TVSportsMarkets
VOL 18 NUM 4
FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2014
www.sportbusiness.com/tv-sports-markets

WORLD CUP ASIA

FMS close to deal in Singapore, the last of a lucrative Asian sales round

By Kevin McCullagh

Football Media Services, Fifa's sales agent in Asia, is understood to be close to a deal for 2014 World Cup rights in Singapore, its last major deal in a highly successful sales cycle.

Singaporean pay-television broadcaster SingTel is understood to be prepared to pay between \$20m (€14.6m) and \$25m for the rights, a minimum 18-per-cent increase on the \$17m paid jointly by SingTel and rival StarHub for the 2010 World Cup.

FMS, a joint venture of the Infront Sports & Media and Dentsu agencies, has generated fees of over \$625m from Fifa's media rights in Asia for the 2007 to 2014 cycle (see table, page 3). FMS's rights cover all markets except Japan and Thailand.

This income dwarfs the \$350m minimum guarantee the agency gave to football's world governing body. However, the deal was not a buyout. Fifa, football's world governing body, earns a share of revenues above the guarantee. It is the signatory of all FMS contracts with broadcasters or other local agencies.

FMS's deal was signed in 2007. Football rights fees have since risen sharply in many Asian markets. Fifa has already secured an increase of over 90 per cent in its guaranteed Asian fees in the cycle covering the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. It will earn over \$1.27bn, compared to the total of about \$665m guaranteed in the cycle covering 2010 and 2014.

Again, most of the income in 2018-22 is from a single, multi-territory agency deal – Infront acting alone this time. Three markets were sold directly by Fifa – Japan, Malaysia and South Korea (*TV Sports Markets* 15:20). World Cup rights in Singapore are worth less than in comparable Asian markets because of

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TABLE TENNIS

Eurosport boosts exposure ex-Asia

By Robin Jellis

The deal that the International Table Tennis Federation secured earlier this month with Eurosport is part of the wider challenge it faces to boost coverage of its events in the sport's weaker markets outside Asia.

The deal with pan-regional sports broadcaster Eurosport covers rights for the ITTF World Tour in 54 territories in Europe. It is a one-year deal for 2014, which may be extended to cover 2015.

Eurosport agreed the deal with TMS International, the federation's in-house marketing agency, and the Total Sports Asia agency, which agrees media-rights deals on behalf of the federation.

Eurosport already had a three-year deal with the federation covering the World Championships and World Cup from 2013 to 2015. Steve Dainton, ITTF

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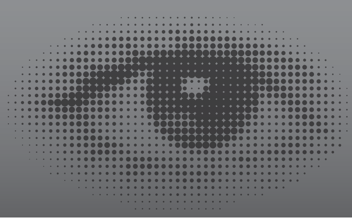

FASTRACK

NEWS IN BRIEF

Czech league boosts fee in Pragosport deal

Strong competition between the Pragosport and MP & Silva agencies this week provided the top division of football in the Czech Republic with an increase of around 33 per cent in the value of its media rights.

The league sold its media rights for four years, from 2014-15 to 2017-18, to Pragosport for around CZK120m (€4.4m/$6m) per year.

This is up from the fee of about CZK90m paid by the KPS Media agency in the previous four-year cycle, from 2010-11 to 2013-14.

Pragosport has the option to extend the rights for a further four years and is thought likely to do this. The deal was agreed with Stes, the in-house marketing agency of the Czech Republic Football Association.

The league sold the rights to Pragosport because the agency offered the highest amount of money, Daniel Hajný, media director of professional competitions for Stes, told *TV Sports Markets*.

The deal is for worldwide rights, the same as in the previous deal with KPS Media. There is relatively strong interest in the league in Slovakia, but the rights are not valuable outside of the Czech Republic.

Pragosport told *TV Sports Markets* that the rights would provide it with a significant share of locally-produced sport content, to diversify from its international programming. The price of the rights increased because they were undervalued in the previous deal. The league and federation were also prepared to "raise the bar on production quality," the agency said.

Pragosport tends to have pre-deals with broadcasters, but it is not yet thought to have any deals in place. The agency is expected to make a profit on the rights.

In the current domestic cycle, public-service broadcaster Česká Televize and pay-television broadcaster Nova bought the rights from KPS Media. Česká Televize shows matches on its ČT Sport channel. Nova shows matches on its Nova Sport and Fanda TV channels.

The packages of rights for the new cycle are yet to be decided. The rights are important for Česká Televize, which is expected to renew its deal. Nova may face competition from commercial broadcaster Prima TV, owned by multi-territory operator Modern Times Group, which holds rights to the Uefa Champions League from 2012-13 to 2014-15.

The deal includes live and highlights rights to the top two domestic leagues, the Czech Cup and the Czech Supercup. Most of the deal's value is in the top league.

No clues on key Serie A question

The guidelines which Italy's top football league, Serie A, supplied earlier this month to the country's antitrust and communications authorities for the sale of its media rights from the 2015-16 season leaves open the key question: will the league switch from selling separate packages on the basis of technology platform or pit operators against each other in a head-to-head battle? The league has asked for clearance for both possibilities.

Most independent rights experts believe that to maintain the value of its domestic pay-television rights, the league has to abandon the strategy it has adopted over the last two rights cycles of creating one large package to suit satellite operator Sky Italia and one slightly smaller package to suit digital-terrestrial operator Mediaset Premium.

This view arguably gained weight with Mediaset's surprise €700m ($959m) acquisition of the exclusive rights to the Uefa Champions League for the next three seasons (*TV Sports Markets* 18:3). It demonstrated that Mediaset is prepared to pay big premiums for must-have content to take on Sky in the pay-television market.

The guidelines were drawn up before that deal and suggest that the league, in common with most observers, had not seen Mediaset's aggressive bid coming. The prevailing wisdom in the market was that Sky and Mediaset had struck a non-belligerence pact following their decision to share the rights to the Uefa Champions League and Europa League. The worst-case scenario for the league is collaboration between the two platforms to drive prices down.

In its submission to the two authorities, the league talks of the "worrying recent choices of some audiovisual operators to collaborate in the acquisition and distribution of content." ■

Agency looks to float on rights deal

The Super Sports Media Group agency is understood to be considering an IPO on the back of its acquisition last year of the rights in China to England's Premier League. The agency is also planning to boost its portfolio by bidding for other top football rights, especially those for European football.

SSMG acquired the rights to the league in mainland China and Macau for six seasons, from 2013-14, in a deal worth $18m (€13.1m) per season. It sold the rights on to IPTV operator BesTV, which is owned by the Shanghai Media Group. As part of the deal, Shanghai Media Group took a 14-per-cent stake in SSMG.

Local sources say that the agency will break even on the deal in the first three years and make a profit in the second three-year cycle.

