

TV ITALY

Lopez: Surprise Fox Sports launch is 'not about keeping Al Jazeera out'

By Frank Dunne

Fox International Channels, the channel syndication division of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, said this week that the surprise launch of its Fox Sports channel in Italy was not a defensive move to prevent Qatari pay-television operator Al Jazeera from gaining a foothold in the market.

Hernan Lopez, the president and chief executive of FIC, told *TV Sports Markets* this week that market conditions had created a "unique opportunity" to launch in Italy and that the move had to be seen in the wider context of the expansion of the Fox brand across the globe (see box, page 2).

Fox Sports will launch in Italy in August with the rights to the English Premier League and FA Cup, Spain's La Liga, and France's Ligue 1. It is in negotiations to add other sports content.

The planned launch has baffled many in

the industry because News already has a premium sports broadcaster in the country. Its wholly-owned pay-television platform Sky Italia operates the Sky Sport channels. News operates both platforms and premium channels around the world but there is no other market where the company has two vehicles acquiring premium sports rights.

The most common industry interpretation of the development is that News needed to snap up the rights to the four properties to deny the expansionist Al Jazeera a basis for launching its beIN Sport premium channels in Italy.

Fox had to step in, the theory goes, because Sky had overspent on other rights, such as the Olympic Games and Formula One motor racing, and either could not afford to, or was not prepared to, spend the money. Sky has been losing

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TV BRAZIL

Turner's strategic move into sport

By Dan Horlock

The Brazilian sports-rights market is set to become even more competitive following Turner Broadcasting System Latin America's investment in basic-tier pay-television channel Esporte Interativo.

The pan-regional media company this month acquired a small stake in the channel worth R\$80m (€28m/\$37m), with EI having access to further capital as and when opportunities arise. The

majority stakeholder is holding company TSH. The company is controlled by EI senior management and was formed by executives and financial investors.

Turner and TSH each had its own motives for doing the deal. Turner was looking to integrate a sports channel into its general entertainment portfolio in Brazil, while EI needed fresh investment.

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Italy the latest outpost in the expansion of the Fox Sports empire

The launch of the Fox Sports channel in Italy has to be seen in the wider context of the growth of the brand across the world, according to Hernan Lopez, the president and chief executive of Fox International Channels.

In the last two years, Fox has launched sports channels in Brazil and Japan and is set to launch Fox Sports 1 – a national sports network designed to take on ESPN – in the US in August. After taking full control of the ESPN Star Sports network last year it rebranded the network Fox Sports Asia.

FIC has also taken a majority stake in Eredivisie Live, the pay-television platform in the Netherlands created by the Eredivisie, the Dutch football league. The platform will be rebranded as Fox Sports Eredivisie.

The expansion over the two years has increased the footprint of the Fox Sports channels outside the US from 17m to 64m homes.

This month, News Corp officially splits into two companies – one for entertainment, the other for publishing. Murdoch's choice of name for the entertainment business – 21st Century Fox – underlines his belief in the brand.

"We are big believers in the power of the Fox brand and the Fox Sports brand," Lopez said. "We have seen that in markets where we have Fox channels and Fox Sports channels, each group is stronger than in markets where we only have one."

He said that with sports channels, FIC had to be mindful of the competitive environment, "so our launch plans have to be a lot more targeted."

Italy is one of the biggest markets for Fox. The success of the Fox-branded entertainment, factual and lifestyle channels – which have enjoyed strong results in terms of advertising income – was a factor in the decision to launch

Fox Sports in the country.

"We have a stronger share of the audience in Italy than in many other places," Lopez said. As a consequence, Sky Italia's management recognise that there was a "lot of equity" in the Fox brand.

The launch of a Fox premium sports channel is unprecedented in a market where News already operates sports channels under another brand, but Lopez pointed out that there are examples in entertainment content. In the UK, for example, News-owned pay-television platform BSkyB buys scripted series, as does Fox.

Lopez declined to be drawn on whether the Italian model would be considered in other markets where News Corp operates a platform, such as the UK, Germany and Australia. "We launched Fox Sports in Italy because of an opportunity that was unique to the market," he said. ■

TV ITALY

Fox Sports launch is 'not about Al Jazeera threat'

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subscribers for the last 12 months. It had either passed up the chance to acquire, or been outbid for, each of the four properties.

Lopez said that both parts of this theory were false.

He said that the threat of Al Jazeera was not the driving factor behind the deal: "This is absolutely not the case. FIC manages its own business in order to maximise the returns of the overall sports vertical. It only enters markets where there are platforms and rights-holders that it can establish a long-term relationship with."

He denied that Fox was bailing out a weakened Sky Italia. "That interpretation is false. The company [News Corp] manages resources on the whole.

Whether Sky buys certain rights or FIC buys them, it still comes under the same consolidated results."

The launch of Fox had been planned with the full support of Sky Italia and it would benefit both Sky and, by adding another player, the Italian pay-television industry as a whole, Lopez said. He said that it was too early to go into detail about how the sports-rights acquisitions of each would be handled in future, but confirmed that the two would never compete for the same rights.

Mixed blessing

The launch of Fox Sports in Italy does not mean a guaranteed pay-day for rights-holders because it does not change the underlying competitive dynamics of the marketplace. Italy's pay-television market remains under the control of two players – Murdoch's News Corp and Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest, owner of the Mediaset Premium digital-terrestrial pay-television service.

Italy's Serie A, among others,

would have stood to benefit more from the arrival of a genuinely new player, such as Al Jazeera. It is facing a big drop in domestic media-rights income, currently about €880m (\$1.17bn) per season, in the next cycle.

However, a second News Corp budget for sport and FIC's global relationships with sports rights-holders are likely to be positive for the market.

It is thought that FIC's relationship with the MP & Silva agency, from whom it has bought sports rights in many territories, including Latin America and the Netherlands, was an important element in Fox being able to agree a deal quickly in Italy.

Content and carriage

Fox has just over a month to create its new Italian channel. It is currently in negotiations on several fronts to add new sports content beyond the four football properties already acquired.

Italian media reports say that FIC is in talks with ESPN about the Italian rights held by its basic-tier channel ESPN

Fox Sports arrival saves Pitch/MP & Silva Italian venture from losses

The arrival of Fox Sports in Italy has saved the Pitch International and MP & Silva agencies from heavy losses. The launch of the channel was completely unexpected but in the end was the agencies' only way out of a tricky situation.

