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OLYMPIC GAMES

The IOC changes tack in LatAm despite América Móvil renewal

By Callum McCarthy

- América Móvil to pay \$55m for rights to four Games from 2018 to 2024 in Latin America
- The telco paid \$110m for all rights in the region to the 2014 and 2016 Games
- The new deal excludes free-to-air rights: these will be sold directly by the IOC

The International Olympic Committee's deal with telco América Móvil for pay-television and digital rights this month heralds an abrupt change in strategy across Latin America.

The IOC, along with its sales adviser the IMG agency, excluded free-to-air rights from its recent tender in the region and will sell these separately. América Móvil held these rights in the last cycle.

The tender banned joint bids, and rules were changed in the second round to limit a winning bidder's right to sublicense to just one other buyer.

América Móvil will pay a minimum of \$55m (€46.4m) for rights to four Games from 2018 to 2024. It has acquired exclusive pay-television rights in South America, non-exclusive pay-television rights in Central America and Mexico, and exclusive digital rights across all these territories.

The deal does not include any rights in Brazil, where media group Globo holds exclusive, platform-neutral rights to eight Olympic Games from 2018 to 2032 in a deal worth \$600m (*TV Sports Markets* 20:1).

América Móvil's fee is expected to increase once a carriage deal for the Olympic Channel is completed. This deal is expected to grant América Móvil exclusive carriage of the channel, and will boost the overall fee to more than \$60m.

América Móvil will primarily exploit the rights via its pay-television Claro Sports channels, which are available across Latin America. It will reserve some rights for its subsidiary telcos in the region, such as Telmex in Mexico.

Crucially, Claro will hold video on-demand rights to all four Games. The 2018 Games in Pyeongchang, 2020 Games in Tokyo and 2022 Games in Beijing are in poor time zones for a Latin American audience, meaning most viewing is expected to be via delayed broadcasts and video-on-demand.

Over half the total value of the deal lies in the 2024 Games, which will be held in Paris, a much better time zone for Latin America.

Claro will show about 600 hours from the 2018 Games live across its digital and pay-television platforms. Linear channel Claro Sports 2 will be dedicated entirely to the summer Games, with marquee events shown live and delayed on Claro Sports 1.

Non-exclusive pay-television rights are still available across Central America and Mexico, and are expected to be sold in private negotiations. Many consider media group Televisa, which owns pay-television operator Sky México, the favourite to acquire these rights.

Lessons learned

América Móvil's previous deal – for exclusive, platform-neutral rights to the 2014 and 2016 Games across Latin America, excluding Brazil – was worth \$110m (*TV Sports Markets* 17:7). América Móvil acted as a gatekeeper of the rights but had great difficulty sublicensing free-to-air rights.

This was especially true in Mexico, where the telco hoped to obtain a free-to-air broadcasting licence on the back of its Olympics deal – a hope that never became a reality.

In response to the telco's attempt to muscle in on the Mexican market, neither of the country's dominant commercial broadcasters, Televisa and Azteca, bid to sublicense any rights. They were eventually sold to public-service broadcaster Canal 22 and 26 Mexican regional free-to-air channels at a price well below market value.

América Móvil is thought to have met the IOC's broadcasting requirements for both Games, but lost a considerable amount of money. The minimum requirement is for 100 live hours of a winter Games, and 200 live hours of a summer Games.

With the previous cycle in mind, the IOC and IMG decided to rip up this gatekeeper model in the region and take full control of the free-to-air sales process for the 2018-2024 cycle. América Móvil's new deal will enable it to focus on its strengths: the exploitation of rights on pay-television, digital and mobile platforms.

Games theory

The IOC tendered rights to four Games – no bids could be made for a two-Games cycle – because it, and IMG, believed the 2018 and 2020 Games lacked value as a standalone package. The four-Games cycle ensured the rights on offer were worthy of strong bids.

The IOC's decision to ban joint bids, but allow unlimited sublicensing by winning bidders in the first round of bidding, led to a disappointing number of bids that each fell short of its financial expectations.

Sources believe many potential bidders chose to wait and seek sublicensing agreements with the winning bidder(s) rather than compete with them directly.

As a result, the IOC and IMG called a second round, modifying the sublicensing rule: winners of exclusive rights could only sublicense to one other player. This led to much greater competition.

Even though América Móvil won exclusive rights in two territories – Central America and South America – it will still be restricted to sublicensing rights to one company.

It is thought it will choose a pay-television broadcaster in South America instead of a digital platform across both regions, as this will better enable it to monetise the rights.

For the IOC, this method of sale provided a clear primary pay-television partner with which it could then negotiate a carriage and production deal for the Olympic Channel.

Experts believe this tender was informative about IMG's plans in the region.

It will soon be selling rights to South American club football competitions the Copa Libertadores and Copa Sudamericana. Many feel the Olympics tender sent a clear message to the market: interested parties will be forced to compete, and their ability to co-operate will be limited.

Next steps

Free-to-air sales for 2018 are ongoing, though the appeal of the winter Games is limited across the region. The IOC and IMG are prioritising the sale of free-to-air rights for the 2020 summer Games.

As these Games are in a poor time zone, the IOC and IMG are debating whether to sell 2020 and 2024 rights as a single package in countries with competitive free-to-air sectors.

América Móvil does not plan to sublicense any rights to the 2018 Games as it has little time to do so – the Games will begin on February 9. Instead, the telco will focus on sublicensing rights to 2020, 2022 and 2024. ♦

OLYMPIC GAMES

Rai strikes deal with Discovery for Olympic Games rights in Italy

By Frank Dunne

- Rai to pay €55m for rights in Italy to the 2018 and 2020 Olympic Games
- Fee is similar to the amount Rai offered as part of an EBU bid for exclusive rights in Italy
- Discovery will go it alone in Spain for 2018, but talks continue with TVE for 2020 rights

Italian public-service broadcaster Rai is understood to be close to a sublicensing deal with Discovery Communications to acquire rights to the 2018 and 2020 Olympic Games.