In its previous three-year deal in China, worth $16m per season, the agency sold the rights to regional free-to-air channels.

The Premier League said last year that it had awarded SSMG the rights for six years instead of the usual three because of its "innovative and successful business model."

SSMG is a joint venture by venture capital group IDG Capital Partners and Hong Kong-based media company New Yadii Media. ■

WORLD CUP ASIA

FMS brings in almost double its minimum gaurantee to Fifa

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specific local factors. Singapore's 'cross-carriage' regulation means that no broadcaster can acquire sports rights completely exclusively. Singapore's Media Development Authority introduced the regulation in March 2010 to counter rising costs for pay-television operators and subscribers.

SingTel and the MDA have clashed over the implementation of the cross-carriage rules, most recently when SingTel acquired non-exclusive English Premier League rights for the current cycle (*TV Sports Markets* 17:9).

Even before cross-carriage was introduced, SingTel and StarHub, the market's two biggest sports broadcasters, had elected not to compete for certain rights, including the 2010 World Cup.

The SingTel/StarHub bids were well below Fifa's expectations for the 2010 rights. Their first bid is thought to have been around $8m – in a market where SingTel had paid $250m for English Premier League football rights just a few months previously. A deal was eventually agreed in April 2010, two months before the tournament began.

Home of football

SingTel is understood to have considered the 2014 World Cup rights a high priority due to its positioning of its sports pay-television service as 'the home of football' in Singapore.

The broadcaster is expected to create a dedicated channel service covering the tournament. It jointly operated such a service for the 2010 World Cup along with StarHub.

Under cross-carriage, the channel would have to be available on StarHub's platform. SingTel would get all the income from StarHub subscribers who buy the service, but would have to pay its rival a channel carriage fee. For Euro 2012, StarHub acquired the rights and created a channel which it had to provide to SingTel (*TV Sports Markets* 15:18).

Major World Cup rights deals agreed by FMS in Asia, 2010 and 2014

	2014			2010		
Territory	Buyer	Buyer type	Total fee ($m)	Buyer	Buyer type	Fee ($m)
China*	CCTV	State broadcaster	62.5	CCTV	State broadcaster	62.5
Hong Kong	TVB	Free-to-air and pay-television	40	i-Cable	Pay-television	34
Indian subcontinent	Sony Six	Pay-television	45-50	ESPN Star Sports	Pay-television	42
Indonesia	ISM	Agency	55	ISM	Agency	41
Malaysia	M-League	Agency	28	M-League	Agency	23
Singapore	SingTel	Pay-television	22.5	StarHub and SingTel	Pay-television	17
South Korea*	SBS	Free-to-air and pay-television	70	SBS	Free-to-air and pay-television	70
Vietnam	MP & Silva	Agency	10	Dentsu	Agency	4.25

Source: *TV Sports Markets* Footnote: **Figures represent an even split of total fee between 2010 and 2014 - actual fees may not have been evenly split.*

Fifa's World Cup rights guarantees in Asia, 2010-2022

Territories	Buyer	Buyer type	Fee ($m)	Total
2018 and 2022 World Cups				
All except below	Infront Sports & Media	Agency	600	$1.27bn
Japan	Dentsu	Agency	400	
South Korea	SBS	Free-to-air and pay-television	190	
Malaysia	M-League	Agency	75	
2010 and 2014 World Cups				
All except below	Football Media Services (Dentsu & Infront)	Agency	350	$665m
Japan	Dentsu	Agency	300	
Thailand	RS	Free-to-air and pay-television	15	

Source: *TV Sports Markets*

SingTel's World Cup deal is likely to be a loss leader. It and StarHub lost money on the 2010 deal. Their efforts to commercialise the rights were hampered by how late they acquired them – there was little time to market the channel to customers, or to sell programme sponsorships or advertising.

SingTel will have more time this year, if it is able to finalise a deal soon. But its coverage faces another challenge – the time zone for the 2014 tournament in Brazil is not as favourable for local audiences as the 2010 event in South Africa. In Singapore, match kick-off times at this year's tournament are between midnight and 9am.

This will hit live audiences, interest in subscriptions from bars and clubs, and interest from advertisers. Many Asian viewers are accustomed to watching European football late at night, but the early morning kick-off times and midweek matches pose an extra challenge.

The kick-off times pose less of a challenge for free-to-air broadcasters, because there will be no interference with prime-time schedules.

Viewing on computer, mobile and tablet is expected to be a major part of fan consumption of the 2014 tournament – many fans will watch while in bed. SingTel and other Southeast Asian broadcasters are expected to invest in strong internet platforms, including mobile and tablet applications, to cater for these viewers.

Malaysia deal coming

In Malaysia, the M-League Marketing agency is expected to unveil a deal for the 2014 World Cup with a free-to-air broadcaster next week.

Public-service broadcaster RTM is understood to have faced competition for the rights from resurgent commercial broadcaster TV3. RTM acquired the 2010 free-to-air rights. TV3 was then uninterested because it could not refinance the acquisition via advertising and sponsorship sales.

TV3's approach to sport has since shifted. In recent years, it has acquired rights for the Uefa Euro 2012 and Africa Cup of Nations football tournaments.

The Astro platform has the Malaysian pay-television rights for the 2014 World Cup in a $28m deal with M-League. The agency acquired the Malaysian rights for the 2010 and 2014 World Cups from FMS. M-League is being assisted in its sales by another Malaysian agency, Esprit Media. ■

TABLE TENNIS

Expansion beyond Asia still a key target for federation

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marketing director, told *TV Sports Markets*: "It was a natural progression for us to push forward with a World Tour deal with Eurosport. It means we will have a bigger presence in Europe."

The Eurosport deal will help the ITTF in one of its two major challenges. First, it must secure wider coverage outside of its Asian heartland, and second, achieve a fair market value for its media rights in its biggest single market – China.

Eurosport

The Eurosport deal covers six of the federation's World Tour Super Series events. There are four Major Series, six Super Series and 11 Challenge Series events as part of the Tour each year.

The World Tour is as valuable as the World Championships, the federation's most prestigious event. The World Cup is the least valuable of the federation's three main events (see panel, page 5).

"Eurosport provide us with large amounts of exposure. On the sponsorship side it's good to please the sponsors. There is always a bit of pressure to get the most exposure possible for them," Dainton said.

The Eurosport deal is primarily about exposure, not the rights fee. One table tennis rights expert said the deal would either be free or a nominal fee, or Eurosport may provide sponsors with broadcast airtime. Eurosport will provide coverage in markets where table tennis does not have a big following, and where it would have been difficult to agree a deal.

German equipment manufacturer Liebherr is an important sponsor for the ITTF and the exposure it gets on Eurosport is very valuable.

