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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Windy City Debut: Chicago's Newest RSN Goes Live

The next chapter in Chicago sports began Tuesday with the launch of **Chicago Sports Network**. CHSN officially went live at 5pm CT, kicking off with a two-hour program "Game On Chicago" where Bulls play-by-play commentator and former **ESPN** voice *Adam Amin* previewed what the new RSN will offer to fans in the Chicago market.

"My priority, first and foremost, is to create a great experience for our fans, and everything else goes from there," CHSN President *Jason Coyle* told **CFX**. "We go out with that expectation of the world-class quality of Chicago, but we have those neighborhood values, and I think that'll just come across in everything that we do."

CHSN is now the regional home of the **NHL's** Blackhawks, **NBA's** Bulls and **MLB's** White Sox as all three migrate from the now-defunct **NBC Sports Chicago**, which closed its doors Monday. The White Sox wrapped up their season Sunday, but both the Blackhawks and Bulls will start their new regular seasons this month. The Cubs will remain on the team-owned **Marquee Sports Network**, which also has the rights to the Chicago Sky's **WNBA** games, Chicago Hounds rugby matches and local college games.

Initial distribution includes **DirectTV**, which [struck a multi-year deal](#) to air CHSN across five states (most of Illinois, Iowa and parts of Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin) for its satellite, **DirectTV Stream** and U-verse subscribers. **Astound Broadband**

also confirmed to **CFX** that it'll carry CHSN upon launch.

"We're not trying to just continue an RSN path. We've seen what happens to that model eventually. It hasn't been working that great for a lot of fans, a lot of distribution partners and a lot of the networks themselves," said Coyle, who was previously the President of **Stadium** for seven years and co-founded the media company **Silver Chalice** in 2008. "We're really looking at this as an opportunity to create something that is built upon the best parts of the traditional execution and leans into some new [methods of distribution] ... We are not out to get anyone to cut the cord. I can promise you that that is not in our interest."

Notably, an agreement with **Comcast/Xfinity**—the largest cable provider in the area—has yet to be reached as the operator continues its push to have RSNs on a less-penetrated digital tier. Comcast sent a notice to customers regarding the network change, adding that it's "evaluating the Regional Sports Network (RSN) fee that applies to your current TV package and will communicate any changes in the coming weeks." Coyle said the network remains engaged "everywhere that our fans want to watch," but didn't specify a timeline for when a deal could be done.

CHSN lined up over-the-air availability as well ahead of Tuesday's launch. **Gray Media** will begin carrying CHSN next month on its stations in Rockford, Illinois, and South Bend, Indiana. Gray said the arrangement will span more than 500,000 households across the two markets. That's in addition to the

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previously announced deal with **Millennial Telecommunications**' WJYS TV, which provides an OTA option for those in the Chicagoland area.

"If fans have decided that they're going to watch via free-to-air television, we're going to serve them. There are 600,000 households in Chicago already watching with a digital antenna. Those are unaddressed otherwise. We need to be there for them," Coyle said. "If they're on a traditional carrier like a DirectTV, or any of the others, then we want to be there for them. Streamers [are] the same way. Our intention is to end up in significantly more homes than we have the last couple of years."

Beyond the two-hour opening program, CHSN announced a trio of weekday shows that'll get started this week. "The Chicago Lead" will have breaking news, analysis, features and interviews with professional, collegiate and high school athletes from the region. It'll air at 6pm and be hosted by Chicago sports personalities *Brooke Fletcher*, *Camron Smith* and *David Haugh*. "The Big Pro Football Show" will cover the Bears and the NFL at large during the week at 5:30pm. "The Big College Football Show" will cover happenings in college football at 5pm.

Team-specific coverage has been unveiled for the Blackhawks and Bulls, but the White Sox team is still being worked on with the offseason just getting underway.

"I think everyone is going to be able to see it from the first video and continuing onward, the content is Chicago-focused. We're being very, very purposeful in designing a content experience that will start out in a really strong place and continue to evolve over time, just like everything else," Coyle said.

