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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Play Ball: Nats, Orioles End MASN Spat As MLB Preps for TV Rights Blitz

The **Washington Nationals** and **Baltimore Orioles** have hit a home run ahead of the start of the **MLB** season, reaching an agreement to settle issues tied to their shared RSN.

For the 2025 season, Nationals games will continue to be televised locally exclusively on the **Mid-Atlantic Sports Network (MASN)** under a new, one-year contract. For the 2026 season and beyond, the Nationals will be allowed to look at alternative arrangements for their television rights.

No word yet on where the Nats could head, though some see **Monumental Sports Network** as a potential new home. Monumental Sports, which owns the Washington Wizards, Capitals, Mystic and Capital One Arena, created the RSN after acquiring what was NBC Sports Network Washington from **Comcast** in 2022. That same year, Monumental CEO **Ted Leonsis** made a rebuffed bid for the Nats and has suggested he may try again.

"The Nationals and Orioles extend their gratitude to Commissioner Manfred and his team at MLB for their efforts in bringing this matter to a successful conclusion," the clubs said in a statement. "Both Clubs thank our fans for their support and look forward to continuing their partnership with MASN for the upcoming season."

It's well-documented there has been a battle of the beltway over television media rights for going on two decades, dating back to the birth of the Nationals after the Montreal Expos moved the franchise to D.C. The Nationals and the Orioles struck an agreement that led to the creation of MASN as well as the

split of rights payments that would be due to each team annually.

The teams have been in and out of the courtroom for several years over a failure to reach an agreement on telecast fees that should be distributed to each team for the period of 2012-2016. The dispute went to arbitration before the MLB's Revenue Sharing Definitions Committee that ultimately determined the Nationals were owed \$53 million for 2012. That's \$19 million more than the valuation reached by the Orioles and the RSDC also determined the total should increase by \$3 million annually through 2016.

The Orioles ultimately challenged that decision, claiming the RSDC was partial to the Nationals due to certain ties between members of the committee and the organization. However, in 2023, the New York Appeals Court found no evidence of partiality.

The Nationals' freedom to look for other arrangements in 2026 is the latest update in the ongoing upheaval in the distribution of baseball across the country. It was only in January that **Main Street Sports** (then known as **Diamond Sports**) emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy after 10 months during which it battled with MLB teams and the league itself over its existing telecast rights agreements.

Just last week, **ESPN** and MLB mutually agreed to step away from their distribution arrangement after the 2025 season. That agreement began in 2021 and was originally set to last for seven years at a cost of \$550 million per season. On Monday, a **WSJ** [report](#) indicated that Main Street Sports has put forth the idea of bundling its streaming package with ESPN's flagship DTC service set to launch later this year, according to people familiar with the matter. That would fill a gap left behind by the end of the MLB deal.



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FOX'S DTC EXPECTATIONS

Fox is finally getting ready to join the DTC arena later this year, but it's not looking to compete on the frontlines of the streaming wars. CEO/Executive Chair *Lachlan Murdoch* elaborated on the expectations Fox has on its upcoming DTC venture at **Morgan Stanley's** TMT Conference on Monday, saying that the hope is to launch the product in time for the 2025-26 football season. He unsurprisingly reiterated the company's staunch support of the traditional cable bundle, but when it came to who the DTC product was targeting, Murdoch used the familiar "cord-nevers" and "cord-cutters" terms from when **Venu Sports** was the talk of the town. "That was our vision with Venu—to focus on those cord-nevers or those cord cutters," Murdoch said. "The same is exactly true with our direct-to-consumer service. We want **Fox News**, **Fox Sports**, our TV stations, our entertainment network in front of as many people as possible, however, they want to engage with us." Much of the technology to support a DTC product was created by Fox already and further strengthened as Venu was being developed. When asked about subscriber expectations, Murdoch said it was somewhat in the same range as Venu's previous guidance, setting the bar at the mid-single-digit millions range. On the other side of Fox's streaming portfolio is **Tubi**. The free streamer is at a \$1 billion annualized run rate, giving Fox reason to continue investing in it. Although Murdoch added it's not a huge investment, he said it's ultimately "a new broadcast network." Other items on Fox's list of priorities for 2025 include maintaining **Fox News'** dominance, investing in digital properties like Tubi and its soon-to-launch DTC venture and wrapping up affiliate deals that are up for negotiation. Murdoch did mention there are fewer than normal number distribution deals up (less than a quarter in 2025), but he was later asked if launching a DTC product would eat into Fox's pricing power when going through renewal talks. "We're not chasing subscribers. We're targeting on incremental subscribers. It'll be accretive to us as a business, and the same is true with our DTC," Murdoch said. "It's going to be priced, importantly, at a level which really, frankly, is not going to be competitive with someone who wants that as part of their cable bundle."