In February, Pitch paid about €13m (\$17m) per season for the rights to the English Premier League for three seasons, from 2013-14 to 2015-16. In March, the agency added the rights to La Liga through to the end of the 2014-15 season, paying between €8m and €9m per season.

MP & Silva already held the English Football Association's rights in Italy and the rights to Ligue 1. The agency's one-year deal for Ligue 1 with sports broadcaster Sportitalia had expired and the FA rights remained unsold.

The two agencies decided to pool their rights and create a 50:50 joint venture operation to handle the four properties, with costs and revenues split equally. The agencies have worked closely for several years. This year, they launched a joint venture in Asia (*TV Sports Markets* 17:7).

Pitch/MP & Silva tried to persuade Al Jazeera to launch a beIN Sport channel on the back of the content. The broadcaster is understood to have been considering a launch until just a few weeks ago. The joint venture's fall-back position if this failed was to launch its own channel. It explored both possibilities simultaneously.

They recruited experienced Italian television executive Filippo Chiusano to sound out Sky Italia and Mediaset Premium about carriage for the channel on the two platforms (*TV Sports Markets* 17:11). It quickly became clear that neither was keen to carry a channel which would have allowed an aggressive new player a foothold in the market, forcing up the price of rights in future.

In particular, Sky and Mediaset were concerned about the price of Serie A rights in the next cycle, from 2015-16 onwards. Both broadcasters want to force down the amount they pay for the rights. The arrival of Al Jazeera – or even an independently-owned premium sports channel – would have scuppered this plan.

Neither platform would offer a carriage deal that would make the channel a viable

operation. During the carriage talks, Mediaset is understood to have offered to acquire the rights on a non-exclusive basis, with a view to sharing them with Sky, as it does for the Uefa Champions League and Europa League. The agencies rejected the offer and negotiations hit an impasse.

Fox first made tentative enquiries about the situation just over a month ago. When it became clear that neither the Al Jazeera channel nor the Pitch/MP & Silva channel was going to happen, the company moved quickly, agreeing a deal for the rights package in little over a week.

Fox was able to pick up three major European leagues and the FA Cup at somewhere between €20m and €25m per season, and was entering a market where it could count on a favourable carriage deal with Sky Italia.

As one local rights expert put it, "Sky was clearly not going to obstruct a News Corp-owned channel. There is no other channel operator that could have entered the market with a premium sports channel right now. But it does put the spotlight on why Sky didn't buy these rights in the first place." ■

America. Lopez refused to be drawn on what sports content might be added to the channel.

FIC is talking to Mediaset about carriage on the Mediaset Premium platform. At present, FIC has carriage for the channel on Sky Italia only. It will be available at no extra cost to existing subscribers to the Calcio (football) package. All of FIC's other Fox channels are carried exclusively on Sky. Lopez said that FIC had not "closed off the option" of also distributing Fox Sports on Mediaset. "It depends on whether Mediaset Premium makes a strong offer for the channel. They would have to make a really compelling offer."

He said that FIC was undaunted by the short timeframe. Fox had the support of Sky Italia and of the Fox Sports channels around the world. "This is a great network of talent, from Los Angeles to Tokyo; we can make things happen quickly." ■

TV BRAZIL

Turner's strategic investment will help Esporte Interativo

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Edgar Diniz, chief executive of EI, told *TV Sports Markets* this week: "Now we will be more competitive and more aggressive. We will be more comfortable making bids for higher amounts."

He said that due to the competition in the market, with big pay-television players such as SporTV, ESPN and Fox Sports acquiring premium rights content, EI needed additional capital to defend its position.

EI's main rivals are ESPN and Fox Sports, with the three broadcasters mainly competing for international football

rights. The sport is by far the most popular in Brazil. It is worth about 85 per cent of the total value of the country's sports-rights market, according to a study by SportBusiness Intelligence, the research arm of the SportBusiness Group, parent company of *TV Sports Markets*.

The market is dominated by the country's largest media group Globo. Globo holds all the key domestic sports rights, including the top-tier football league, the Campeonato Série A. It also operates the largest satellite company (Sky Brasil) and the largest cable operator (Net Serviços).

Turner accelerating

EI provided Turner the opportunity to have a sports channel in the country. Turner's senior vice president, corporate development and new media, Alex Gonzalez, said: "We viewed having an investment in EI and getting closer to the management as a way to accelerate our

knowledge around sports rights.”

Turner will assume two of the seven seats on EI's board of directors. The broadcaster will continue to operate as an independent company and be run by its current managing partners.

Turner already has a strong presence in the country as one of the biggest international programmers, operating 13 pay-television channels. However, it does not have a sports channel.

Turner currently has the rights in Latin America, including Brazil, to NBA basketball, as well as some mixed martial arts rights. It shows them on its pan-regional pay-television film and drama series channel Space. Gonzalez said that there were no plans to move the existing sports content on to EI.

Turner will continue acquiring international sport for the Space channel that fits its male target audience. Turner and EI will liaise to ensure that they don't bid for the same rights.

Gonzalez said that the “local element” of EI's portfolio, such as the Copa do Nordeste, a regional football competition, and the success it had had building its rights portfolio, was attractive from an investor's perspective. Initial conversations about investing in the broadcaster began in 2009.

Turner could be prepared to invest more money into EI and acquire a larger

stake in the business in the future, depending on its performance, he said.

Rights targets

The investment comes at a crucial time for EI with Uefa, European football's governing body, beginning its global sales process last week for the rights to the Champions League and Europa League for the period 2015-16 to 2017-18.

Two of EI's biggest investments are for the Champions League and Europa League rights for the period 2012-13 to 2014-15. EI pays about \$4m per season for its Champions League rights, and about \$600,000 per season for the Europa League (*TV Sports Markets* 15:18).

EI's live rights for the Champions League include the first-choice match on Tuesday until the quarter-final stage. It then shows the second-pick match with the first-pick reverting to Globo. EI's live rights for the Europa League include one match per kick-off slot.

It remains keen to hold onto the rights but faces fierce competition from SporTV, ESPN and Fox Sports. Globo could also decide to acquire the first-pick matches on both days. The Champions League is the most popular international football competition in the country.

As well as trying to maintain its current rights portfolio, EI is targeting more football and Olympic sports properties

ahead of the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro. “We need to go forward and add to our rights portfolio, as well as to our production facility,” Diniz said. The broadcaster will launch its high definition signal before the end of the year.