Germany is the biggest table tennis market in Europe but there were few alternatives for the federation, with no interest from free-to-air broadcasters.

France is the second strongest in terms of audiences. Russia, Sweden, Denmark and Austria are also relatively big markets for the sport.

Eurosport is particularly strong in Germany and France, Dainton said, and its deal will showcase the federation's events to other European audiences which may not have traditionally watched them.

With five of the six Super Series events taking place in Asia, there will be few clashes with Eurosport's other sports content.

The deal ties up a whole continent in one deal, which is important for the federation and TSA as there were "pretty slim pickings" for coverage in Europe last year, according to Dainton.

Exposure

Increasing the exposure of ITTF events in territories where the sport is not as strong is the federation's primary objective. Its other main objective is to increase its commercial revenue.

TSA planned to agree deals on a market-by-market basis and sought to increase rights fees when it began selling rights to ITTF events, but the federation prioritised exposure to reach the largest audience possible.

"Table tennis is not a rich sport," Dainton said. "Whatever we can do to increase our revenues, we try to do. There is always that question of profit versus exposure we grapple with every day. It is sometimes better for the sport if we make less income but get more exposure. All medium-sized sport federations have that internal debate."

The ITTF is taking steps to make its events more attractive to broadcasters outside of its core Asian markets. Historically, Asian players have dominated the sport, but the federation wants to introduce a wider qualification phase to generate greater local interest.

"If we want to become a global sport in the media we have to think about what we can do to make it more inclusive to players on other continents," Dainton said. "When we have discussions with broadcasters we want to have a package which at least gives them some local content.

"It is not an overnight process though; it will be 10 to 15 years until we start to see the fruits of our labour."

The federation has agreed deals with small table tennis confederations in Oceania, Africa, Latin America and North America to develop content for local broadcasters, and increase interest in the sport, Dainton said.

Commercial revenues

When agreeing broadcast deals the ITTF must take into consideration how much exposure its events will receive, with the majority of its commercial revenue earned from sponsorship deals.

In 2013, the federation earned about $8m (€5.8m). About $6m of this came from sponsorship deals and $2m from media rights. This was up about 10 per cent on 2012, when it earned just under $7.5m. The federation is aiming to increase its commercial revenues for 2014 to about $10m, most of which will be driven by sponsorship.

The ITTF has seen increases of around 10 per cent in commercial revenues over the last three or four years. This is being driven by the overall growth of the Chinese economy, Dainton said.

The dominance of Chinese players, and lack of competition they face, means that media-rights fees are being held back though. Each of the top five men's players are Chinese, with 10 of the top 20 from China. Making the sport more competitive is vital to the federation increasing the value of its media rights, according to one expert.

It is estimated that Chinese state broadcaster CCTV pays $1m per year for rights to all ITTF events in a four-year deal from 2013 to 2016. Its World Championships rights are exclusive, but rights to the World Tour and World Cup are non-exclusive. TSA also has deals with regional broadcasters Hunan Broadcasting System and Guangdong TV. Both are thought to be worth about $100,000 per year.

CCTV's dominant position in the Chinese market, however, means that securing a fair value for the rights is difficult. Sponsors also want the wide free-to-air exposure that it can offer to reach the largest audience possible.

"The TV rights value in China is extremely low if you take into account the audiences, the number of broadcast hours and the advertising dollars they should be able to generate from table tennis," Dainton said.

"It is far from a correct price and from what they should be paying, but that's the nature of the Chinese market.

"They are the number one player and they have a powerful position. It's basically them or trying to take a regional approach, but that would be far less in terms of viewership and far less attractive for sponsors. It's a great position for CCTV to be in."

TSA's sales strategy was to agree a deal for a big package of ITTF rights with CCTV, then agree deals with other broadcasters. In countries where table tennis is not as popular, the package is tailored to suit the demands of the broadcaster.

Table tennis is one of the most popular sports in China. Its World Championships generates large audiences, especially if the tournament takes place in China outside of an Olympic year.

The World Championships is a one-week event. The individual and team events take place biennially, in alternate years. The World Tour provides year-round content for broadcasters, with 21 events each year. The World Cup is a three-day event. A men's and women's tournament takes place each year.

Other deals

After CCTV, the federation's second most valuable media-rights deal is with Japanese commercial broadcaster Tokyo TV. It is worth about $500,000. It also has deals worth about $100,000 each in Singapore with pay-television broadcaster StarHub and in the US with sports network One World Sports.

"TSA have generated a fair bit of growth to give them credit where it's due," Dainton said. "They have been able to increase the rights fee in markets where table tennis is not particularly popular.

"They have increased the values in China and Singapore, but also in places like Thailand and Malaysia. They have also found some new markets which had been previously untouched by the ITTF such as Myanmar, Taiwan and Macau."

It also has a host of other major deals, which provide extensive programming and reasonable rights fees, mainly in Asia.

Estimated annual media-rights value of the three main ITTF events

Competition	Value
World Championships	$800,000
World Tour	$800,000
World Cup	$400,000
Total	$2m

TSA sells the federation's media rights as part of a six-year deal, from 2011 to 2016. It pays a minimum guarantee, with a share of revenues above this. The split is 80:20 in favour of the federation. Although TSA's contract began in 2011, there was some overlap with existing broadcast deals in China, Japan and Hong Kong. TSA has sold all media rights since 2013.

The federation is understood to be close to agreeing deals with pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports in the Middle East and digital free-to-air channel Sommet Sports in New Zealand.

It does, however, struggle to agree deals in South Korea and India. Table tennis is weak in Africa and Latin America. ■

F1 CHINA

Why it's good to lose 30m viewers in one season

By Frank Dunne

The loss of nearly 30m viewers in one country would represent a crisis for most sports. In Formula One, it seems, it is a good thing.

The total television audience for the Formula One motor racing world championship fell in China by 29.75m, from 48.9m in 2012 to 19.15m in 2013, following the switch of coverage from state broadcaster CCTV to regional channels.

The Chinese Grand Prix organiser, Juss Event Management, and the championship's commercial rights-holder, Formula One Management, which together decide the rights strategy in China, dropped CCTV from 2013 after nine seasons.

Working closely with Shanghai Great Sports Television, they created the F1 China Television Network, consisting initially of 13 regional channels, with more set to follow in the coming seasons.

The switch was due to frustrations over CCTV's perceived lack of commitment to the sport (*TV Sports Markets* 17:5).

Juss and FOM believed that poor scheduling and limited broadcasting commitments, especially to content around the live races, had contributed to a 25.6m drop in CCTV's audience in 2012 compared to the 2011 season.

Across the two seasons, the total audience has now fallen from 74.5m to 19.15m. But there are a number of reasons why everyone from Juss and FOM to team sponsors see the development as positive. Or at the very least, as necessary.

