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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

RSN Roundup: Comcast Re-tiers NBC Sports, NESN; MSG & Optimum Feuding

Remember some complaining over **Comcast** moving RSNs as their deals came up for renewal to a less distributed tier while its NBC Sports RSNs continued to be carried more widely? That's changing, with Comcast set to move **NBC Sports Boston**, **NBC Sports Bay Area** and **NBC Sports California** tomorrow to its Digital Preferred and Ultimate TV tiers this month. **NESN**, not owned by Comcast, is also being moved to the Digital/Ultimate TV package tomorrow.

The operator has consistently promised to move RSNs, including its own, as their deals come up for renewal.

"Comcast is pleased to have reached agreements with NBC Sports Bay Area, NBC Sports California, NBC Sports Boston, and NESN to continue offering their networks in a way that reflects the changing video marketplace for local sports and provides our customers with a choice," said a Comcast statement. "While the majority of customers shouldn't be impacted, we have promotional offers for customers with Popular TV service who want to continue receiving these RSNs."

Comcast made a similar promotional offer when it reached a deal to return **Bally Sports** RSNs (now **FanDuel Sports Network**) to its lineup in the Digital Preferred package on Aug. 1 after a three-month blackout, giving customers three months before they needed to upgrade their packages to keep the nets. The operator has been steadily moving RSNs to its Digital Preferred package, with **MASN** and **SportsNet Pittsburgh** already there. It

still has a handful of networks to re-tier, including **Monumental Sports**, **SNY**, **YES Network** and **Marquee**.

Not on Xfinity's Digital Preferred is **MSG Networks**, which Comcast hasn't carried since 2021 with the two unable to agree on fees. The Knicks, Rangers RSN is currently in a carriage impasse with **Altice USA's Optimum**, which lost the channel on Jan 1 after the two couldn't reach renewal terms. On Monday, New York Attorney General *Letitia James* weighed in on the Optimum-MSG blackout. "As two major corporations engage in contract talks, the people who are impacted the most are everyday New Yorkers who simply want to watch sports and enjoy television programming. Altice, which owns Optimum, and MSG Networks, which provides sports coverage for some of New York's favorite sports teams, are struggling to reach a final agreement, and consumers who expect the programming and games they paid for are the ones missing out," she said. "I will be monitoring this situation closely to ensure New York customers receive the services they are paying for. I urge both companies to work together to reach a fair, final agreement so New Yorkers can get back to rooting for the home teams."

James' statement comes after the two exchanged words over the weekend. Shortly after Optimum lost **Nexstar** stations on Friday at 5pm ET, MSG Networks issued a statement claiming that Optimum had pulled their latest proposal and walked away from negotiations. It urged viewers to switch to **Verizon Fios** and said Comcast subs should be credited at least \$10/month for programming not received. Optimum pushed back against

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MSG's claims, saying it invited MSG to its offices that week and requested a follow-up meeting with MSG execs on Friday.

"Despite our ongoing efforts to reach a fair and reasonable deal for our customers, MSG Networks continues to demand that non-fans be forced to pay for content that they do not want. In fact, almost half of customers with access to MSG Networks didn't even turn on the channel in 2024," an Optimum spokesperson said, adding that the operator is offering customers various solutions, offsetting and defraying costs for MSG Networks' own **Gotham** app.

Carriage on Optimum is a key factor in another battle MSGN is facing: paying its outstanding debt. It owes lenders \$829.13 million and was supposed to pay part of that back Oct. 11. It's since been delayed three times, and its latest deadline of last Friday was once again pushed back after the **Sphere Entertainment** subsidiary agreed with lenders to extend the forbearance period until Jan. 31 at 11:59pm, according to an **SEC** filing.