'Strategic play'

Gonzalez described the investment in EI as Turner's “most significant strategic play in sports in Brazil” but he accepted that the company's control was limited. “It's not a company we own, so the level of control is a little bit different,” he said.

The two companies have complementary strengths. EI will be able to tap into Turner's large client base to sell advertising space and will give Turner a stronger bouquet of channels when negotiating with pay-television platforms. The broadcaster would also benefit from the bargaining power of Turner which had “many long-standing relationships” with carriers.

EI is available in over 32m homes. It is distributed on the satellite pay-television platforms Claro TV, Oi TV and Vivo TV, as well as regional north-east cable pay-television operators Cabo Telecom and TCM. The broadcaster is usually described as a free-to-air commercial channel but said this week that it was more accurately described as a basic-tier pay-television channel. ■

TV MIDDLE EAST

Two deals being watched by all rights-holders

By Kevin McCullagh

Two deals will indicate whether the era of guaranteed massive rights-fee increases for top football in the Middle East is over.

The media rights to the English Premier League for 2013-14 to 2015-16, and the Uefa Champions League and Europa League for 2015-16 to 2017-18, are currently on the market in the region.

The key question is whether pay-television broadcasters Al Jazeera and

Abu Dhabi Media Company will continue to pay fees that are hundreds of millions of dollars above what they can generate in subscription revenue.

They have paid such fees in the past because of competitive bidding between them and apparently limitless state funding. But there are signs that the golden tap is about to be turned off.

One expert said this week that Uefa would consider keeping the rights fee for its club competitions at the same level a great success. The Middle East was “a tough environment in comparison to previous years,” he said.

Al Jazeera pays a total of \$88m (€68m) per year for the Champions League and Europa League in the current cycle, 2009-10 to 2011-12.

David Butorac, chief executive of the

region's third major pay-television operator OSN, formerly known as Orbit Showtime, predicted that Middle East rights fees for top football were set to fall.

He told *TV Sports Markets*: “The rights costs for premier football content – be it the Premier League or the Champions League – are at this stage uneconomic in the Middle East. The rights owners have to accept that the broadcasters in the region are now forming the view that there is no reason for them to do uneconomic deals.”

OSN, as the only one of the three broadcasters that is not state-backed, and the only one run for profit, has the most to gain from any bursting of the bubble.

Butorac said the latest Premier League auction backed his view. Broadcasters are thought to have bid significantly lower

than the \$350m, or \$117m per season, ADMC paid in the last cycle, 2010-11 to 2012-13. Agency MP & Silva outbid the broadcasters, but has yet to sell the rights on. The agency is thought to have offered the league a fee in the range of \$300m to \$350m. Some local sources claim that the fee is not backed by a guarantee but one well-placed insider said that “the Premier League does not do deals without a guarantee.”

ADMC lost heavily on the previous Premier League deal. On top of the rights fee, it also paid substantial production costs. It has around 300,000 subscribers, each paying \$8 per month, equating to annual subscription revenue of \$25m.

ADMC's primary purpose is to enhance Abu Dhabi's political stature rather than to make money. Nevertheless, local experts say such investments are unsustainable in the long term.

Al Jazeera dominates sports broadcasting in the region, having used its financial muscle to secure the rights for most top club football content, including the Spanish Liga and Uefa competitions.

However, three weeks ago the broadcaster decided to relocate its English-language football production facilities from London to Doha in what is thought to be a cost-cutting move. A source close to the matter said Al Jazeera had rejected “highly competitive” offers from UK commercial broadcaster ITV and the IMG agency to run the London operation.

Bidding expectations

Both ADMC and Al Jazeera are thought to be interested in the Premier League rights. ADMC has a strategic interest because of Abu Dhabi's ownership of Premier League team Manchester City.

ADMC is said to be determined to drive down the rights fee, after overpaying in the last cycle. Then it outbid its nearest rival, Arab Radio and Television, by about \$100m over three years. ART, a pay-television broadcaster, later withdrew from the market after selling its sports portfolio to Al Jazeera.

The strength of Al Jazeera's interest in the Premier League is less clear. Some observers believe ADMC and Al Jazeera have decided not to compete too fiercely

No football, no problem for growing OSN

Middle East pay-television platform OSN is growing strongly despite its inability to compete with Al Jazeera and ADMC for top football rights. Its subscriber number increased by about 30 per cent in 2012. It does not regularly report the number but is thought to have around 730,000 subscribers.

ADMC has around 300,000 subscribers and Al Jazeera around 1.5m. ADMC and Al Jazeera are priced much lower than OSN, at about \$8 (€6) per month. OSN's subscription packages range from \$25 to \$108 per month.

“Sport is of appeal but not having high-profile football brands has not impacted our ability to grow the OSN base,” the platform's chief executive David Butorac said.

“People want to watch TV seven days a week, not just twice a week for 90 minutes at a time. They want to have access to the best entertainment, information and sports content, and

that's what we are able to offer them.”

OSN has not lost interest in sport, he said, and wanted to build a “broad portfolio of sports of high class and appeal across the region.” Beside its core rugby and golf content, OSN's portfolio includes cricket, mixed martial arts and US sports including NFL American football. It was also the only broadcaster in the Mena region to show all events from the 2012 Olympics, under a deal with regional rights-holder the Arab States Broadcasting Union.

“We value premium sport and will continue to invest in premium sport,” Butorac said.

Kuwaiti investment company Kipco, which owns 60.5 per cent of OSN, this week confirmed it was looking into an initial public offering of the broadcaster, due to its “market position and potential for future growth.” Saudi Arabian investor Mawarid Group owns the other 39.5 per cent of the company. ■

for the Champions League and Premier League, to halt the massive fee increases. Al Jazeera's football portfolio is so strong it arguably doesn't need the Premier League – the Spanish Liga is the region's most popular football league.

However, Al Jazeera's close relations with MP & Silva mean the broadcaster is still considered a potential buyer. Some industry experts say the agency, with a turnover of about \$350m, would not have offered the Premier League \$300m-plus without an understanding with Al Jazeera, but the agency's joint chief executive Andrea Radrizzani said in February that there were no pre-deals in place (*TV Sports Markets* 17:3).

ADMC is not expected to compete for Uefa rights. It did not bid the last time they were sold. It does not have a strategic reason to buy the properties, as it has for the Premier League and Formula One – Abu Dhabi hosts a grand prix.

Al Jazeera paid a 25-per-cent increase for the current cycle of Champions and Europa League rights despite the lack of competition.