For Juss and FOM it is the first time that the championship is earning a rights fee in China. The fees from the regional broadcasters are said to be in the single digit millions of dollars. CCTV had not been paying anything for the rights.

The regional broadcasters cover the most densely populated urban areas and provide a demographic suited to the sponsors which invest in the sport. Much of the rural interior of the country served by CCTV remains extremely poor. The new audience is also younger, with a 40-per-cent increase in viewers under 16, who now make up 15 per cent of the total audience.

Further, the network has committed to showing far greater coverage of the championship. Total broadcast hours in 2013 across the 13 channels were 1,067.5, compared with just over 200 on CCTV in 2012.

Hitting the target demographic with a huge increase in content is critical for Juss in servicing its lucrative four-year contract with watch manufacturer Rolex, which has become naming sponsor of the F1 China Television Network.

A source at Juss told *TV Sports Markets* this week: "The China network was created to find a solution for a more reliable platform and more targeted demographic audience for the F1 season, which CCTV could not deliver.

"Juss and FOM are targeting a much more high-end demographic audience and therefore regions and provinces that make sense to build the sport in China and deliver value to F1 clients, especially Rolex."

He added that the new arrangement gave Juss "a higher degree of accountability and reliability" of broadcasts than with CCTV. It was natural to see a drop in ratings, he said, because it was a new audience.

Quality v quantity

Some of those involved in the sport commercially had doubts, in any case, about the reliability of the ratings information coming from CCTV.

Mark Gallagher, motorsports consultant and former executive at Formula One teams Jordan and Red Bull Racing and engine manufacturer Cosworth, said: "At Jordan and at Red Bull, we questioned the veracity of the figures that were being produced. The ratings were enormous but the attendances at the Chinese Grand Prix were very poor. Supposedly half of the middle class in China was watching Formula One on TV and yet the grandstands at the grand prix were empty."

He said that the ratings were not backed up by other indicators, such as online purchases of merchandising. "I felt very uncomfortable presenting those figures to sponsors. I think the new figures are much closer to reality."

He said that sponsors of luxury goods, such as Italian car manufacturer Ferrari, were less interested in hitting a massive number in China than in reaching their target audience. China now accounts for about 10 per cent of Ferrari's global sales, from zero before the creation of the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai in 2004.

"The brands that sponsor Formula One will ring a bell with maybe no more than 10 per cent of the Chinese population. And if F1 is getting to 10 to 15 per cent of that group, it is reaching the right audience."

No complaints

Zak Brown, founder and chief executive of motorsports marketing consultancy Just Marketing International, said that none of the Formula One sponsors which the company represents had raised the drop in Chinese audiences as an issue.

JMI handles the F1 sponsorship agreements of UBS, UPS, GlaxoSmithKline, Unilever, Johnnie Walker. UBS is the title sponsor of the grand prix in Shanghai.

"Sponsors have enough experience to know that there will be an ebb and flow in audiences for different reasons," he said, "such as where grands prix are hosted and who is performing well. Big movements up or down in single pockets are not an issue."

It was a view backed up by Nigel Currie, director of sports marketing at sponsorship consultancy brandRapport. "There will not be too much panic, maybe not until there is a clear downward decline in audiences across all countries. It may present individual teams with some problems regarding their sponsors but it is likely that increased TV revenues will compensate for this," he said. ■

BADMINTON ASIA

MP & Silva looks for growth in India to recoup big outlay

By Frank Dunne

The growth of interest in badminton in the Indian subcontintent is understood to be the main reason for MP & Silva's high valuation of the Badminton Asia Confederation rights portfolio.

This week the agency agreed a deal to sell the confederation's global media rights for three years, from 2014 to 2016. The deal is thought to be worth about $1.7m (€1.2m), just over $560,000 per year. Badminton experts say the fee is a high one when compared to previous deals.

The agency is said to be banking on the continued growth of the sport in India, in what is becoming an increasingly competitive sports media-rights market, especially in the pay-television sector.

Badminton has enjoyed a boom in India in the last three to four years, driven by the exploits of players like Saina Nehwal, who won a bronze medal in the women's singles at the 2012 Olympic Games.

Last year, a professional badminton league, the Indian Badminton League, was launched, modelled on cricket's Indian Premier League. Grassroots participation in the sport is growing rapidly.

There are three further reasons why MP & Silva believes it is not overpaying for the rights.

First, the rights will provide valuable content in Indonesia, another of the sport's core markets, for beIN Sports, the premium sports channel operated by a joint venture of MP & Silva and Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera.

Second, the deal is thought to include sponsorship rights that were not part of previous deals. Sales are likely to be led by Rene Valencia, the former head of sponsorship for US basketball's NBA in Asia who joined the agency's Asia-Pacific operation in Singapore earlier this month.

Third, the contract is understood to include clauses which would reduce the agency's fees if the promised BAC events did not materialise. Some of the events listed in the BAC's official portfolio exist in name only and haven't been staged for years.

IMG steps back

A like-for-like comparison with the previous deal, when the rights were held by IMG Media, is complicated by the fact that IMG renegotiated the terms of its agreement soon after signing the deal due to political upheaval at the confederation.

In 2012, the BAC put its media rights out to tender for four years, from 2013 to 2016. IMG won the contract, paying about $450,000 per year. This was thought to have been a significant uplift on what the IEC in Sports agency had been paying in the previous deal, and was a long way ahead of rival bids from both IEC and the Total Sports Asia agency.

However, it is understood that the agency's bullish estimates were based on commitments made by the then-president of the BAC, Katsuto Momii, to enhance its portfolio by adding new events and upgrade its events by offering far higher prize money.

After Momii was ousted in an emergency meeting in March 2013, the agency is understood to have renegotiated its contract, committing to only a one-year deal, for the remainder of 2013. One local source claimed that IMG also reduced its annual rights fee by almost half, to about $250,000.

Faced with finding a new agency, the BAC had talks with IEC, TSA and MP & Silva in November and December last year before accepting the latter's bid. There was no tender and IMG is not thought to have submitted a fresh bid.

Local experts say that MP & Silva will face the same underlying problems facing any agency selling badminton rights: the dependence on a very small number of key markets and the difficulty of obtaining a fair market price in the biggest of those, China, whose players dominate the sport. In addition, they will have to deal with a very unstable political situation at the confederation.

Content

By far the most important event in the BAC portfolio is the annual Asia Championships. The deal also covers the Asia Team Championships, the Mixed Team Championships, and the junior championships at U-15, U-17 and U-19 level. ■

FOOTBALL

MP & Silva the 'only realistic offer,' says Belgian Pro League

By Robin Jellis

The Belgian Pro League said this week that it agreed an advisory deal with the MP & Silva agency because the proposal, which comes with strong financial guarantees, was the "only realistic offer on the table."