The deal is thought to be worth about €55m (\$65m), with the 2020 summer Games in Tokyo accounting for about €40m of the total.

Rai's board was expected to approve the deal late this week. The broadcaster had held out for over 18 months against what it saw as an exorbitant asking price from US media group Discovery. In April, Rai threatened to pull out of negotiations, describing the difference between the two sides as "unbridgeable".

The fee is higher, on a per-Games basis, than that offered by Rai as part of the 2015 bid for rights across Europe by the European Broadcasting Union (*TV Sports Markets* 19:20). Rai bid as part of a block with TVE and TRT, the public-service broadcasters of Spain and Turkey respectively. The three bid a total of €200m for rights to four Games, from 2018 to 2024. Of this, it is thought Rai's contribution would have accounted for between €80m and €100m.

The new deal is arguably a better one for Rai than the one it struck for the last two Games. Rights to 2014 and 2016 in Italy were acquired by pay-television operator Sky Italia for €152m, split €62m for 2014 and €90m for 2016 (*TV Sports Markets* 12:19). In 2013, Sky sublicensed live rights to the 2016 Games, plus highlights of the 2014 Games, to Rai in a deal worth about €65m.

No exclusivity

Rai will show at least 100 hours of live coverage from Pyeongchang next year and at least 200 hours from Tokyo in 2020. This will include coverage of almost all events relevant to an Italian audience.

One major benefit for Rai is that Discovery has not carved out any sports disciplines for exclusive coverage on its pay-television channel Eurosport, as it has done in several other territories.

The winter and summer Games are protected for free-to-air coverage by Italian listed-events legislation. Although Discovery has its own free-to-air channels in Italy – such as digital-terrestrial channel Dmax – Rai was always considered the favourite to win the rights. Discovery is not thought to have had substantive talks with any other broadcaster.

Eurosport is carried on the two main Italian pay-television platforms, Sky Italia and Mediaset Premium. Talks to renew carriage deals with both operators – covering the period in which the next two Games take place – are in progress and expected to be finalised before Christmas.

In addition to coverage on Eurosport – which will include one channel dedicated entirely to Italian athletes – Rai's exclusivity will be limited by the deal Discovery struck with telco TIM in July. This deal, worth about €15m, made TIM the official mobile broadcaster in Italy for the 2018 and 2020 Games (*TV Sports Markets* 21:13).

The company's TIMvision subscription streaming service will carry a bespoke Olympic channel with news and highlights targeted at an Italian audience, but will show no live coverage. TIMvision, which has about 1m subscribers, will also carry the Eurosport Player OTT service, which includes access to the Eurosport 1 and Eurosport 2 channels.

In June 2015, Discovery acquired Olympic Games rights in 50 European territories in a four-Games deal with the International Olympic Committee, from 2018 to 2024, worth a total of €1.3bn (*TV Sports Markets* 19:13).

Rai's pot of cash

One possible reason for the sudden softening in Rai's negotiation position with Discovery is the national football team's failure to qualify for the 2018 Fifa World Cup. Rai had budgeted about €130m for the event, but the value of the rights dropped by at least half last month when Italy was beaten by Sweden in a World Cup qualifying play-off match.

According to local sources, Rai may not spend any of the €130m on the World Cup. Football's global governing body Fifa and its Italian sales agent MP & Silva identified a preferred buyer for the rights – thought to be Mediaset – and entered discussions about a long-form agreement last week.

The extra funds would strengthen Rai's position in the bidding for rights to at least two other properties: the Uefa Champions League and Formula One.

Rai wants to sublicense free-to-air rights to one Champions League match per match-week in the next cycle, from 2018-19 to 2020-21. Sky will pay €275m per season for all Champions League rights. Rai is reported to have offered Sky €40m per season, which the pay-television broadcaster has so far refused. Sky agreed its deal with Uefa in June (*TV Sports Markets* 21:11).

The public-service broadcaster is also in talks with Formula One Management, the sport's commercial rights-holder, about a renewal of its contract for the next three years.

Rights in Italy are currently shared: Rai has live rights to nine races per year and all other races on a delayed basis, while Sky shows all 20 races per year live. Both deals expired at the end of the 2017 season. Sky wants greater exclusivity in a new cycle from 2018 onward, but Rai wants to continue showing at least those races which take place in favourable time zones.

Both Rai and Sky are said to be monitoring F1's discussions with Italian team Ferrari before signing a new deal. Last month, Ferrari president Sergio Marchionne said the company could quit the championship from 2020 in response to plans by the sport's owners, US media group Liberty Media, to make changes to the championship from 2021, including introducing a budget cap and new governance structure.

No deal in Spain

It is understood Discovery has given up trying to agree a deal with Spanish public-service broadcaster TVE for rights to the 2018 winter Games. Talks will continue for 2020 and it is thought the two sides are close to an agreement.

The winter Games are not hugely popular in Spain. Discovery is understood to have budgeted to earn between €2m and €3m from any sublicensing deal for 2018 only. By showing the Games on its Dmax free-to-air channel it should earn about this amount from advertising revenue and improved carriage fees. As TVE is unwilling to pay a premium for these rights, local experts say it makes sense for Discovery to use the event to boost its own channel brands.

