of artificial intelligence and how new and existing providers are addressing buildout challenges.

TCA NOTEBOOK

AMC Networks’ TCA news included the revelation that *Toni, Towanda, Trina, Tamar* and *Ms. Evelyn* will reunite for new **WE TV** series “The Braxtons.” It’s been three years since the family’s hit reality series “Braxton Family Values,” with the new series picking up with the family building a new chapter following the devastating loss of their sister Traci. In other news out of Pasadena, AMC Networks has greenlit a third installment of its horror anthology series, “The Terror.” The new season, called “The Terror: Devil in Silver,” will premiere on AMC and AMC+ with six episodes in 2025. The programmer also said it is actively developing a potential third series in the *Anne Rice* franchise, based on the secret society, The Talamasca, featured in several of Rice’s novels. “Anne Rice’s Interview with the Vampire” returns for its second season May 12, and production has started on the second season of “Anne Rice’s Mayfair Witches.” Streamer **ALLBLK** announced the summer debut of “Deb’s House.” It follows music mogul *Deb Antney*, who pioneered the careers of several high-profile artists such as Gucci Mane, French Montana and Nicki Minaj, as she searches for the next female superstar MC.

PROGRAMMING

Great American Media signed actor *Mario Lopez* to a multi-year, multi-picture deal. Lopez will star in content across the company’s portfolio which includes **Great American Family**, **Great American Faith & Living**, **Great American Adventures** and other linear and digital channels. He’ll also play a key role in the network’s Great American Christmas 2024 event.