The league agreed a six-year deal with the agency, from 2014-15 to 2019-20, worth €450m ($616.5m), an average of €75m per year.

The deal means the league has guaranteed an increase of around nine per cent in the total value of its media rights for the three years from 2014-15 to 2016-17. It will increase by just over 14 per cent from 2017-18 to 2019-20, the second three-year cycle.

The league's chief executive, Ludwig Sneyers, told *TV Sports Markets*: "The proposition from MP & Silva provides a guarantee for our clubs – it is important for our clubs to know what money they have for the next years."

The league took the agency's bid having examined two other proposals. Pay-television operator Telenet had offered to form a joint venture with the league for 12 seasons, from 2014-15 to 2025-26, which would have been worth €900m, or €75m per year to the clubs (*TV Sports Markets* 18:2).

The Belgian Competition Authority, however, advised the league that the offer may fall foul of competition law.

The league returned to Telenet, and also spoke with the two other main pay-television operators – Belgacom and BeTV, owned by telco Voo. It asked each to submit a separate bid for non-exclusive domestic rights. Each of the three parties replied, with the total value of the bids worth about €60m per year.

That left MP & Silva's as the "only realistic offer on the table," according to Sneyers. "There was a problem with the joint venture. We would have had to follow a formal procedure which would have taken almost 100 days."

He said that the information from the competition authorities was that there might be problems with the Telenet offer. "It was a risk we were not willing to take," he said.

Both the MP & Silva and Telenet offers were initially for 12 years. The league, however, can only sell rights collectively over the next two cycles, until the end of the 2019-20 season, following an agreement with clubs agreed in October 2012 (*TV Sports Markets* 16:19). Both parties changed their offers to six years.

Antitrust

The Belgian Competition Authority had concerns that the joint venture would have given Telenet a dominant position in the pay-television market.

Telenet proposed that a company would be set up on behalf of it and the league. The authority said that to do so, the two parties would have to file for a merger.

The investigation could have taken up to three or four months. If the league had agreed a deal with Telenet, only for it to be deemed anti-competitive, the league would have had little time in which to agree a domestic rights deal.

The operators were disappointed that the league rejected their non-exclusive bids, as they felt they were not far behind the MP & Silva offer in terms of rights fee. On top of the €60m domestic rights fee, the league could have earned additional advertising revenue as the league would have had a wider distribution. It would also have sold international and highlights rights separately, taking it close to the average of €75m per year which MP & Silva will pay.

Almost unanimous

To approve the deal, the league needed at least 13 of the 16 Pro League clubs to vote in favour. Fifteen did so, with Standard Liège the only club not to vote in favour.

The vote was arguably surprising given that Telenet and Belgacom sponsor many clubs, and have been long-term domestic broadcasters of the Pro League.

"To get 15 out of 16 voting in favour is very positive," Sneyers said. "It's a strong signal and I think the clubs are very happy, it's almost a unanimous decision. It's not always easy to work in the interest of all 16 clubs as they are all playing against each other."

Sneyers said that the league had acted democratically and had involved all the clubs. "We take our time – it's one of the most important decisions we have to make. It's normal we don't take a decision in 60 minutes." It took four meetings to approve the deal.

Some local experts believe it is a good deal for the league. "The agreement means the risk is now with a third party," one said. "They were very reluctant to take the risk themselves as the domestic broadcasters have said they only want non-exclusive rights."

Many believe that MP & Silva must have received some kind of indication that a new entry operator, such as Fox International Channels, will bid, as the agency looks unlikely to recoup its investment from deals with the league's current domestic broadcast partners.

MP & Silva and the league are expected to launch a tender for the domestic live rights in about two weeks. It is thought that highlights rights will be tendered at the same time.

Quality

Interest in the league's rights is high because of the quality of its clubs and the football on offer, Sneyers said.

"If you look into our product, it's not

the top prize – it doesn't compare to the top leagues in England, Germany, France or Spain – but we have good teams and the quality of our football is always getting better," he said.

"Everybody now looks into Belgium because we have a good national team, and people are realising we also have good league football."

The league has secured increases in the value of its domestic rights over the last three cycles and the impending launch of the Fox Sports channel is likely to give the sports-rights market further impetus.

Upfront payment

MP & Silva's €450m guarantee breaks down as follows: €70m per year in the first three seasons, and €80m per year in the last three seasons.

The deal was contingent upon the agency paying an initial €5m of its guarantee within five days of the contract being agreed. The league requested this payment as it is the first time it has worked with the agency.

In the current three-year cycle, from 2011-12 to 2013-14, the league earns €55.2m per year from live rights deals with Telenet and Belgacom. Telenet has the top two packages of live rights on an exclusive basis and shares a third package with Belgacom.

MP & Silva's deal also covers international and highlights rights. International rights are currently held by the IMG Media agency and generate about €1m per year. MP & Silva is expected to bundle these rights with its rights to other European football leagues in deals with broadcasters.

www. *For the full interview with Ludwig Sneyers, visit our website.* ■

CRICKET

Sky continues big spending to fortify cricket stronghold

By Kevin McCullagh

UK pay-television broadcaster BSkyB continued its heavy spending to defend its position against rival BT in deals this month for cricket from Sri Lanka and the Indian Premier League.

Sky is understood to be paying between $15m (€11m) and $18m for Sri Lankan Cricket Board rights in a deal with the global rights-holder Taj Television, the Indian pay-television broadcaster.

The deal covers 2014 to 2018 and the key content is two England tours to Sri Lanka, one in November this year and one in 2018.

Sky is understood to have agreed to pay between $4m and $5m per year for the rights for the IPL, the India-based Twenty20 competition, in a three-year deal from 2015 to 2017.

This represents an increase of at least 100 per cent from the $2m per year that commercial broadcaster ITV paid in the current deal, from 2011 to 2014.

Sky faced competition for both deals. BT, which is building a rival sports pay-television service, is understood to have bid for the Sri Lanka rights. BT is unlikely to have bid very aggressively, however, because this deal alone would not have significantly strengthened it. BT would need to build other cricket programming around it, and almost all other major properties are controlled by Sky in long-term deals. BT will have entered the bidding to at least make sure its rival did not pick up the rights cheaply. And Sky will not have wanted to take any chances – BT has been active in cricket rights bidding contests in the past 12 months, establishing relationships with the sellers and in some cases bidding strongly.

The main England content in the Sri Lanka deal comprises five One Day Internationals and two T20 matches this November, and three Tests, five One Day Internationals and one T20 in October 2018.

ITV misses out

Sky faced competition from at least ITV for the IPL. BT is not thought to have bid because it would have had difficulty scheduling the content.