TVE paid €70m for rights to the 2014 and 2016 Games at a time when Madrid was still in the running to host the Games in 2016. ♦

FOOTBALL

Mediaset beats free-to-air rivals as World Cup value falls in Spain

By Robin Jellis

- Mediaset to pay between €33m and €34m for rights in Spain to the 2018 World Cup
- This is less than the €40m Fifa earned from Mediaset and Mediapro for the 2014 World Cup
- It is a substantial decrease on the €90m Prisa paid for rights to the 2010 tournament

Spanish commercial broadcaster Mediaset acquired all rights to the 2018 Fifa World Cup in a deal worth at least 15 per cent less than Fifa earned for 2014.

Mediaset will pay between €33m (\$39.1m) and €34m for rights to all 64 matches. The deal is yet to be signed off. The 2018 tournament will run from June 14 to July 15.

Fifa, football's global governing body, earned close to €40m in Spain for rights to all matches from the 2014 tournament. Then, Mediaset acquired rights to 25 matches on free-to-air for about €30m. Agency Mediapro acquired rights to all matches – 39 of which were exclusive, 25 non-exclusive – for close to €10m. It exploited the rights on its digital-terrestrial channel Gol. These deals were agreed in June 2013.

The decrease in fee comes despite the improvement in the Spanish television advertising market, which is currently worth between €2.2bn and €2.3bn. This is a recovery from a low of about €1.7bn in 2013, but still a long way from its 2007 peak of €3.47bn.

Commercial broadcasters Atresmedia and Mediaset are generally conservative when bidding for sports rights, usually offering only what they can recoup from advertising revenue.

Fifa's new deal represents a second successive fall in the value of World Cup rights in Spain. Rights to the 2010 World Cup were acquired by media group Prisa for €95m (*TV Sports Markets* 15:23). Prisa subsequently sublicensed rights to 22 of the 64 matches to Mediaset for about €35m (*TV Sports Markets* 17:11).

Spanish struggle for Fifa

On March 30, Fifa launched a tender for rights to the 2017 Confederations Cup, the 2018 men's World Cup and the 2019 women's World Cup. Bids were due on May 2. Mediapro acquired rights to the Confederations Cup only in June.

Mediaset's new deal covers the men's World Cup only. Rights to the women's World Cup will be sold in the coming months. There is understood to have been little interest in these rights from Spain's major free-to-air broadcasters.

Following its tender, Fifa held direct talks with broadcasters. The governing body is understood to have sought a minimum of €35m for rights to all men's World Cup matches.

Fifa initially carved out a package of 27 matches for a free-to-air broadcaster. It is understood to have received bids of less than €20m from each of Atresmedia, Mediaset and public-service broadcaster TVE for these rights. There was little interest from pay-television broadcasters.

Fifa declined to sell the rights for so little and continued negotiations with broadcasters. Broadcasters were prepared to make offers closer to Fifa's expectations once the qualification of the Spanish team was guaranteed in October.

Atresmedia and TVE are both understood to have offered between €22m and €25m in a second round. Most local experts believe this is the most that could be recouped from selling advertising around World Cup coverage.

TVE was not overly aggressive after spending much of its sports-rights budget in a deal with football's European governing body Uefa. It will show all 40 European Qualifier and Nations League matches of the Spanish team, from 2018-19 to 2021-22, in a deal worth between €96m and €100m over the period (*TV Sports Markets* 21:18).

TVE has not broadcast the World Cup since the 1998 tournament. Mediaset has shown the last two World Cups, in 2010 and 2014, and the last two European Championships, in 2012 and 2016.

Not following Uefa's lead

For major events like the World Cup, broadcasters usually want as much lead-in time as possible. Long-term planning gives them promotional benefits and helps them maximise advertising revenues.

But one local source said the longer a broadcaster waits until the start of an event the better it can react to the local advertising market, potentially offering higher fees if the market has grown.

Rather than letting talks drag on, Fifa is thought to have closed the deal this month in order to avoid Uefa's predicament when it sold rights to Euro 2016.

CAA Eleven, Uefa's sales agent for its national team competitions, struck a deal for Euro 2016 less than a month before the tournament took place. It sold rights to 23 matches to Mediaset for €28m, but failed to sell rights to the other 28 matches and ended up streaming these on the Uefa website (*TV Sports Markets* 20:9).

This represented a significant drop on the €70m Uefa had earned from Mediaset for rights to all matches at the Euro 2012 tournament (*TV Sports Markets* 16:7).

The outcome of the World Cup negotiations is regarded by most local rights experts as a reasonable one for Fifa. The governing body has suffered a fall in value compared to 2014, but has guaranteed revenue ahead of the tournament and will likely benefit from free-to-air exposure of all matches.

World Cup coverage in Spain

Mediaset is yet to announce its coverage plans for the 2018 tournament. It will likely show major matches on its flagship Telecinco channel, with less attractive matches shown on its commercial Cuatro channel and/or digital-terrestrial channel Be Mad.

For the 2014 tournament, Mediaset earned an average of 5.569m viewers and a 39.7-per-cent share across Telecinco and Cuatro.

This was only slightly lower than its ratings for the 2010 tournament, when its channels had an average audience of 6.325m, a share of 44.6 per cent.

As part of its new deal with Fifa, Mediaset is understood to have the right to sublicense World Cup rights to other broadcasters. Any sublicensing deal would need to be approved by Fifa.

Insiders say it will be difficult for Mediaset to sublicense these rights given the limited interest in World Cup rights from pay-television broadcasters in Fifa's original tender.

The main reason for this limited interest, especially from pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports and telco Telefónica, is thought to be the impending sale of domestic rights to Spain's LaLiga. A tender is expected in the first half of 2018. The current cycle runs from 2016-17 to 2018-19 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:23).