OPTIMUM CLAIMS NEXSTAR DISREGARDING FCC RULES

Altice USA's Optimum is the latest MVPD to square off with **Nexstar**. At 5pm ET Friday, Optimum lost 63 stations in 42 markets, including WPIX in NY as well as stations in Albany, NY; Charleston, WV; and Lubbock, TX. Cable network **NewsNation** is also dark across Optimum's footprint. Optimum claims Nexstar is demanding exorbitant fees, while the broadcaster alleges the MVPD wants special treatment. Optimum is also complaining that Nexstar is seeking expanded carriage of 24/7 news network **NewsNation**, including to "hundreds of thousands" more customers despite "essentially no viewership." This spat reopens the dispute over whether Nexstar is skirting the **FCC's** 39% national audience cap, which broadcasters are hoping will disappear under the *Trump* administration. Last March, the **FCC** proposed Nexstar pay a \$1.2 million fine and divest WPIX, finding Nexstar and **Mission Broadcasting** apparently willfully and repeatedly violated several Commission rules, including its 39% cap. Nexstar and Mission are challenging the proposed Notice of Apparent Liability, which came after **Comcast**, **Charter**, **DirecTV** and **Cox** all argued that Nexstar should actually be attributed ownership of Mission-owned station WPIX, which would make it in violation of the 39% cap on national audience reach. Optimum complained to the FCC Monday that Nexstar is continuing to negotiate carriage of WPIX. "Nexstar further required that the Company agree to a contractual provision stating that WPIX would continue to be governed by the Nexstar agreement even after all FCC decisions were final, regardless of whether such decisions had been stayed, until all possible appeals had been concluded – effectively extending these rights for years after an adverse FCC decision. Such blatant disregard

of FCC rules and orders should not be tolerated," it said in an FCC filing that notified the agency of the blackout. Optimum also said Nexstar insisted on including Phoenix area CW affiliate **KAZT**, owned by **Londen Media**, as part of negotiations, even though it already has a deal covering that station that was negotiated directly with Londen. That's not the only entanglement for Nexstar. In 2023, **DirecTV** went 76 days without Nexstar stations. While the two eventually reached a deal, DirecTV declined to drop its federal suit accusing Nexstar of antitrust violations for its shared service agreements with Mission and **White Knight**. Last month, DirecTV argued its case in a federal appeals court for why it believes a lower court erred in dismissing the antitrust suit. We're awaiting the ruling from the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.

COMPANIES PLEDGE SUPPORT FOR L.A. FIRE RELIEF

The efforts to contain and extinguish the wildfires in the Los Angeles area continue into another week as the death toll rises to at least 24 people. Several events in the L.A. area have been postponed or canceled as a result, but some events are staying on schedule for now. Both the Grammys and Oscars will remain on their Feb. 2 and March 2 dates, respectively, though nominations for the Oscars have been delayed. The Sundance Film Festival is slated for Jan. 23-Feb. 2 in Park City, Utah, and the event announced it's not making any changes to the dates as of now. Relief efforts continue as **FCC** Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* said the agency has deployed spectrum survey teams to assess the impact on cellular communications in Los Angeles County. Data collected will be used to identify communications gaps to inform emergency response activities and see where assets are needed. FCC staff is also helping manage public safety spectrum use, and the FCC issued grants of Special Temporary Authority. Companies have continued an outpouring of support. **Disney** pledged \$15 million for initial and immediate response and rebuilding efforts. The money will go to organizations including the Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation and the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, among others. The company noted that many of its employees have been affected by the fires and that it intends to provide more resources to its Employee Relief Fund. **Warner Bros. Discovery** is also helping out impacted employees. *The Wrap* reports that WBD created a hotline for employees that directs them to shelters and hotel rooms that the company has blocked off and paid for. Additionally, WBD is offering to pay for meals for those who have taken in displaced family members and friends. **Paramount** is giving \$1 million across the California Fire Foundation, the American Red Cross, Direct Relief, World Central Kitchen and Best Friends Animal Society. That's in addition to assistance and resources it's giving employees who have had to evacuate. **Comcast NBCUniversal** is

donating \$10 million in cash to help with wildfire disaster relief and recovery efforts. The company will have \$2.5 million of funding be used to become an inaugural corporate partner to the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles' ReBUILD LA initiative. Donations will also be made to those working on the ground with short- and long-term relief assistance such as the American Red Cross and Entertainment Industry Foundation SoCal Fire Fund. **Netflix** is also giving \$10 million across several nonprofits helping with community recovery. The streamer is helping employees through temporary housing and double-matching all employee charitable contributions made via Netflix's employee giving program. **Sinclair** and **Tennis Channel** kicked off an initiative alongside The Salvation Army to provide disaster relief support across Southern California.