ITV was keen to keep the IPL as it provides solid ratings, a large volume of content, and content at good times of the year and day for digital channel ITV4. The competition includes over 70 live matches per year, which take place during UK day time. It runs during April and May, when ITV has little other major sport.

ITV4 had an average audience of 223,000 across the 72 live matches it covered in 2013, and 415,200 watched the final. The channel generally has audiences of around 100,000 at the times of day the IPL matches are on.

The competition has its challenges for broadcasters. Political issues in India have affected its scheduling. Hosting arrangements this year are undecided – it is likely to take place outside India due to a clash with a general election in the country. It was hosted in South Africa in 2009 due to security concerns.

The UK rights were sold unexpectedly early for some broadcasters, who had expected the tender only after this year's tournament. They were sold by the Board of Control for Cricket in India, which was advised by the IMG Media agency.

ITV's sports portfolio is suffering during the BT-Sky battle. The pay-television broadcasters can outbid ITV, and other free-to-air broadcasters, for almost any sports property they want. ITV lost its crown jewel property, live Uefa Champions League rights, to BT last November.

Opportunities for BT

There are two major cricket properties on the horizon which are likely to attract stronger attention from BT than those just sold. The International Cricket Council is expected to tender in the next few months a rights package from 2016 onwards that includes two major international cricket competitions taking place in England and Wales – the Champions Trophy in 2017 and the Cricket World Cup in 2019.

Rights for Australian Cricket Board content from 2016-17 onwards, including the England Ashes tour to Australia in November 2017 to January 2018, are due to come on the market later this year. Sky is the incumbent rights-holder in both cases.

Several properties in other sports of interest to both BT and Sky are either currently on the market or soon will be: US Open golf, currently held by Sky from 2009 to 2014; England international rugby union (Sky, 2010-11 to 2014-15); and NFL American football (Sky, 2012 to 2014). ■

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

MEDIA RIGHTS 1

Action sports, air sports, badminton, baseball, cricket and football

- **Action Sports:** Latin American and Caribbean pay-television provider DirecTV PanAmericana acquired exclusive rights in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela for the Red Bull Cliff Diving, Red Bull Crashed Ice, Red Bull Air Race World Championship and Red Bull X-Fighters events. The rights, acquired from media company Red Bull Media, will be exploited on the DirecTV Sports and DirecTV Sports Plus channels.
- **Action Sports:** The IMG Media agency struck a deal to distribute global media rights for the International Festival of Extreme Sport World Series, which features BMX, skateboarding, mountain bike slopestyle, wakeboarding and rollerblading. The agreement will run for seven years, from 2014 to 2020. IMG Media struck the deal with Hurricane, the series' organiser. IMG will distribute live coverage and highlights and will show coverage via EDGEsport, the agency's premium action sports channel.
- **Air Sports:** Servus TV, the German commercial broadcaster owned by energy drinks brand Red Bull, will show live coverage and highlights of all eight races in the 2014 Red Bull Air Race World Championship.
- **Badminton:** The MP & Silva agency struck a deal to distribute rights for events operated by the Badminton Asia Confederation. The exclusive worldwide deal will run for three years, from 2014 to 2016, and covers all platforms including online, mobile, betting and in-flight rights (page 6).
- **Baseball:** Australian commercial broadcaster Nine and international pay-television broadcaster ESPN acquired rights for two season-opening Major League Baseball games in Sydney, Australia, between the Los Angeles Dodgers and Arizona Diamondbacks on March 22-23. Nine will exploit the rights on free-to-air digital television multi-channel GEM. ESPN will broadcast the two games plus exhibition games featuring the Diamondbacks and Dodgers against an Australian representative team in Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, South America and the Caribbean. The league-owned Major League Baseball Network has rights for the games in the US.
- **Cricket:** UK pay-television broadcaster BSkyB acquired rights in a sublicensing deal with Indian subcontinent pay-television broadcaster Taj Television for the England national team's next two tours to Sri Lanka (page 8).
- **Cricket:** BSkyB agreed an exclusive three-year rights deal, from 2015 to 2017, for the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament (page 8).
- **Cricket:** Pay-television broadcaster OSN acquired rights in the Middle East and North Africa for the 2014 Asia Cup national team tournament. OSN will show live coverage of the One Day International tournament on its OSN Sports Cricket HD channel.
- **Football:** The MP & Silva agency was appointed as the worldwide media adviser to the Belgian Pro League in a six-year deal from 2014-15 to 2019-20 (page 7).
- **Football:** The Pragosport agency acquired rights for the Gambrinus Liga, the Czech Republic's top division for four years, from 2014-15 to 2017-18 (page 2).
- **Football:** Football Federation Australia confirmed that Australian pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports would show coverage of the governing body's new club knockout competition, the FFA Cup. Fox Sports will show at least 10 matches from the round of 32 onwards, including all quarter-finals, the semi-finals and the final. The length of the deal was not disclosed, but Fox Sports has an existing rights deal for Australia national team games and the top-tier A-League in a four-year deal with the governing body, from 2013-14 to 2016-17.
- **Football:** Major League Soccer club Chicago Fire agreed a one-year extension to its rights deal with regional cable-television broadcaster WPWR My50 Chicago, covering the 2014 season. My50 Chicago will show 26 matches this year.

SINCE LAST TIME

- The International Olympic Committee said that the global broadcast output for the 2014 winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, was almost double that of the previous edition in 2010 in Vancouver, Canada. IOC television and marketing services managing director Timo Lumme said that 464 television channels showed 42,000 hours from Sochi in comparison with 240 channels that showed 32,000 hours from Vancouver. Digital coverage through 230 websites and application-based services totalled 60,000 hours from Sochi in comparison with 25,000 hours from Vancouver.
- US media company Comcast agreed a deal to acquire US pay-television operator Time Warner Cable for \$45.2bn (€33bn). The acquisition is expected to be granted regulatory approval by the end of this year. Time Warner Cable, which last year acquired the NBCUniversal media company, including the NBC Sports Group, operates numerous sports channels in the US.
- UK telecommunications company BT secured a victory in the Court of Appeal that will force the Competition Appeal Tribunal to re-examine its decision to stop pay-television broadcaster BSkyB being compelled to offer its main sports channels to rivals at a discount. BT had challenged the tribunal's summer 2012 ruling that the basis of media regulator Ofcom's decision to force Sky to cut its wholesale charges to show Sky Sports 1 and 2 was "unfounded."
- The Liga de Fútbol Profesional, the Spanish football league, is in talks with the country's government about changing legislation that allows broadcasters to show goals from the league for free. The league's president, Javier Tebas, told Bloomberg that charging companies to show the goals could raise as much as €40m (\$54.8m) per year.