Satellite overspill

The security of Al Jazeera's satellite system is a concern for rights-holders. It is more easily hacked than ADMC's or OSN's systems. Al Jazeera channels can be received easily in southern Europe, with a hacked set-top box, and as far north as the UK, with a large enough satellite dish.

Rights-holders have two options when agreeing deals with Al Jazeera, experts say: demand the broadcaster improves its security, or build compensation clauses into their contract.

So far, rights-holders appear to have been content with the latter option. Al Jazeera's rights fees may have been lucrative enough to outweigh the downside of overspill.

If its rights go to Al Jazeera, the Premier League would have to settle for contractual safeguards at least for the first year of its next cycle. There is not enough time for Al Jazeera to improve its security ahead of the 2013-14 season – this would require new set-top boxes for its customers.

Sustainable growth

The Middle East still holds potential for rights-fee growth for properties outside top football, OSN's Butorac said. "I think for some of the more minor sports there is still the opportunity as platforms grow to increase the revenues that are

being paid," he said. OSN paid increased rights fees in recent deals for European Tour and US PGA Tour golf, Butorac said, but "those numbers are realistic numbers that are commensurate with the growth of the platform."

Pay-television growth in the Middle

East and the relative underdevelopment of the pay-television market point to potential for sustainable rights-fee growth. ADMC, Al Jazeera and OSN between them have around 2.5m pay-television homes, in a region with about 90m television homes. ■

TV NEW ZEALAND

Coliseum takes on Sky to become the home of football

By Dan Horlock

Coliseum Sports Media is planning to buy more international football league rights to establish its position in the New Zealand market following its surprise Premier League deal last week.

The private investment group acquired the exclusive rights to the Premier League in a deal with the MP & Silva agency covering the three-season period 2013-14 to 2015-16. It will show the games on the internet (see box, page 7). It has also agreed a three-season sublicensing deal with public-service broadcaster TVNZ for one delayed match per week.

Tim Martin, Coliseum's chief executive, told *TV Sports Markets* this week: "We are interested in the rights to all the different European football leagues. Our relationship with MP & Silva is very good and I'm sure we can do more deals together."

Martin said that the company's second rights acquisition could be England's second-tier league, the Championship, after receiving "thousands" of emails over the past couple of days enquiring about it.

The company is targeting football rights due to the sport's burgeoning popularity in the country. It has no plans to diversify into other sports at this stage but its entry into the market has already caused a stir.

The share price of the incumbent Premier League rights-holder, pay-television broadcaster Sky, fell sharply on the news that it had lost the rights, although it has partially recovered.

Sky has long had a dominant position in the country's sports-rights market. The

platform accounts for about 80 per cent of pay-television customers. Its subscriber base stands at about 670,000. New Zealand has about 1.4m television households. Sky also owns the free-to-air channel Prime, which it bought for NZ\$30.3m (€18.3m/\$24.2m) in 2006.

On Prime, Sky screens delayed coverage of its live sports programming and shows other content to drive interest for its pay-television operations. Ownership of the channel allows Sky to bid for listed sports events.

Sky is a listed company. Australian investment firm JCP Investment Partners is the biggest shareholder, with around a nine-per-cent stake. In March, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation sold its 44-per-cent stake for NZ\$815.3m. In December, New Zealand's billionaire Todd family sold its 11-per-cent stake for NZ\$218m.

Competition

Given Sky's dominance, rights-holders for years have found it very difficult to secure what they consider a fair market price in the country. "Sky are the only game in town and they know it," one industry executive said. "The only tool left open to rights-holders is brinkmanship – holding out for as long as possible to drag them towards the line."

Another expert said that he now expected Sky to begin renewing deals by offering rights-holders 30-per-cent increases on the previous fees to take the content off the market. New Zealand Rugby Union boss Steve Tew told the media that NZRU was watching the

market with considerable interest. He said it was better to have "more spice in the market."

However, while Coliseum's arrival will put pressure on Sky, its impact will probably be limited to certain football league properties. Major events such as the 2014 winter Olympic Games, the 2015 International Cricket Council World Cup and the 2014 Fifa World Cup – for which the rights are unsold – are unlikely to benefit from the competition.

Martin said that it was far more difficult for subscription-based businesses to monetise expensive shorter tournaments. It was unlikely to bid for the World Cup, for example, despite its interest in football.

The World Cup rights in the country are held by Australian public-service broadcaster SBS. Sky is refusing to meet SBS's asking price of about US\$1m (€752,000). For the 2010 event, Sky paid between US\$300,000 and US\$350,000.

Some experts questioned Coliseum's narrow focus. Peter Young, a broker at investment firm Forsyth Barr, said that while acquiring the Premier League rights had generated a lot of interest in Coliseum, he doubted whether the property would be profitable. He said there was a small revenue pool in New Zealand for a football channel, especially if it excluded the New Zealand national team and matches for New Zealand club Wellington Phoenix, which plays in Australia's top-tier A-League.

Martin countered that "there is a much bigger, more active and passionate

Premier League rights in New Zealand, 2010-11 to 2015-16

New deal	Buyer	\$m per season	Old deal	Buyer	\$m per season	Percentage increase
2013-14 to 2015-16	MP & Silva	1.6	2010-11 to 2012-13	Sky	0.65	150

Source: *TV Sports Markets*

football community here than has been realised and has ever been acknowledged. In terms of commercial property there is substantial room for growth. We can take the league to a new level of engagement and support in this country.”

He said: “We think there is a massive and passionate football community in New Zealand. People say here that football is worth nothing. Some people say Sky not having the Premier League doesn't matter. I don't believe that for a second. I believe that football can be as popular here as everywhere else in the world. It may never be as big as rugby but I see no reason why it couldn't come close. Making it accessible to more people and making all the content available feels like the start of that.”

Another expert said that if the company were to survive beyond the duration of the Premier League contract it would need more than football rights. “They need to get out now acquiring rights. If not, they won't get anything and then Sky will kill them off in a few years' time,” he said. “International cricket rights and other low-hanging fruit could be picked up fairly easily,” he said, “but international rugby union rights are the real key to opening up the market.” Rights-holders would be willing to talk to other players in the market due to Sky's hardline approach in recent years, he said.

Free-to-air strategy

TVNZ is understood to be paying a very small fee for the free-to-air rights. It will

Coliseum wants 'most advanced platform'

Coliseum Sports Media said this week that it wanted to create “the world's most advanced football viewing platform” on the back of its investment in the English Premier League rights.