CHSN's launch at least temporarily ends the uncertainty surrounding the future of Chicago's RSN situation. It was once reported that Stadium, the network owned by Bulls and White Sox owner *Jerry Reinsdorf*, would be the one that would replace NBC Sports Chicago. Negotiations between the three teams and Stadium never reached the finish line, thus opening the door for CHSN to obtain all three of the franchise's rights.

NBC Sports Chicago originally launched in 2004 as Comcast SportsNet Chicago, initially sharing the rights to the Cubs, White Sox, Blackhawks and Bulls with **WGN-TV** (owned by **Tribune** at the time). The network underwent the NBC Sports rebrand in 2017, and in 2020 it lost the Cubs after the team introduced Marquee Sports Network.

## DISNEY CLAIMS MISUNDERSTANDING IN DIRECTV BAD FAITH FIGHT

Disney is fighting back against **DirectTV's** claim that it negotiated in bad faith, telling the **FCC** in a filing submitted Friday that the entire situation is nothing more than a misunderstanding between the two parties. The programmer claims that during negotiations

for a new carriage agreement, Disney understood that **DirectTV** was potentially interested in the inclusion of a litigation-focused "clean slate" provision. It was surprised then to hear that **DirectTV** filed the complaint with the Commission, and since clarified to **DirectTV** that the clean slate proposal was never meant to preclude either party from engaging with or filing complaints with the **FCC**. Disney also said it never demanded that **DirectTV** accept any particular language, only that the two parties reach a mutually agreeable position as they had in prior renewals. "In past distribution agreements, Disney and **DirectTV** had agreed to execute mutual clean slate agreements, and Disney rationally assumed that **DirectTV** would agree to do so again as part of the instant renewal negotiation," Disney said. "Moreover, on August 31, 2024, before Disney added the issue of the clean slate to the issues list, **DirectTV** proposed a clean slate term in the long-form draft of one of the (non-broadcast) component agreements in the distribution negotiation. Disney's good faith engagement on this topic could not be viewed by any rational fact finder as an act of bad faith by Disney."

## DIRECTV CEO SEES COMBO WITH DISH AS HEALTHY FOR INDUSTRY

**DirectTV** CEO *Bill Morrow* visited **CNBC's** "Squawk on the Street" Tuesday to discuss the company's merger with **DISH** and the leverage it will give the combined company to change carriage agreements with programmers. He said data from **DISH** and **DirectTV** show that when customers leave either of the two companies, they go to OTT services for their video programming. He hopes to continue to grow **DirectTV** Stream through these changing carriage agreements, like the one with **Disney**, that would allow the company to offer smaller packages as well as access to some of the streaming services. "This is not an either/or. In talking with many of the CEOs of the programmers out there, we see this as complementary. They want to be able to have a certain reach with their direct-to-consumer offering, and then what the consumer won't go with is where we step in," Morrow said. "We think we're going to be able to help the industry be healthier from a financial point of view, and we think that the programmers are going to go back to this partnership concept that actually helped them to get started in the beginning."

## SOURCE OF VERIZON NETWORK OUTAGE UNKNOWN

**Verizon** suffered a network outage that lasted at least seven hours Monday, impacting an unspecified number of customers in parts of the country. The company first addressed the outage on X around noon ET, updating subscribers at 7:18pm ET with

news that all was back to normal. “Verizon engineers have fully restored today’s network disruption that impacted some customers. Service has returned to normal levels,” the Verizon News X account said in the post. “We know how much people rely on Verizon and apologize for any inconvenience.” There was no word of what caused the disruption, but the **FCC** also took to X to note it was aware of the outage. “We are working to determine the cause and extent of these service disruptions,” it said.

**MOFFETTNATHANSON UPS PRICE TARGET ON ROKU**

**MoffettNathanson** upgraded **Roku** from “Sell” to “Neutral” and upped its price target by \$22 to \$80, citing enthusiasm over new leadership strategies and growth in platform revenues. Over the last few years, **MoffettNathanson** has been concerned about Roku’s ability to continue to outperform as ad-supported services eat into the company’s ability to drive pricing and fill-rate. Beyond that, TV manufacturers like **Samsung** and **LG** continue to invest more into their operating systems, placing greater pressure on Roku’s ability to dominate. But looking into 2025, **MoffettNathanson** believes it faces less risk than it has in recent months. “While competition will persist, we believe that Roku does have the ability to improve their financial results due to an improving mix of ad revenues and continued focus on cost management and free cash flow generation.