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

MEDIA RIGHTS 2

Horse racing, ice hockey, mixed martial arts and motorsport

- **Horse Racing:** Pay-television broadcaster At The Races struck deals for some media rights with the operators of the UK's Ripon and Plumpton racecourses. The multi-platform deals in the UK and Ireland exclude distribution into licensed betting offices. At The Races will also be the exclusive distributor of terrestrial rights for the venues in the UK and Ireland. The deal with Plumpton will run for five-and-a-half years until August 2019. The agreement with Ripon will run for 10-and-a-half years until June 2024. Both racecourses were offered seats on the broadcaster's board.
- **Ice Hockey:** Canadian pay-television broadcaster Rogers Sportsnet renewed a rights deal for the Canadian Hockey League for 12 years, from 2014-15 to 2025-26. Sportsnet will show at least 50 games per year across television, online and mobile platforms. The deal includes playoff games and the showpiece Memorial Cup. Sportsnet immediately sublicensed French-language rights for the league to pay-television broadcaster TVA Sports for the same 12-year period.
- **Ice Hockey:** US pay-television channel One World Sports acquired exclusive multi-platform rights for the Russia-based Kontinental Hockey League. One World Sports will provide live or same-day coverage.
- **Ice Hockey:** UK-pay television broadcaster Premier Sports agreed a multi-platform rights deal for the International Ice Hockey Federation World Championship national team tournament. Premier Sports will broadcast 15 games per edition of the annual tournament for four years, from 2014 to 2017. The broadcaster will also show all of the Great Britain team's Division 1 Group A and B games. The Infront Sports & Media agency brokered the deal on behalf of the IIHF.
- **Mixed Martial Arts:** Pay-television broadcaster OSN acquired rights in the Middle East and North Africa for the Bellator series in a multi-year deal, beginning immediately.
- **Mixed Martial Arts:** UK commercial broadcaster Channel 5 acquired rights for the Ultimate Fighting Championship's Fight Night in London on March 8. Live coverage at 9pm will be followed by highlights at 11pm.
- **Motorsport:** Spanish telecommunications company Telefónica agreed a multi-year rights deal with Formula One Management, the series' commercial rights-holder. Telefónica will launch a channel dedicated to the series on its IPTV platform Movistar TV. Movistar F1, which will launch in time for the 2014 season, will provide live coverage of all races, qualifying and practice sessions.
- **Motorsport:** The IEC in Sports agency struck a deal with Wige Media to distribute the production company's portfolio of rights across all media platforms on a global basis. The rights include 150 live motorsport programmes plus magazine shows, highlights, documentaries and newsfeeds.
- **Motorsport:** NBC Sports Group, a division of US media company NBCUniversal, acquired rights for the US-based Global Rallycross series in a multi-year deal beginning this year. The NBC network will show live and delayed coverage, with repeats being shown on pay-television broadcaster NBC Sports Network.

MEDIA INTERNATIONAL

- US media group Time teamed up with several sports rights-holders to launch a new live streaming service, 120 Sports, which will provide game footage, analysis and social commentary for mobile, tablet and online platforms. Ice hockey's NHL, basketball's NBA, Major League Baseball's MLB.com website, the Nascar motor-racing series and Campus Insiders – a joint venture between the IMG College division of the IMG agency and digital sports media company Silver Chalice – will push their content through the service. The service will launch for free through 120Sports.com and other distribution platforms before a premium service is launched next year. The MLB Advanced Media division of MLB, an investor in the venture, is providing the technology infrastructure.
- The US Supreme Court rejected pay-television broadcaster the Tennis Channel's complaint against pay-television provider Comcast's decision to carry the network on a premium sports tier. Tennis Channel had asked the Supreme Court to review a ruling from a lower court that reiterated Comcast's right to carry the network on a premium sports tier.
- US pay-television provider Dish Network said it would scale back its offering of pay-per-view events staged by WWE after the wrestling organisation launched its own pay-television streaming channel, WWE Network, on February 24. Dish said that WWE was unwilling to adjust its pay-per-view costs for satellite and cable companies following the launch of WWE Network and added that it would only consider such pay-per-view events on an ad hoc basis in the future.
- Pan-regional sports broadcaster Eurosport generated a significant rise in operating profit despite a fall in revenue in 2013. Eurosport's full-year operating profit increased by €18.2m ($24.9m) to €81.8m, as group revenue fell by €22.2m to €452.9m. Parent company TF1, which in January agreed to sell a controlling stake in Eurosport to American media and entertainment company Discovery Communications, said that revenue fell in 2013 because there had been more major events in 2012, such as football's Euro 2012 and the Olympic Games, which had generated large advertising sales. TF1 said that difficulties in Spain and Scandinavia had been partly offset by a stronger performance in Central and Eastern Europe and the expansion of Eurosport Asia-Pacific.
- German pay-television broadcaster Sky Deutschland's acquisition of a significant minority stake in sports broadcaster Sport1 was approved by the country's federal cartel office, the Bundeskartellamt.

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

MEDIA RIGHTS 3

Rallycross, stock car racing, netball, Paralympics, tennis and more

- **Motorsport:** The British Eurosport division of the pan-European sports broadcaster acquired rights for the inaugural 2014 World Rallycross Championship this year in a deal with series promoter IMG Motorsport, a division of the IMG agency. Eight of the 12 rounds will be shown live on British Eurosport or British Eurosport 2 on Sunday afternoons with the other rounds broadcast on a delayed basis. British Eurosport will also show highlights and repeats.
- **Motorsport:** NBC Sports Group, a division of US media company NBCUniversal, agreed a multi-year extension to a rights deal with US truck-racing series TORC: The Off-Road Championship. The deal includes coverage of all events and behind-the-scenes programming.
- **Motorsport:** The Automobile Racing Club of America agreed a deal with CBS Sports Network for the US pay-television channel to show at least three events from the ARCA stock car Racing Series live this year.
- **Netball:** Free-to-air broadcaster Maori TV acquired rights in New Zealand for the 2014 ANZ Championship, the top-tier tournament in Australia and New Zealand, in a sublicensing deal with pay-television broadcaster Sky New Zealand. Maori TV will exploit the rights on its free-to-air channel Te Reo, which will show delayed coverage of one game from each round, including the finals, on Tuesday nights at 8.30pm.
- **Paralympic Games:** Australian public-service broadcaster ABC acquired rights for the Sochi 2014 winter Games in a deal with the Australian Paralympic Committee. ABC will broadcast the opening ceremony on March 7 live and a daily half-hour highlights programme on ABC1 at 10.30pm. Highlights will be available on-demand via ABC's iView catch-up service. ABC will stream live coverage of all alpine skiing events plus selected cross-country, biathlon and ice sledge hockey events, via the ABC Grandstand website.
- **Snowboarding:** The Fox Sports division of US network Fox acquired rights for the 2014 US Open Championships on March 7-8. The rights will be exploited on the Fox Sports 2 pay-television channel. The rights are part of a broader deal between Fox and the event's title sponsor, snowboard manufacturer Burton, which will allow Fox to show coverage of other events from Burton's Global Event Series on Fox Sports 2 and the broadcaster's regional channels in the US.
- **Tennis:** The MP & Silva agency extended a deal to distribute worldwide media rights for the men's ATP World Tour tournament in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The agreement, which excludes Argentina, will run for five years, from 2016 to 2020, and includes live coverage of 13 matches per year across all platforms.
- **Tennis:** Eurosport acquired exclusive pan-European rights for six matches being held across the world to promote World Tennis Day on March 3. The day is organised by the International Tennis Federation in partnership with sports marketing company StarGames.