Coliseum will show all 380 games live on its internet platform, PremierLeaguePass.com, which launches on August 1. The internet stream will be delivered by US video technology provider NeuLion.

Tim Martin, Coliseum's chief executive, said that by the end of the three-year contract, Coliseum wanted to have created a far more advanced platform. The company is talking to technology companies and app

developers in the US about augmenting the viewing experience. He said that Coliseum had no plans to launch a television platform.

Martin said that about 350,000 people liked to watch Premier League football in New Zealand. “If we can get a good chunk of those we would be happy,” he said.

He declined to say how much the company paid for the rights but based on the US\$1.6m (€1.2m) fee that MP & Silva paid the Premier League for the rights, Coliseum would need 14,000 subscribers to cover the rights fee. A season subscription costs NZ\$149.90 (€90.30/\$119.92). ■

show one delayed Saturday match per week at midday on Sunday, as well as a highlights programme on Mondays. Coverage will be shown on TVNZ's flagship channel TV One. Coliseum will be the broadcast sponsor of the coverage.

Martin said that the free-to-air coverage would engage fans who could then be targeted for the subscription service.

The deal with TVNZ gave Coliseum “political credibility,” according to one industry expert. He said that sharing coverage of the league with free-to-air television was a shrewd move and would mean that other rights-holders would be more inclined to do deals with the internet broadcaster.

Enter Coliseum

Coliseum was formed in June 2012. It is owned by two companies, MMCT and Cooper and Company, which each holds a 50-per-cent stake. It is funded by Cooper and Company, a private investment and asset development firm.

Cooper and Company was founded by former property solicitor Peter Cooper and is run by chief executive Matthew Cockram. Cooper is worth NZ\$650m, according to the National Business Review Rich List.

MMCT has four shareholders: Tim Martin, his wife Kate, Simon Chesterton and Kenneth Taylor. ■

FOOTBALL

SPL opts for MP & Silva premium in nine-year deal

By Robin Jellis

The MP & Silva agency is thought to be paying about £18m (€21m/\$28m), or £2m per season, for the international rights to the Scottish Premier League, in a deal agreed last week.

The deal, covering all countries outside the European Economic Area, is for an unusually long period – nine years, from 2014-15 to 2022-23. The SPL said this week it had agreed such a long deal because of the agency's impressive record of selling football rights internationally.

Neil Doncaster, the SPL's chief executive, told *TV Sports Markets*: “The best relationships we have had with broadcasters and sponsors have been long-term, that's what we try to develop. MP & Silva were very enthusiastic and exhibited a strong passion to partner with

the Scottish Premier League. We have seen what they have achieved with the English Premier League, and the Spanish, German and Italian leagues.”

The SPL also had a financial motivation. MP & Silva was prepared to pay more per season to secure the rights on a long-term basis. Having longer deals gives the agency more leverage with broadcasters.

The deal brings to an end the SPL's six-year relationship with the Sportfive agency. Sportfive has sold the league's global rights outside the UK and

Ireland since 2008-09. In its current four-year deal, from 2010-11 to 2013-14, Sportfive is reportedly paying an average of £2.25m per season, although the league disputed this. The MP & Silva fee is lower because fewer territories are included.

No Old Firm

Historically, one of the main attractions to the league has been the 'Old Firm' derby between Glasgow clubs Rangers and Celtic. The demotion of Rangers to the Third Division, the fourth tier, over financial irregularities in July 2012 has removed the fixture from the calendar.

"Rangers' demotion has clearly had a negative impact on the overseas TV rights," Doncaster said. "But if Rangers are promoted each season then it will only be a couple more years before they are back playing in the Old Firm match."

Rangers won the fourth-tier championship this season, meaning they will be playing in the third tier next season. Rangers could be back in the Premier League in two years if they secure successive promotions.

It has not been decided whether MP &

Silva's rights will include Rangers games. This will be resolved once talks over the merger between the SPL and the Scottish Football League, which represents the second, third and fourth tiers of Scottish football, have been completed.

One potential bidder said this week that the exclusion of rights to European Economic Area territories from the new deal dissuaded his agency from bidding. It is also believed that there has been diminishing interest in the rights because Scottish clubs can stream games. Under SPL rules, all top-tier clubs are entitled to stream their own league matches live on their websites. The rights are accessible online only by subscribers overseas. The number of subscribers is small.

However, MP & Silva's rights package is wider in scope than in the past. It includes cable, satellite, terrestrial, betting, mobile and internet platforms, apart from those retained by club channels. It is the first time the league has sold cross-platform rights, having previously only sold television rights.

Markets

The SPL's domestic rights are held by UK pay-television broadcasters BSkyB and ESPN in a five-year deal, from 2012-13 to 2016-17. The rights cover both the UK and Ireland. The deal is thought to be worth about £80m, or £16m per season, with Sky paying 65 per cent of the total value (*TV Sports Markets* 15:22).

Following ESPN's decision to close its UK operations this summer, its rights have been taken on by pay-television newcomer BT Sport. The domestic broadcast deal includes Rangers games, regardless of what division the club is in.

When Sportfive's contract to sell the league's international rights expires at the end of next season, the European rights will be added to Sky's domestic deal – although Doncaster said the situation "is slightly more nuanced than that."

It is understood that the European rights will be exploited by a combination of the league, Sky, and MP & Silva. ESPN are not thought to have expressed an interest in obtaining the European rights.

Doncaster said that the league's rights were particularly strong in North America, the Middle East and Asia. ■

Play-offs could provide income boost but SPL has cause to be wary

The Scottish Premier League could be set for an increase in media-rights income from its new play-off system, which will come into effect from next season.

Media reports suggest that a four-year domestic deal for the play-off rights, from 2013-14 to 2016-17, could be worth up to £7m (£8.2m/\$11m), or about £1.75m per year.

The rights to the play-offs are not included in the SPL's current domestic broadcast deals, with pay-television broadcasters BSkyB and ESPN. Strong interest is expected from Sky and rival UK pay-television operator BT Sport.

The league, however, may be limited in its attempts to exploit the rights, as it will want to avoid souring its relationship with Sky. Sky has broadcast the league for the past four seasons, and also agreed the league's first domestic deal.

Sky agreed to broadcast the league from its formation in a four-year deal, from 1998-99 to 2001-02. The league then rejected a bid from Sky to extend its contract, and tried to set up its own channel, SPL TV, which failed. It later agreed a four-year deal with sports broadcaster Setanta, from 2010-11 to 2013-14, worth £125m, or £31.25m per season. This backfired however when Setanta went bust in June 2009, forcing the league to go back to Sky.