Several local experts also pointed out Telefónica appears to be less interested in buying non-domestic football rights. It did not bid for Italian Serie A rights when they were on the market, nor did it attempt to renew its third-party Uefa European Qualifier rights.

The telco is, however, understood to be close to finalising a new deal for Formula One rights, from 2018 onward. Its current two-year deal, covering 2016 and 2017, is worth close to €70m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 18:6).

Fifa's European rights sales

A deal for the 2018 World Cup in Spain was one of the last missing pieces in Fifa's European rights-sales jigsaw.

In March 2012, Fifa awarded rights to the 2018 and 2022 World Cups in 37 European territories to the European Broadcasting Union, the consortium of public-service broadcasters, for between €310m and €315m (*TV Sports Markets* 16:7).

This deal excluded rights in: Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Italy; Norway; Russia; Spain; Sweden; and the UK. Separate deals have now been struck in all these territories apart from Italy and Russia.

In Italy, Fifa and the MP & Silva agency are still trying to sell the rights (*TV Sports Markets* 21:21). In Russia – the host nation – talks between Fifa and local free-to-air broadcasters have been dragging on for many months.

Spanish Club World Cup deal

In a separate negotiation, TVE acquired rights to the ongoing 2017 Club World Cup for about €1m. This is flat on the fee it paid in 2016, and the price paid by Mediaset in 2015 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:20).

Global Club World Cup rights are sold by the Dentsu agency. Atresmedia is thought to have bid, but its offer was much lower than TVE's. Interest in Club World Cup rights is driven by the participation of Spanish clubs. Real Madrid is playing in this year's tournament.

The 2017 tournament is taking place in the United Arab Emirates, meaning matches kick off at a better time for Spanish audiences than in 2016, when the tournament was in Japan. ♦

TV INDIA

Star set for legal challenge if IPL is added to Indian listed events

By David Cook

India's listed-events legislation is expected to widen to include the Indian Premier League early next year, a move likely to prompt a legal challenge from Star India.

Media reports claim India's Ministry for Information and Broadcasting is working on a proposal to ensure the T20 cricket competition can be shown by public-service broadcaster Doordarshan, which is operated by state body Prasar Bharati.

The IPL would be added to the 'Sports Broadcasting (Mandatory Sharing with Prasar Bharati) Act, 2007', which provides "access to the largest number of listeners and viewers, on a free-to-air basis, of sporting events of national importance through mandatory sharing of sports broadcasting signals with Prasar Bharati".

Pay-television broadcaster Star agreed a deal for global IPL rights in September, worth \$2.55bn (£2.14bn) over the five years from 2018 to 2022 (*TV Sports Markets* 21:16). The vast majority of the value of the deal is for rights in India.

What is covered?

Currently, private broadcasters must share rights with Doordarshan to: all Test, One Day International and T20 International cricket matches played by the Indian men's team; and the semi-finals and finals of the men's cricket World Cup and Champions Trophy.

Other events on the current list include: the summer Olympic Games; the Commonwealth Games; the Paralympic Games; all Davis Cup tennis matches featuring India; the finals of men's and women's singles matches from all tennis grand slams; hockey World Cup matches featuring India; and the semi-finals, final, and opening match of the FIFA World Cup.

This year's FIFA U-17 World Cup in India was also shared with Doordarshan.

Events can be added to the list at any time and the law requires the MIB to review the list at least once every year, usually in February. An event's place on the list must be renewed every four years, though it can be withdrawn earlier.

Broadcasters that hold the rights of events added to the Act are compensated. Both the rights-holder and Doordarshan sell advertising around the coverage. This revenue is split 75:25 in favour of the broadcaster losing exclusivity over its rights. Doordarshan keeps the remaining 25 per cent.

What happens to the application?

When the MIB makes an application to add an event to the list there is no official process and there is no vote. The application is not sent to any independent organisation.

The MIB consults with Prasar Bharati and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports but ultimately acts unilaterally.

What can Star do?

Private broadcasters cannot stop the MIB adding to the list, but can legally challenge the decision. After an event is added to the Act, Doordarshan can immediately broadcast coverage.

Should the IPL be added to the list and Star choose to oppose the decision, the case would be taken to the High Court of Delhi and then to the Supreme Court of India if either party were to appeal. During this process, Star could ask for the IPL's addition to the list to be postponed.

An executive at Star India told *TV Sports Markets*: “Star India would have judicial recourse, as these notifications are subject to review by the courts and may be struck down if no basis is established. Personally, I can't see how this can be allowed, given that this is a private, domestic tournament which cannot be equated with say, a World Cup.”

The source added: “While I cannot comment on the strategy at Star India in the event the IPL is indeed added to the list, the recent judgment of the Supreme Court, excluding private networks from the ambit of retransmission, will certainly play a role in any position that Star may take.”

Consultant Arunava Chaudhuri said: “Star could argue in principle about the fact they never knew this could happen when they bought the rights, but in practicality, there is no argument. They are part of the Indian ecosystem and they know the rules.”

Star has challenged an extension of the Act before. Together with the Board of Control for Cricket in India, Star contested whether India's Test matches classify as a matter of national importance. Star has global BCCI rights over six seasons, from 2012-13 to 2017-18, for which it pays a total of \$751m (*TV Sports Markets* 16:7).

Star and the BCCI were unsuccessful with their challenge. The original case was filed by the Nimbus Communications agency in 2007, which held BCCI rights at that time. Star intervened in 2013.

Aahna Mehrotra, a consultant for sports, law and management, said: “Given the stance of the Delhi High Court, it is unlikely an appeal would find success before the courts. Star India and the BCCI also did not contest the High Court's decision on the said point before the Supreme Court.”