SIMINGTON COMMENTS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE ORDER

President *Donald Trump* signed an executive order over the weekend designating English as the official language of the U.S., and **FCC** Commissioner *Nathan Simington* plans to show his support for the move during the agency's open meetings. "In line with this order, I will speak only English during official @

FCC proceedings and encourage my colleagues to do the same. As an immigrant, I had to assimilate. Learning English is key to assimilation, and I recommend all immigrants do the same," Simington said. Simington, a native of Saskatchewan, notably delivered some of his [comments](#) at the February open meeting in Romanian as well as in English. Fellow Commissioner *Anna Gomez*, the first Latina to serve in that capacity at the FCC, has delivered her statements on different items in both English and Spanish since she was sworn in to office in September 2023.

HULU'S OSCARS MISHAPS

Hulu didn't have a shining debut on the red carpet. On an Oscars night dominated by "Anora," users who were tuning in via the streamer reported issues with their broadcast, and some even saw their streams end early before the final two awards were unveiled, including Best Picture. Hulu was airing the Oscars for the first time while **ABC** hosted the linear broadcast, and the first issue came toward the beginning of the program at 7pm ET when users reported having trouble signing into accounts. "Having issues logging in? If so – we're on it! Our team is actively investigating, and we hope to have things back up and running soon," Hulu Support [said](#) on X at 7:39pm. At 9:12pm, Hulu said the log-in issue had been resolved. But toward the end of the broadcast at around 10:32pm, some users once again threw the flag on Hulu after streams ended prematurely and displayed a message that read, "Thank you for watching! The live event has now ended." Those folks missed the Best Actress and Best Picture categories being awarded to Anora's *Mikey Madison* and Anora, respectively. The crux of the issue was the telecast being scheduled to end at 10:32pm, but acceptance speeches and the event running long pushed it past that time limit.

SPHERE SOUNDS THE BANKRUPTCY ALARM ON MSG NETWORKS

Industry spectators have had their eyes on **MSG Networks** not only for its [now-resolved carriage dispute](#) with **Optimum**, but for how it'll (finally) begin paying back guarantors on its existing debt. MSGN's parent company **Sphere Entertainment** issued an update on the RSNs outlook Monday, and it didn't sound entirely optimistic—even sounding the alarm on the potential for bankruptcy. MSGN currently has \$804.1 million of principal amount outstanding under its credit facilities following a repayment of \$25 million made Feb. 4 using cash on hand. MSGN originally had a deadline of Oct. 11 to begin submitting loan payments to lenders, but the forbearance period has since been extended multiple times before

settling on a [current deadline](#) of March 26. Sphere said if it can't restructure the debt or agree to a new deal, bankruptcy options will be explored. "If MSG Networks is not successful in negotiating a refinancing or work-out of its indebtedness, the Company believes it is probable that MSG Networks and/or its subsidiaries would seek bankruptcy protection or the lenders would foreclose on the MSG Networks collateral securing the credit facilities," Sphere said. MSGN reported \$139.3 million in total revenue for 4Q24, down by 5% YOY or \$7.1 million. Distribution revenue fell \$8.7 million mainly due to a drop in total subscribers (approximately 11.5%), but advertising revenue was up by \$1.8 million YOY thanks to higher average per-game ad sales, more live sports telecasts and higher ad revenue from **MSG+**. Quarterly operating income dipped by \$69.3 million to an operating loss of \$35 million compared to the prior year quarter.

STARLINK BRINGS RESIDENTIAL LITE PLANS TO U.S.