One industry expert suggested that the league may add the play-off rights to Sky's existing domestic deal rather than launching a tender for the rights. The league declined to comment.

The play-offs are being created because of a merger between the SPL and the Scottish Football League, which represents the second, third and fourth tiers. The merger was expected to be signed off late this week. The league will

be known as the Scottish Professional Football League from the 2013-14 season.

The basic league structure will remain as it is, with a top flight of 12 teams and the following three divisions with 10 teams. There had earlier been calls to retain the top tier of 12 teams but change the second tier to 12 teams, change the third tier to 18 teams and dispense with the fourth tier.

In the play-offs, the third and fourth teams in the second tier, the First Division, will play each other, with the winner playing the division's runner-up. The winner will play the second-bottom side in the top flight. All games will be played over two legs, creating six additional matches.

The play-off rights are thought to be included in the MP & Silva agency's deal for the league's international rights (see main story). ■

GLOBAL SPORTS MEDIA CONSUMPTION REPORT 2013

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The report looks at a wide range of media (television, print, radio, online, social), a wide range of devices (television sets, internet-connected television sets, mobiles, tablets, desktop computers) and a wide range of sports content formats (video, data, text, news) in an attempt to fully understand how people are consuming sports media.

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SPORTS CLIPS: News from TVSM Daily from June 13 to June 26**MEDIA RIGHTS 1****Football: World Cup, Premier League, Arabian Gulf League and more**

- **Football:** Cambodian free-to-air broadcaster CTN acquired the exclusive free-to-air and pay-television rights to the 2014 Fifa World Cup and other Fifa tournaments, including the 2013 Confederations Cup, 2013 U-20 World Cup, 2013 Beach Soccer World Cup and 2013 U-17 World Cup. The broadcaster said the rights fee was significantly higher than for the previous World Cup. Coverage will be on CTN and sister channel, MyTV.
- **Football:** Spanish commercial broadcaster Atresmedia acquired rights for the 2013 Fifa U-20 World Cup in a deal with Fifa, football's world governing body. Atresmedia channels La Sexta and Nitro will show the games.
- **Football:** Sports broadcaster Slovak Sport acquired rights for the English Premier League in 2013-14 to 2015-16 in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Coverage will be on a new pay-television channel, Slovak Sport.TV2, that is to launch within weeks.
- **Football:** Pay-television broadcaster Sky New Zealand acquired rights for the country's national team games in a deal with governing body New Zealand Football. The deal started immediately and will run for five months, covering eight men's and six women's matches.
- **Football:** Media company Coliseum Sports Media acquired rights to the English Premier League for three seasons, from 2013-14 to 2015-16. It sublicensed delayed and highlights rights to public-service broadcaster TVNZ (page 6).
- **Football:** News Corporation's Fox International Channels acquired media rights in Italy to the English Premier League, FA Cup, Spanish Liga and French Ligue 1 (page 1).
- **Football:** The MP & Silva agency was appointed by the Scottish Premier League to distribute rights in all overseas markets except European Economic Area territories in a nine-year deal, from 2014-15 to 2022-23. The deal includes betting rights (page 8).
- **Football:** The Kentaro agency agreed a deal to distribute the global media rights to the 2013 Audi Cup pre-season club tournament featuring Bayern Munich, Manchester City, AC Milan and São Paolo. Kentaro agreed a deal for the rights with German commercial broadcaster RTL, which will show live coverage of the competition on July 31 and August 1 on its main channel, with additional coverage on cable and satellite-television news channel N-tv.
- **Football:** Middle Eastern broadcasters Abu Dhabi Media Company and Dubai Media Incorporated extended their live rights deals with the Pro League Committee, the organiser of the Arabian Gulf League, the top league in the UAE, for three years, from 2013-14 to 2015-16. The deal also includes rights for the Reserves League, Super Cup and League Cup. The broadcasters will continue to share coverage of the competitions.
- **Football:** UK telco BT acquired exclusive live rights for the testimonial match for Liverpool and England player Steven Gerrard against Greek club Olympiacos on August 3.

SINCE LAST TIME

- Rupert Murdoch's media conglomerate News Corporation is drawing up plans for a 16-team summer competition featuring Europe's top football clubs in 2015, according to UK newspaper *The Guardian*. Clubs such as Manchester United and Chelsea from the English Premier League and Barcelona and Real Madrid from the Spanish Liga would be invited to take part. Several cities including Los Angeles and Shanghai have been approached about hosting matches. News Corp television channels would broadcast the tournament.
- UK media regulator Ofcom dismissed a complaint from telco BT over pay-television broadcaster BSkyB's refusal to carry advertising for BT's sports pay-television service. Ofcom ruled that Sky had not unduly discriminated against BT by refusing to show the advertisements on the Sky Sports channels.
Ofcom launched a separate investigation into BT's claims that the terms under which Sky is offering its main sports channels, Sky Sports 1 and Sky Sports 2, to BT's YouView platform reflected an abuse of Sky's market dominance. Sky wants carriage of BT's sports channels in return for giving BT carriage of the Sky Sports channels.
- There has been a significant increase in the amount of time British

sports fans spend consuming sport in an average week, according to a report produced by digital media company Perform Group in conjunction with research company Kantar Media Sport and *TV Sports Markets*. According to the *Global Sports Media Consumption Report 2013*, the time British fans spent consuming sport increased from 6.2 hours in 2012 to 8.1 hours in 2013. Television remains the most popular platform for consuming sport for 97 per cent of fans in Great Britain.