It is thought the BCCI would support Star should it wish to make a challenge to the IPL application. The BCCI had not replied to requests for comment when *TV Sports Markets* went to print.

Doordarshan now off cable networks

The impact of an event being listed has weakened since the 2015 High Court of Delhi ruling that Doordarshan can broadcast sporting events on its own terrestrial network and direct-to-home platform, but that its coverage should be unavailable on pay-television platforms.

India's pay-television penetration rate is thought to be around 80 per cent. Doordarshan's DTH platform is thought to have about 22m subscribers. India has a population of almost 1.4bn.

That pay-television subscribers could previously access Doordarshan coverage of major events was a serious problem for broadcasters. When it held BCCI rights, Nimbus suffered lasting damage from the introduction of the Act. Viewers were left with little reason to subscribe to Nimbus' Neo Sports pay-television channels when they could watch matches on Doordarshan for free.

While some said this could mean Star may privately be less opposed to sharing the coverage than it would have been previously, one local broadcast source told *TV Sports Markets*: "Even if Doordarshan is not on cable networks, revenues are still likely to fall. Exclusivity is diluted and distribution revenues contribute more than 50 per cent of revenue in the sports industry. If I'm a Star subscriber, I could just not subscribe for two months where I have access to Doordarshan channels."

Despite the lack of exclusivity, the value of BCCI rights was not particularly affected in the current cycle and has remained high, partially because Star's coverage is available in Hindi. Hindi is the most commonly-spoken language in India.

National importance or national popularity?

Should Star contest the issue, the courts will have to consider whether the IPL's nationwide popularity is the same as being an event of national importance.

Sports, media and entertainment lawyer Roshan Gopalakrishna said: "With the IPL, it's more to do with people's connection with cricket rather than the cricket being played.

"They may say the public's interest to watch games is more important than a private broadcaster's interest to protect itself. I'm actually a little surprised it's taken them this long to address it. You could see from season four or five of the IPL [2011 & 2012] that it had become at least as popular as India matches."

One source said: "The IPL is a franchise-based league and to call it an event of national importance would be a stretch. No matter how popular private events become, they shouldn't be on the list."

The MIB did not respond to a request for comment from *TV Sports Markets*. ♦

FOOTBALL

SuperSport dashes Econet hopes with key Champions League deal

By Callum McCarthy

- SuperSport will pay at least \$150m per season for Champions League rights in Africa
- Uefa still has French-language rights to sell across the region in the 2018-2021 cycle
- SuperSport's current Champions League-Europa League deal is worth \$130m per season

Renewing Uefa Champions League rights has cemented SuperSport's place as the leading pay-television sports broadcaster in sub-Saharan Africa for at least the next four years.

SuperSport will pay in excess of \$150m (€126.5m) per season for exclusive, platform-neutral English- and Portuguese-language rights to the Champions League across sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa. The new deal will run for three seasons, from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

In its current deal, SuperSport acquired Champions League and Europa League rights for a combined fee of \$130m per season. This deal, also for English- and Portuguese-language rights, runs for three seasons, from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 17:21).

The value of the current deal is thought to be split about 85:15 between the Champions League and Europa League, implying Uefa – football's European governing body – has increased the value of its English- and Portuguese-language Champions League rights by more than 35 per cent in the new deal.

SuperSport won the rights in the first round of bidding, and its aggression is understood to have caught sports broadcaster Kwesé Sports, its main rival, off guard. Kwesé, which is owned by telco Econet, has long prioritised acquiring at least some Champions League rights outside South Africa.

Pay-television operator StarTimes is also thought to have made a strong offer.

One informed source said Uefa held informal discussions with South African and sub-Saharan African telcos about potential bids, but that these talks were no more than exploratory.

Uefa and Team Marketing, Uefa's exclusive sales agent for its club competition rights, issued a tender for the Champions League and Europa League across sub-Saharan Africa on October 13, with first-round bids due on November 23.

A second round of bidding for Europa League rights in the new cycle closed on December 2. It is thought Uefa will award the rights before Christmas without going to a third round.

Uefa is also thought to be close to completing a separate deal for exclusive, platform-neutral French-language rights to the Champions League and Europa League with pay-television operator Canal Plus. Neither SuperSport nor Kwesé bid for French-language rights.

Canal Plus currently pays about \$10m per season for French-language Champions League and Europa League rights in a three-season deal, from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 21:19).

Two Uefa packages

The tender for English- and Portuguese-language rights consisted of two packages.

Package A contained exclusive platform-neutral rights to all but one match per match-week: the first-pick match on each Wednesday. Rights to this match would have been non-exclusive.

Package B contained non-exclusive, platform-neutral rights to the Wednesday first-pick match each match-week.

Unlike other recent tenders for premium football rights in the region, there was no territorial split. Rights in South Africa and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa had to be acquired together. There were also no free-to-air obligations placed on the winning bidder of either package.

Local experts say this put Kwesé at a slight disadvantage given it does not own a broadcast licence in South Africa.

The structure of the tender also encouraged bidders to pay a premium to acquire both packages, as Package B contained a marquee match.

Blow for Kwesé

SuperSport's exclusive ownership of Champions League rights almost completely restricts Kwesé to lower-tier club football rights.

One local expert described Kwesé's prospective portfolio of football rights as being "B+", at best". It holds one English Premier League match per week, no Champions League football and no Confederation of African Football rights. This will restrict its ability to attract pay-television subscribers.