**SEGRA ADDS ROUTE MILES WITH EVERSTREAM PURCHASE**

**Segra** acquired **Everstream**’s business-only all-fiber network in the St. Louis metropolitan area, adding nearly 1,000 route miles to its national network. The new footprint will be connected to **Segra**’s Southeast and Midwest networks, and customers will immediately gain access to its customer service offerings and national service footprint. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

**POINT BROADBAND EXPANDS WITH RIVIERA BUY**

Alabama-based fiber provider **Point Broadband** has acquired **Riviera Utilities**’ residential cable and internet business. The acquisition was approved by **Riviera Utilities**’ board on Aug. 27 and by the city council of **Foley, Alabama**, where the company is located, on Sept. 3. **Point Broadband** plans to immediately begin an upgrade of the **Riviera** systems with fiber technology. All existing customers will be transitioned to fiber in the coming months.

**SINCLAIR DIVES INTO VR WITH NEWSON APP**

**Sinclair** teamed up with digital innovation firm **Mindgrub** to launch an Apple Vision Pro app for **NewsOn**, the broadcaster’s platform for live and on-demand local news content. Among

the features included in the app are a “Newsroom immersion” that displays interactive news maps and an interactive environment and access to on-demand newscasts and short form story clips from more than 280 local TV stations.

**NTIA OKS ARKANSAS BEAD PLAN**

Arkansas is the latest eligible entity to earn **NTIA** approval for its **BEAD** plans, winning an approval of its Volume II proposal. It was allocated more than \$1 billion for the deployment and upgrade of broadband networks within its borders, among other things.

**FIBER FRENZY**

**Archtop Fiber** has begun construction of a fiber network in **Woodstock, New York**, and plans to begin servicing the area by the end of the month. **Archtop** currently offers symmetrical speeds of up to 2 Gbps with speeds up to 8 Gbps for residents and 10 Gbps for businesses coming soon. – **Schurz Communications**’ Ohio-based provider **NKTelco** wrapped up a project to bring **Flight Fiber** to **Versailles, Ohio**. Over 1,600 residents and businesses in the area will now get the product’s symmetrical internet offering. Plans include 300 Mbps for \$69.95 per month, 600 Mbps for \$79.95 per month and 1 Gbps for \$89.95 per month. The project was part of **NKTelco**’s \$2 million capital investment it’s made in Ohio.

**WEEKLY RATINGS**

**Fox News** resumed its spots at the top of both the primetime and total-day ratings charts for the week of Sept. 23-29. In prime, **Fox News** led with 2.33 million viewers P2+. **ESPN** came in with 2 million thanks to a college football bump, and **MSNBC** loomed in third with 1.18 million. **CNN** and **Hallmark Channel** followed with 695,000 and 626,000, respectively. **Fox News**’ total-day average for the week was 1.44 million. **MSNBC** took second with 846,000 and **ESPN** third with 748,000. **CNN** checked in with 511,000, and making its way into the top five was **The Weather Channel** with 348,000 as it covered Hurricane Helene.

**PROGRAMMING**

As the anniversary of Hamas’ attack on Israel looms Monday, **Jewish Life TV** will air four programs commemorating the event. “Screams Before Silence” will feature former **Meta/Facebook** COO **Sheryl Sandberg** interviewing eyewitnesses, released hostages and first responders on Monday at 2pm, 7pm and 11pm. “October 7th: Voices of Pain, Home & Heroism” chronicles the lives of families who were impacted by the conflict at 3:10pm, 8:10pm and 12:10am. “Al Tira (Do Not Fear): A Diary from a Nation at Work” recounts what happened on Oct. 7 at 4:50pm, 9:50pm and 1:50am, and “Healing Ink: Tattooing Over the Scars of October 7th” highlights a nonprofit helping tattoo over scars of those who attended a music festival that was attacked. That’ll air Monday at 5:30pm, 10:30pm and 2:30am.