Starlink expanded its offerings in the U.S. with a more affordable plan. Residential Lite, which is already available in some international areas, comes in at \$80/month for speeds ranging from 50-100 Mbps. Starlink said on a help page that while Residential Lite has no data or speed caps, it will be deprioritized compared to the provider's \$120/month during peak hours. Residential Lite customers will be able to upgrade to the Residential plan at any time. The cheap plan is only available in 15 states including Iowa, Vermont, Minnesota and North Dakota. In states like Montana, Utah and Nevada where the plan is available, there are still some portions of the state where Starlink customers will not be able to subscribe to Residential Lite. Starlink also posted on X on Friday, claiming it is connecting more than five million people with high-speed internet across 125 countries, territories and more.

TBD TV FINDS ITS ROAR

Sinclair's free OTA network **TBD TV** will have a new look come April 28. It'll be rebranded as **ROAR** while the network transitions to airing comedy franchises, donning new on-air graphics, updated social media handles and an immersive brand experience. Sinclair embarked on a journey to update the network to a comedy focus back in late 2023. Since then, it's acquired series like "Saturday Night Live," "Whose Line is it Anyway" and "Punk'd." TBD TV secured its highest ratings to-date last month across every key demographic and daypart.

VIAMEDIA HITS 100 PROVIDERS

ViaMedia is kicking off March with a milestone, claiming the prize of becoming the first U.S. ad sales firm to represent over 100 video service providers. The firm has been quite busy adding more providers to its portfolio over the past 12 months. Currently,

ViaMedia's footprint spans 75 DMAs. Recent partners include **TruVista** (South Carolina), **Nex-Tech** (Kansas), **North Central Telephone Cooperative** (Kentucky/Tennessee) and **CityLink** (Ohio).

THE MADNESS BEGINS

With the calendars turning to March, it means one thing: March Madness is upon us. As folks get ready to fill out their brackets in pursuit of perfection, **ESPN** is leaning into the hysteria in its latest marketing campaign called "Bracketbrain." Leading the campaign is a [commercial](#) that focuses on the idea of fans stressing over every prediction in their March Madness brackets, whether they're at work, walking outside or anywhere in between. Selection Sunday is set for March 16 at 6pm on **CBS**.

FIBER FRENZY

Home Telecom is bringing its SmartTown Community WiFi to Moncks Corner, South Carolina. The public open WiFi network is available to HT customers visiting the area, staying connected in public locations such as the Moncks Corner Recreational Complex, Train Depot, Home Telecom Miracle League Field and more. The SmartTown Community WiFi is slated to go live in time for the town's St. Patrick's Day Festival on Saturday.

PROGRAMMING

Telemundo is debuting a new fast-paced late-night sports show next Monday. "El Pelotazo" (the ball) will air live seven days a week at midnight, spotlighting the latest news in sports with analysis from special guests in what the network describes as "an unconventional format designed to engage today's Hispanic sports fans." The trio of *Verónica Rodríguez*, *Pablo Mariño* and *Diego Arriola* will serve as the show's hosts. – *Mike Tirico* is trading his usual calls on national TV for a couple of appearances on two RSNs. Tirico will be the play-by-play for tonight's Trail Blazers vs 76ers game on **NBC Sports Philadelphia** at 7pm. Tirico will then ship up to Boston for the Trail Blazers vs Celtics game Wednesday at 7pm on **NBC Sports Boston**. It'll be Tirico's first NBA PXP assignment since calling the Cavaliers' series win over the Hawks on **ESPN** in May 2016. – **Nickelodeon** has renewed "PAW Patrol" and its spinoff "Rubble & Crew" for more episodes and a new special crossover event. The series have been picked up for an additional 26 episodes each, marking Seasons 12 and 13 for PAW Patrol and the third and fourth seasons of Rubble & Crew.

PEOPLE

After seven years at **Charter Communications**—most recently as VP, Policy & External Affairs—*Laura Berrocal* has joined **Verizon** as Executive Director, Policy and Strategic Alliances. She's stepping away from her role as President of the **WICT Network's** DC/Baltimore chapter, opening the door for someone else to step up to the role. Know anyone?