It is thought Kwesé TV subscriber growth has been slow over the first 12 months of its existence, partly due to protracted negotiations with regulators in many territories, but also because most of Kwesé's premium sports content is currently available on its free-to-air Kwesé Sports Free channel, or on affiliated free-to-air broadcasters across the region.

Romance of the cup rekindled

While Kwesé missed out on its main objective of Champions League rights, the sports broadcaster is understood to have acquired exclusive English-language rights to the English FA Cup across sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) for six seasons, from 2018-19 to 2023-24.

It is thought Kwesé will pay a marginal increase on the \$12.5m per season paid by SuperSport in the current six-season cycle, from 2012-13 to 2017-18, in a deal which also covered South Africa (*TV Sports Markets* 16:1). SuperSport's deal also includes rights to England friendly matches, which are of substantially less value than the FA Cup. These are excluded from Kwesé's deal.

The Kwesé deal was completed with the IMG agency, which holds rights to the competition in all territories outside Western Europe and the Middle East and North Africa in a six-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2023-24, worth a total of \$730m (*TV Sports Markets* 20:19).

The deal is thought to be the first FA Cup agreement completed since IMG acquired the rights in October 2016. Negotiations in sub-Saharan Africa have been protracted (*TV Sports Markets* 21:3).

IMG initially sought about \$30m per season from sub-Saharan Africa – \$5m per season more than Kwesé's bid in the international tender process run by the English Football Association, which operates the competition.

This asking price was gradually reduced over the course of several months. IMG is now thought to be seeking total earnings of about \$17m to \$18m per season, including yet-to-be-completed deals for English-language rights in South Africa and French-language rights across the region.

Kwesé now holds rights to the FA Cup, the English League Cup, and the English Football League across sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), as well as one free-to-air Premier League match per match-week, for a cumulative price of about \$27m per season. ♦

FOOTBALL

SuperSport halts telco ambitions with Premier Soccer League deal

By Callum McCarthy

- SuperSport to pay ZAR800m-ZAR850m per season for Premier Soccer League rights
- Five-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2023-24, halts local telco ambition for sports rights
- SuperSport's current PSL deal, in 2016-17 and 2017-18, worth about ZAR675m per season

SuperSport last week agreed a five-season deal to retain global rights to South Africa's Premier Soccer League, defeating an unlikely competitor.

Local experts believe pay-television broadcaster SuperSport will pay between ZAR800m (€49.6m/\$59m) and ZAR850m per season over its five-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2023-24. SuperSport will also cover production costs of about ZAR200m per season on top of its fee.

Telco Vodacom, in its first attempt to acquire sports rights in South Africa, is understood to have submitted a strong bid for platform-neutral rights to the top-tier PSL across sub-Saharan Africa. The telco's unexpected bid has generated excitement and scepticism among rights-holders and local industry executives.

Some feel Vodacom's bid is a watershed moment for the South African sports-rights market, and will herald further aggression from the country's telcos. Others feel SuperSport's grip on the market remains as tight as ever and view Vodacom's bid as opportunistic.

Regardless, Vodacom's activity has produced a good result for the PSL, forcing SuperSport to pay more than it might have expected. The new deal represents an increase of between 18 and 26 per cent on the value of the broadcaster's current two-season deal, covering 2017-18 and 2018-19, worth about ZAR675m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 21:21).

As with SuperSport's current and previous agreements, the new deal is expected to significantly increase in value from season to season. SuperSport's previous five-season deal, from 2012-13 to 2016-17, was worth an average of ZAR377m per season. It increased in value by about ZAR86m from 2014-15 to 2015-16.

SuperSport will continue to hold exclusive pay-television and digital rights to the league and its cup competitions, but its obligation to sublicense key matches – including all matches involving popular South African clubs Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates – will remain.

SuperSport will also be expected to sublicense matches from the country's three domestic cup competitions: the Nedbank Cup (professional and amateur clubs); the Telkom Knockout (all PSL clubs); and the MTN8 (the top eight teams from the previous PSL season).

Public-service broadcaster SABC has sublicensed free-to-air PSL rights from SuperSport since the first season of the pay-television broadcaster's original deal in 2007-08, and is almost certain to do so again in the new cycle. SABC produces all matches shown on its channels.

Attack the best form of defence

Retaining PSL rights was vital for SuperSport to remain the dominant pay-television sports broadcaster in South Africa.

The PSL appeals mainly to South Africans of a lower socio-economic status, and is available via a subscription to pay-television operator DSTV's cheapest pay-television sports package, 'Compact', which costs ZAR365 per month. DSTV is the exclusive carrier of all SuperSport channels.

A subscription to DSTV's 'Premium' package, which provides access to SuperSport's coverage of the English Premier League and South African rugby and cricket, costs ZAR789 per month.

Compact subscribers, usually of a lower middle-class background, are a key market for advertisers and sponsors. There is greater competition at this mid-range price point.

Rival operators and OTT players prefer to compete with DSTV for lower-tier subscribers as the content required to compete is less costly than premium content such as the Premier League or the Uefa Champions League.

Telcos such as Vodacom, Telkom, MTN and Cell C are thought to be increasingly keen to add sports rights to their mobile offerings and, in the case of Cell C, its existing OTT offering.

Vodacom is understood to have wanted to use PSL rights as the foundation for a new IPTV or OTT service, providing it with a key differentiator in a crowded South African OTT market.

OTT services in South Africa include: Netflix; tech company Amazon's Prime service; ShowMax (owned by SuperSport and DSTV parent company Naspers); Cell C's OTT service Black (which launched on November 14); and telco Econet's Kwesé Play IPTV service (which launched in September).

None of these services carry premium sport and local experts believe Vodacom could have built a successful OTT service of its own should it have won.