T-MOBILE BUYS AD TECH UNIT

T-Mobile's M&A train isn't coming to a stop anytime soon. This time, the wireless company has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire **Vistar Media**, known for its technology offerings for digital-out-of-home advertisements. Through the deal, T-Mobile is set to acquire Vistar's solutions for buying, selling and managing media campaigns across more than 1.1 million digital screens provided by nearly 370 OOH media owners and serving more than 3,000 partner advertisers. It plans to combine the capabilities with T-Mobile's customer data to provide more relevant and personalized advertising. T-Mobile will pay approximately \$600 million in cash for Vistar Media, and the deal is expected to close in 1Q25. This isn't expected to disrupt the company's plan to return up to \$14 billion to shareholders as part of its 2025 return program.

LOUISIANA EARNS FINAL BEAD OK

NTIA gave Louisiana's broadband office another green light on Monday, approving the state's Final Proposal for the grant program. It's the first state to have its Final Proposal approved and this is the last step required under the BEAD statute before Louisiana can sign agreements with the ISPs selected to build networks under the grant program this year. The Bayou State received an allocation of \$1.355 billion, and a consortium of Louisiana fiber providers was preliminarily awarded more than \$450 million to serve 76,815 locations. Other winners include **AT&T**, **Cox**, **Charter** and **Comcast**.

AJIT PAI ON TIKTOK'S NEXT DANCE

With less than a week until **ByteDance's** deadline to divest or shut down **TikTok** operations in the U.S., **Searchlight Capital** Partner and former **FCC** Chair **Ajit Pai** is weighing in on what he believes could be the next stage in the saga around the app. Appearing on **CNBC's** "Squawk on the Street" [Monday](#), he said he believes the Supreme Court, which is set to rule on the constitutionality of the federal law mandating the closure, is heavily weighing both national security concerns and free speech implications. But for those mourning the app known for its short-form content, Pai

believes there is a chance the guillotine may not be rolled out quite yet. "In the oral arguments if you listened, they also opened the door to some procedural complexities. For example, could the Supreme Court issue an administrative stay to allow the next administration to take some action to facilitate a divestiture that it thought was qualified? Could the next administration simply decide not to enforce the law?" Pai said.

REDS THROW CURVEBALL, SIGN WITH MAIN STREET SPORTS

The name and branding might be different, but the Cincinnati Reds' media partner remains the same. The franchise signed a one-year deal with **Main Street Sports** to produce and distribute local Reds broadcasts on **FanDuel Sports Ohio** for the 2025 season. It's a change of plans after it was announced back in November that **MLB** would handle the Reds' local distribution this upcoming season. The Reds were previously on **Bally Sports Ohio** when it was owned by then-**Diamond Sports Group**. FanDuel Sports Ohio will continue to have 30-minute pre- and post-game shows, and Reds fans can get a direct-to-consumer subscription on the FanDuel Sports Network app. Pricing and subscription options will be revealed at a later date. The broadcast crew is also being finalized.

VIZIO'S NEW BUNDLE

Vizio is adding to the many bundling options consumers are getting these days. Those with a Vizio account can get **Starz** and **AMC+**'s full libraries for \$13.99/month. Separately, those two subscriptions would total \$20.98/month.

ON THE CIRCUIT

C-SPAN CEO **Sam Feist** is set to be on hand at the **ACA Connects** Annual Summit in D.C. He'll join **NCTC** CEO **Lou Borrelli** for a fire-side chat March 5, touching on topics like the evolution of covering Congress, C-SPAN's "Democracy Unfiltered" brand refresh and more. Feist [stepped in as C-SPAN's CEO](#) in September following the departures of co-CEOs **Rob Kennedy** and **Susan Swain**.

PROGRAMMING

FETV will begin airing original, uncut versions of most series and movies beginning Feb 1. It said the change will make it the only network in classic TV genre to feature programming as it originally aired. – **C-SPAN** is giving viewers a first for next Monday's presidential inauguration. It will have live, raw feeds covering **Donald Trump** as he assumes power. The raw broadcast will be on **C-SPAN2** while the flagship C-SPAN network will have the traditional inauguration day coverage starting at 7am. Extended coverage begins Saturday at 3pm and runs through 11am on Jan. 21. C-SPAN2's "American History TV" will air a 48-hour marathon of past presidential inauguration addresses on Saturday and Sunday.