FOOTBALL

- Turkish football's Süper Lig moved closer to a new media rights model after the Turkish Union of Clubs reached an outline agreement under which the clubs would keep all media rights income, ending the current sharing of revenue with the Turkish Football Federation. The new agreement would also aim to ensure a more equitable spread of income between the top clubs in Istanbul and those located in the rest of the country.
- Major League Soccer, the top football league in the US and Canada, formed a new content and distribution division to produce football programming across multiple media platforms. MLS+ will create content including television and internet shows, mini-documentaries, mobile applications, lifestyle features, user-generated content and viral footage. Distribution

SPORTS CLIPS: News from TVSM Daily from June 13 to June 26

MEDIA RIGHTS 2

American football, cricket, cycling, ice hockey, motorsport and more

- **Action Sports:** Thai pay-television operator Cable Thai Holdings acquired rights from the Red Bull Media House for programming including the Red Bull X-Fighters, Red Bull Rampage and Red Bull Cliff Diving world series.
- **American Football:** The NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers announced a five-year rights deal, from 2013 to 2017, with local broadcaster WFLA-TV/News Channel 8 to produce and show live coverage of pre-season games.
- **American Football:** Cincinnati's NBC network affiliate WLWT (Channel 5) acquired local broadcast rights for all four Cincinnati Bengals primetime NFL games in 2013.
- **Cricket:** Indian telco Reliance Communications agreed a partnership with pan-Asian pay-television broadcaster Star Sports to offer live mobile streaming coverage in India of the International Cricket Council's 2013 Champions Trophy.
- **Cycling:** The IMG Media agency was appointed by the Grands Prix Cyclistes de Québec et de Montréal to distribute the media rights for the 2013 editions of the International Cycling Union World Tour one-day races in Québec City and Montréal in Canada.
- **Darts:** UK commercial broadcaster ITV acquired rights for Professional Darts Corporation events in a three-year deal, from 2013 to 2015. ITV will show the annual European Championship and Players Championship finals, the UK Open and a new event, the Masters. Coverage will be on the ITV4 channel.
- **Fishing:** The IEC in Sports agency struck a deal to produce and distribute global media rights for the 2013 World Fly Fishing Championship. The agency has agreed deals for the rights with Swedish broadcaster TV4 and Norwegian broadcaster TV2.
- **Horse Racing:** Turf TV, the channel for betting shops in the UK and Ireland, agreed a deal with Xpressbet, a subsidiary of US racecourse owner Stronach Group, for rights to racing from the Santa Anita Park, Gulfstream Park and Golden Gate Fields tracks. Coverage will start in the autumn.
- **Ice Hockey:** Canadian pay-television sports broadcaster TSN and French-language sister network RDS signed a 10-year rights agreement, from 2014 to 2023, with national governing body Hockey Canada. The broadcasters acquired multi-platform rights to more than 30 games annually, including all Hockey Canada events, plus international events including the International Ice Hockey Federation World Championships, World Junior Championships in 2015 and 2017, and World Women's Championship.
- **Ice Hockey:** Liberty Global-owned broadcaster Chello Central Europe renewed exclusive rights for Russia's Kontinental Hockey League in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The deal runs for three years, from 2013-14 to 2015-16. Coverage will be on the Sport1 and Sport2 HD channels.
- **Mixed Martial Arts:** Canadian pay-television broadcaster Rogers Sportsnet acquired rights for the 2014 Ultimate Fighter series, which will feature Canadian fighters for the first time. Sportsnet acquired English-language rights in a multi-platform deal with the Ultimate Fighting Championship, which runs the series.
- **Mixed Martial Arts:** US women's series the Invicta Fighting Championships secured its first pay-per-view television rights deal, for an event on July 13. Invicta FC 6 will be distributed by Integrated Sports Media via pay-television platforms iN Demand, Dish and Avail-TVN in the US, and by Bell TV in Canada.
- **Motorsport:** Pan-regional sports broadcaster Eurosport renewed a live rights deal for coverage of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile World Endurance Championship, including the Le Mans 24 Hour race. The broadcaster struck the three-year extension, from 2014 to 2016, with series organisers Automobile Club de l'Ouest and Le Mans Endurance Management. The deal includes television and digital rights for Le Mans and the seven other rounds of the championship, and covers 71 countries in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.
- **Motorsport:** US pay-television sports channel NBC Sports Network acquired rights for the Arca Racing stock car series in a deal covering four race days this August. The broadcaster struck the deal with series organiser the Automobile Racing Club of America.

partnerships were agreed with US pay-television sports channel NBC Sports Network and the NBCSports.com website, and Canadian pay-television broadcasters TSN and RDS. The league's official YouTube channel KickTV and the MLSsoccer.com website will also distribute the content.

- Mário Figueiredo, president of the Portuguese Liga, said the league would appeal to the European Commission if Portugal's media regulator the ERC refuses to block telco Portugal Telecom's acquisition of a 25-per-cent stake in pay-television broadcaster Sport TV. Figueiredo said that the transaction would further strengthen the dominant position of the Olivedesportos agency

– a co-owner of Sport TV – in the sports rights market and would reduce competition for the league's rights.

MEDIA INTERNATIONAL

- The MP & Silva agency reached an agreement with Al Jazeera to launch beIN Sport, the Qatari broadcaster's sports pay-television brand, in Indonesia. Three beIN Sport channels will launch on July 1, including beIN Sport 3 Premier League HD, which will provide rolling coverage of English Premier League football. BeIN Sport 1 HD and beIN Sport 2 HD will show live coverage of

SPORTS CLIPS: News from TVSM Daily from June 13 to June 26**MEDIA RIGHTS 3****Rugby, sailing, skiing, tennis, Universiade, US college sport and more**

- **Rugby League:** Australian commercial broadcaster Seven acquired cross-platform, live and on-demand rights for the 2013 Rugby League World Cup in a deal with the IMG Media agency. Seven will show all games live on digital channel 7mate.
- **Rugby Union:** UK public-service broadcaster the BBC extended a television, internet and radio rights deal for exclusive live coverage of the Scotland national team's autumn international matches for two years, 2014-15 and 2015-16. The BBC struck the deal with governing body Scottish Rugby.
- **Sailing:** Video-sharing website Dailymotion will host coverage of the 2013 editions of the Extreme Sailing Series and International Sailing Federation World Cup event Kieler Woche under a deal with internet video company Real TV.
- **Skiing:** Swedish public-service broadcaster SVT acquired rights for International Ski Federation Nordic Ski World Cup events in Finland in a three-year deal, from 2013-14 to 2015-16, with the Infront Sports & Media agency. The rights cover live, delayed and highlights coverage of all Finnish World Cup events in the cross country, ski jumping and Nordic combined disciplines.
- **Snooker:** UK commercial broadcaster ITV acquired live rights for the new World Snooker Champion of Champions event, which will launch in November. ITV, which struck the deal with event promoter Matchroom Sport, will show coverage on the ITV4 channel.
- **Tennis:** Tennis Australia extended commercial broadcaster Seven's domestic rights to the Australian Open in a five-year deal, from 2015 to 2019, after opting against auctioning the rights. Seven will pay about A\$40m (€29.8m/\$39.6m) per year. The deal includes free-to-air, pay-television, internet, IPTV, mobile and tablet rights.
- **Ten-Pin Bowling:** US pay-television broadcaster ESPN extended a rights deal with the Professional Bowlers Association in the United States. The agreement includes the World Series of Bowling and the PBA League and will run for just over four years, from December 2013 until January 2018.
- **University Sport:** Fisú, the International University Sports Federation, struck a rights deal with US sports broadcaster ESPN for live coverage of the 2013 Summer Universiade, an international multi-sport event for university athletes. ESPN will show more than 40 hours of coverage on its ESPNU college sports channel and the ESPN3 online platform, focusing on basketball, water polo, swimming, athletics, beach volleyball and volleyball.
- **US College Sport:** US sports broadcaster ESPN agreed a seven-year rights deal, from 2013-14 to 2019-20, with Kansas Athletics, the sports division of the University of Kansas, brokered by IMG College, the university's media rights partner. ESPN's online platform ESPN3 will show a minimum of 70 live events per year. The University and IMG College also agreed a local rights deal with pay-television broadcaster Time Warner Cable Sports to show 50 of the university's basketball games per year on the Metro Sports channel.
- **US College Sport:** New York media company CNY Central acquired exclusive local media rights to selected American football and basketball games featuring Syracuse University in a three-season deal, from 2013-14 to 2015-16.