It was not expected to create a pay-television service as this would have required a protracted licence application to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, which has historically been reluctant to grant broadcast licences.

Vodacom would also have used PSL rights to improve its mobile offering, persuading customers to buy more expensive data packages. One expert said it could have prompted the telco to offer the country's first unlimited mobile data plan – it currently offers a maximum of 30GB per month at a sim-only price of ZAR379 per month.

Historic lack of competition

Competition in South Africa for premium sports rights has been all but non-existent since the creation of SuperSport in 1995, and rights-holders are hopeful the country's telcos will become more aggressive.

But local executives are doubtful the telcos have either the appetite or expertise to compete with SuperSport for premium rights. The most outwardly aggressive, Cell C, is considered naïve in its ambitions to take premium sport from SuperSport in South Africa, and lacks rights-acquisition expertise.

Other telcos, such as MTN and Telkom, are understood to be more interested in agreeing sponsorship deals than buying media rights. ♦

FOOTBALL

LeSports suffers hefty loss on sale of World Cup in Hong Kong

By David Cook

- PCCW buys rights in Hong Kong to the 2018 World Cup from LeSports for about \$40m
- LeSports had originally acquired 2018 rights in the country from Infront for \$70m
- The sublicensing deal is part of LeSports' plans to close its operation in the country

Digital streaming service LeSports has sold on its Fifa World Cup 2018 rights in Hong Kong at a significant discount as it plans to cease operations in the territory.

Telco PCCW will pay LeSports about \$40m (€33.6m) for rights to all 64 matches. This is 43-per-cent less than the \$70m LeSports paid the Infront agency for these rights in 2015 (*TV Sports Markets* 21:20).

Infront sold the rights in Hong Kong as part of its deal with Fifa, football's global governing body (*TV Sports Markets* 19:6).

LeSports has been winding down its global operations as it struggles with its own financial problems and those of parent company LeEco. LeEco had \$182m of its assets frozen by a Shanghai court in July due to unpaid loans. LeSports has already lost several sports properties due to missed payments.

Experts said LeSports overvalued the rights. Its \$70m fee was not seen as a genuine reflection of the Hong Kong market.

It is understood LeSports had not missed any payments for the World Cup rights before agreeing the sublicensing deal with PCCW. Four out of five payments had been made, but LeSports decided in the summer it would look to sell on the rights. More than one other broadcaster expressed an interest in buying the rights.

It is likely LeSports is selling the rights ahead of closing its operations in Hong Kong as the digital streaming service is seeking any additional revenue it can to pay off its debts.

LeSports retains rights to two other major properties in the country: the English Premier League and the NBA.

The digital streaming service pays just under \$130m per season for its Premier League rights over three seasons, from 2016-17 to 2018-19 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:17). LeSports shows all matches, but sublicensed non-exclusive rights to all matches to PCCW for about \$65m per season.

LeSports pays \$21.5m per season for NBA rights in the country over five seasons, from 2016-17 to 2020-21 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:16).

PCCW to split World Cup coverage

PCCW will exploit the rights via its pay-television service Now TV and free-to-air Viu TV channels. Now TV will show all 64 matches live, while Viu TV will show live coverage of 19 matches, including the opening match of the tournament between Russia and Saudi Arabia, two semi-finals and the final.

LeSports had to sublicense at least the opening match of the tournament and the final to a free-to-air broadcaster, as demanded by Fifa.

Viu TV can choose to show matches on either its English- or Cantonese-language channels, with the latter thought more likely as it has a greater audience share and advertisers are expected to show more interest in airtime on that channel.

PCCW has about 1m pay-television subscribers across various packages. It has about 300,000 subscribers to its Now Sports premium channels.

PCCW's 2018 fee is closer to the value in Hong Kong for rights to the 2014 World Cup. These were held by commercial broadcaster TVB in a deal worth just under \$40m (*TV Sports Markets* 17:10).

One local expert said TVB made a loss on the rights as the tournament failed to generate the subscriber growth it had expected for its pay-television channels.

The 2014 fee was up 14 per cent on the combined \$35m paid for the 2010 World Cup by TVB, pay-television broadcaster i-Cable and free-to-air broadcaster ATV.

More international football on the table

TV Sports Markets understands rights to Uefa national-team competitions have been tendered in Hong Kong and Macau. I-Cable currently holds rights to European Qualifiers in Hong Kong over four seasons, from 2014-15 to 2017-18. LeSports bought rights in the country to Euro 2016 from MP & Silva. Rights to these two properties in Macau were held by the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union. ♦

FOOTBALL

Uefa club competitions to move fully to pay-television in Greece

By David Svenson

- Cosmote buys exclusive Champions League & Europa League rights for €31.7m per season
- No free-to-air coverage in Greece for either competition in new cycle, 2018-19 to 2020-21
- These rights are currently worth €38.3m per season in current 2015-16 to 2017-18 cycle

The value of Uefa Champions League and Europa League rights in Greece is set to fall in its new cycle despite rights being sold exclusively to pay-television broadcaster Cosmote last week.

Cosmote will pay about €31.7m (\$37.5m) per season for exclusive rights to all Champions League and Europa League matches from 2018-19 to 2020-21. This is a decrease of about 17 per cent on the current cycle, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, in which Cosmote and public-service broadcaster ERT pay a total of about €38.3m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:22).

Cosmote currently pays about €35m per season for exclusive rights to the Europa League, and near-exclusive rights to the Champions League – ERT pays about €3.3m per season for non-exclusive rights to the Wednesday first-pick Champions League match (*TV Sports Markets* 18:19).

The value in the new cycle will be close to the €32.3m per season average paid by three broadcasters in the previous cycle, from 2012-13 to 2014-15.