- Spanish pay-television operator Canal Plus teamed up with sports newspaper *Diario AS* to launch a new video streaming service offering goals from Spanish football's Liga in real time. The Videogoles service, accessible via a website and mobile application, will provide goals from all Liga games that Canal Plus broadcasts. *AS* readers can access the service for the remainder of the 2013-14 season for €4.49 ($6.15).
- Pay-television broadcaster Fox International Channels launched Fox Sports 6, a new online channel in the Netherlands. The channel will only be activated when the broadcaster has more live coverage than can be accommodated on its existing channels.
- Swedish commercial and pay-television broadcaster TV4's new TV12 channel, which will offer sports and lifestyle programming, will launch on March 29. TV12 will replace the TV4 Sport Xtra channel and will offer domestic football as well as coverage of French Ligue 1 and Italian Serie A football.
- The Austrian Bundesliga, the country's top football division, made highlights of its games available to watch via mobile platforms through the Bundesliga application, which is available to download for free for Apple iOS and Google Play devices.
- Argentinian pay-television broadcaster TyC Sports will become part of a new independent company after media conglomerate Grupo Clarín was permitted to break up its operations rather than face a forced dismantling to comply with new media ownership law. State media regulator Afsca gave Clarín six months to reorganise its radio and television properties into six independent companies following a proposal the group put forward last year after Clarín lost a legal battle against the law.
- The Indian arm of telecommunications company Vodafone linked up with pay-television broadcaster Star India to establish a Vodafone Sports online service. The service, which will be available through the Vodafone Live service, will initially feature live cricket, football and hockey coverage before expanding to other sports such as Formula One motor racing and tennis.
- Indian pay-television broadcaster Star's lifestyle channel Star Life OK will show live cricket for the first time in Europe during the Asia Cup One-Day International tournament. Star acquired the rights from the Asian Cricket Council in January.

MEDIA RIGHTS NEGOTIATIONS

- American football's NFL extended an exclusive negotiating period with DirecTV over renewing the pay-television provider's rights to the Sunday Ticket programming package, which gives subscribers access to Sunday afternoon games broadcast by US networks CBS and Fox. DirecTV's exclusive deal will expire at the end of the 2014-15 NFL season, and the company's chairman and chief executive Mike White said that talks were "progressing in a very positive and constructive manner."

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

- The WWE wrestling organisation is seeking bids for the rights to key properties such as Monday Night Raw and Friday Night SmackDown after its exclusive negotiating window with current rights-holder, US media company NBCUniversal, expired. NBCU will have the opportunity of matching any offer that WWE receives from rival broadcasters. The new rights cycle will begin in October.

- UK pay-television broadcasters BSkyB and BT Sport are in advanced talks over a deal to share coverage of European club rugby union's top tournament, according to the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. The negotiations could lead to a company being established to operate a new 20-team European tournament featuring clubs from six nations from the start of the 2014-15 season.

- Commercial broadcaster RTL pulled out of the race to acquire highlights rights in a sublicensing deal with pay-television broadcaster Fox International Channels for the Eredivisie, the top division of football in the Netherlands. RTL withdrew after its initial bid for the rights, from the 2014-15 season, was below the other offers submitted by commercial broadcaster SBS and public-service broadcaster NOS, the incumbent rights-holder.

- International Olympic Committee vice-president John Coates said that the organisation was in talks to sell the rights in Australia for the next three Olympic Games, in 2016, 2018 and 2020, as a single package. The IOC is expecting to generate about A$250m (€164m/$225m) from the sale of the rights across free-to-air, pay-television and digital media platforms. The Ten network broadcast the Sochi 2014 winter Games. It acquired the rights for A$7m after the Seven and Nine networks showed little interest.

- The Football Association of Malaysia said that three companies were in contention to acquire rights for the M-League, the country's top division, for four years, from 2014-15 to 2017-18. Pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports Asia and Malaysian media investment group Media Prima are two of those interested. Pay-television operator Astro is the incumbent rights-holder. The bidders will make their final proposals in March.

ALSO SINCE LAST TIME

- The Infront Sports & Media agency distributed rights for cycling's 2014 Track World Championships in Cali, Colombia, to more than 100 territories worldwide. The number of broadcast partners taking the live feed, which will be provided by Colombian commercial broadcaster RCN Television, had doubled in comparison with the 2013 edition in Minsk, Belarus.

- IMG Sport Video Archive, part of the IMG Media agency, extended its deal to serve as the exclusive archive rights partner of football's English Premier League.

- The Confederation of African Football amended its statutes to strengthen its fight against broadcast piracy of its competitions. A clause added to the rules of the continental governing body's competitions said that "non-compliance" by a national association in tackling piracy would lead to the association's national team being "excluded from the [Africa Cup of Nations] competition and... suspended for the next edition."

- Turkish state broadcaster TRT will not show matches from the 2014 Fifa World Cup that clash with programming concerned with breaking the fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, according to Bülent Arınç, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister. Arınç said that TRT 1 would not broadcast some of the quarter-finals and added that TRT would aim to strike a sublicensing deal for the rights to the affected games.

- Pan-European motor sport television channel Motors TV secured a place on the UK Freeview platform by agreeing a carriage deal with telecommunications company Arqiva's Connect TV service.

- Benfica agreed a carriage deal with French pay-television operator Numericable for the Portuguese Primeira Liga football club's basic-tier channel, Benfica TV. The channel will be available on Numericable for €5 ($6.85) per month.

- The IEC in Sports agency appointed Carsten Hendrich as its new chief commercial officer, with responsibility for media and production operations across Europe.

- Spring Media appointed Lasse Eckartsberg as the agency's new commercial director, to be based in Hamburg, Germany.

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235-245 Goswell Road, London EC1V 7JD

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper from responsible sources FSC® C020659

SportBusiness