the Premier League, plus other content. The agreement supersedes MP & Silva's original plan to launch a bouquet of four channels of its own in the market.

- Eredivisie Live, the Dutch pay-television sports channel created by the Dutch football league, the Eredivisie, will be rebranded as Fox Sports Eredivisie from the start of the 2013-14 season. This follows the acquisition of a 51-per-cent stake in Eredivisie Live last year by Fox International Channels, a subsidiary of media conglomerate News Corporation.
FIC will also launch two new pay-television channels in the Netherlands covering international sport, including English Premier League and Italian Serie A football. It is also launching a free-to-air channel that is expected to carry highlights of the Eredivisie from 2014-15, after the current highlights rights deal with public-service broadcaster NOS expires.
- Football's English Premier League stepped up its campaign against websites offering unauthorised live streams of its matches to UK users by seeking a court order forcing internet service providers to stop UK users accessing Swedish website FirstRow1.eu.

- MUTV, English Premier League club Manchester United's pay-television channel, signed distribution deals with Norwegian broadcaster TV2, Icelandic media group 365 and pay-television broadcaster SkyNet in Myanmar. TV2 and SkyNet are new partners for the channel, while the agreement in Iceland is an extension for two years, from 2013-14 to 2014-15. TV2's deal is for three years, 2013-14 to 2015-16.
- Portuguese pay-television broadcaster Sport TV will appeal after being fined €3.7m (\$4.9m) by the Autoridade da Concorrência, the country's competition regulator. The fine related to the carriage fee Sport TV charged pay-television operators between 2005 and 2011.
- Sports broadcaster Slovak Sport was granted a licence to operate a second sports channel, Slovak Sport.TV2, on pay-television in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The broadcaster's first channel, Slovak Sport, is expected to be turned from a pay-television channel available in both countries, to a free-to-air channel available only in Slovakia.

SPORTS CLIPS: News from TVSM Daily from June 13 to June 26

MEDIA RIGHTS NEGOTIATIONS

- Uefa, European football's governing body, began media and marketing rights sales for its Champions League and Europa League competitions in 2015-16 to 2017-18. Bids were invited in the first media rights auction, for the Middle East and North Africa. The Team Marketing agency is handling the sales process on behalf of Uefa.
- UK pay-television broadcaster BSkyB, telco BT, public-service broadcaster the BBC and commercial broadcaster ITV submitted bids to the English Football Association for FA Cup and England national football team friendly rights in 2014-15 to 2017-18.
- German basic-tier and pay-television sports broadcaster Sport1 is close to a deal to buy the rights held by American sports channel ESPN America, for the territories of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. ESPN, the US-based sports broadcaster, is shutting down ESPN America, which was syndicated across Europe. Sport1's deal is likely to cover rights for NCAA US college basketball, American football, lacrosse and baseball competitions, and IndyCar and Nascar motorsport. ESPN America's rights for NHL ice hockey, NFL American football and MLB baseball are excluded from the deal, as they reverted to the rights-holders when the decision was taken to close the channel.
- Pay-television broadcaster Setanta Sports is interested in acquiring the English Premier League football highlights rights in Ireland vacated by RTÉ, the public-service broadcaster. RTÉ has decided not to compete to renew the rights for 2013-14 to 2015-16.
- the contract from 2014. *TV Sports Markets* understands that the two companies are in the final stages of talks with governing body British Cycling, and the winner will be announced within weeks.
- Malaysian pay-television operator Astro linked up with the Ufa Sports Asia agency to create Asia Sports Ventures, a joint venture to commercialise the sport of sepaktakraw. Asia Sports Ventures will be based in Singapore and run by a board comprising senior management from Ufa Sports Asia and Astro.
- Fifa, football's world governing body, is considering dropping plans to broadcast the 2014 World Cup in 3D due to fading interest from broadcasters. US sports broadcaster ESPN has said it will close its 3D channel by the end of the year.
- Brazilian media group Globo decided against showing live coverage of the Spain v Tahiti Fifa Confederations Cup football match on June 20, instead opting to cover public protests in Brazil about the amount of money being spent on the country's hosting of the 2014 World Cup. Globo said that under the terms of its rights deal with Fifa, football's world governing body, it would not have been allowed to cut away from the match if it had already started showing it.
- UK pay-television broadcaster BSkyB will rebrand its Sky Sports 2 channel during this summer's Ashes cricket series, between England and Australia, as Sky Sports Ashes HD and totally dedicate its programming to cricket. The channel will show live coverage of the Ashes, women's Ashes, domestic county cricket and other cricket programmes.
- ITN Productions, part of UK media company ITN, won the contract to produce newspaper group News International's English Premier League internet clips. ITN will produce 9,500 clips per season for the internet editions of *The Sun*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* newspapers for three seasons, from 2013-14 to 2015-16.
- The International Rugby Board will stream online free live coverage of the 2013 World Cup Sevens tournament, from June 28-30.

ALSO SINCE LAST TIME

- Digital media company Perform Group is in talks to acquire sports data company Opta. Current Opta owner Albion Capital, an investment firm, put the company up for sale for £40m (€47.1m/\$62.6m).
- SweetSpot, the current organiser and commercial rights-holder of cycling's Tour of Britain, is vying with the Fast Track agency for

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