Then, pay-television broadcaster Nova held non-exclusive rights to both competitions for between €18m and €19m per season. ERT paid €10.8m per season for first-pick Champions League matches on Wednesdays, the final and the Super Cup. Commercial broadcaster Antenna held rights to the first-pick Europa League match for about €3m per season.

A three-day process

Uefa, European football's governing body, and Team Marketing, Uefa's exclusive sales agent for its club competitions, saw presentations from interested broadcasters on November 20, with first-round bids due on December 6 (*TV Sports Markets* 21:20).

After receiving first-round bids, Uefa asked for second-round bids to be made the following day. Cosmote overcame a strong challenge from Nova, which is owned by telco Forthnet. Nova is thought to have bid up to €30m per season for all rights. Antenna is also thought to have bid.

Public-service broadcaster ERT also made it to the second round. It is thought to have bid about €4m per season for free-to-air rights to one Champions League match per match-week.

However, Cosmote was adamant it wanted exclusive rights and the price it was willing to pay could not be matched by any other bidders. Cosmote is under no obligation to sublicense any matches to a free-to-air broadcaster and is highly unlikely to do so.

In acquiring exclusive rights, Cosmote will be hoping to further increase its subscriber base beyond that of its main rival, Nova.

In October 2014, when the existing Uefa deal was agreed, Nova had about 500,000 subscribers, whereas Cosmote, then branded OTE, had about 320,000 subscribers. Over the past three years Cosmote has grown its subscriber base to just over 500,000, while Nova's has declined to about 420,000.

Cosmote's desire for exclusive Uefa club competition rights is thought to have been partly due to the breakdown in carriage negotiations with international sports broadcaster Eurosport.

Since October 1, Cosmote has been without access to the Eurosport channels, and is keen to enhance its current sports-rights portfolio in order to reduce any potential subscriber churn. Eurosport currently holds rights in the country to: cycling's Tour de France; Major League Soccer; the Olympic Games; and three of the four tennis grand slams (the Australian, French and US Opens).

Uefa is thought to have had few concerns about moving coverage exclusively to pay-television given Cosmote is the largest pay-television broadcaster in Greece.

The governing body had expected the value of its club competitions to decrease in a new cycle. In the last cycle, it benefitted from Cosmote's aggressive move to unseat Nova.

Qualifying problems

Uefa's changes to the Champions League and Europa League qualification criteria have made it harder for Greek teams to qualify. The changes mean clubs from nations that finish lower in the Uefa Association Coefficient Rankings are entered into the qualifying stages of both competitions at an earlier stage, reducing their chances of reaching the main competition.

Greece is currently 15th in the coefficient rankings. Uncertainty surrounding the involvement of Greek teams was a big factor in the decrease in value.

Greece is unlikely to finish lower than 15th in the coefficient rankings this year. If it drops to 16th next year it could have a big impact on the final season of the cycle, 2020-21. The changes mean only one domestic team from associations ranked 16th and 17th are entered into the Champions League qualifying phase, down from two. ♦

RUGBY UNION

TF1 buys 2019 World Cup rights after solving scheduling troubles

By Robin Jellis

- TF1 buys rights in France to the 2019 Japan Rugby World Cup for about €45m
- The commercial broadcaster paid €50m for rights to the 2015 UK tournament
- TF1 paid €40m for New Zealand 2011, also played in a bad time zone

French commercial broadcaster TF1 has acquired rights to the 2019 Rugby World Cup after taking up an option in its deal for the 2015 tournament, *TV Sports Markets* understands.

TF1 will pay about €45m (\$53m) for rights in France to the 2019 tournament, which will be held in Japan. TF1 is the long-term broadcaster of the Rugby World Cup in France.

The 2019 fee is slightly less than the €50m TF1 paid for rights to the 2015 Rugby World Cup, held in the UK – a far better time zone for French television audiences (*TV Sports Markets* 17:21).

But it is an increase on the €40m TF1 paid for rights to the 2011 Rugby World Cup held in New Zealand – also a bad time zone for French audiences and the most meaningful benchmark for its 2019 deal.

The new deal was agreed with Rugby World Cup Limited, the tournament organisers and a wholly-owned subsidiary of World Rugby, rugby union's global governing body. RWCL is advised on its global media-rights sales by the IMG agency.

As part of the deal, *TV Sports Markets* understands TF1 will have an option to acquire rights to the 2023 tournament, which will be held in France.

Scheduling difficulties delayed deal

The Rugby World Cup delivers strong audiences for TF1. For the final of the 2011 tournament, TF1 drew an audience of 15.389m, an 82.3-per-cent share.

During negotiations for 2019, there were multiple meetings between TF1 and RWCL as the two tried to agree on kick-off times for the tournament.

The hosting in Japan has thrown up scheduling problems for TF1, as evening matches will clash with TF1's daily news programme, *Le Journal de 13h*, broadcast between 1pm and 1.30pm French time.

Some kick-off slots have been moved to accommodate TF1, although this only applies to matches of major importance to the broadcaster – matches of the French team and the latter stages. France is World Rugby's second-most lucrative broadcast market after the UK.

RWCL's original French tender

In April 2012, RWCL launched a tender in France for rights to the 2015 and 2019 Rugby World Cups.

TF1 was awarded rights to the 2015 tournament, but its offer for rights to the 2019 tournament was rejected as too low. The 2015 deal included an option to acquire rights for 2019, which has now been activated

At the time of the tender, RWCL had hoped to take advantage of competition in the market following the launch of pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports.

Only the semi-final and final of the Rugby World Cup must be shown free-to-air in France in accordance with listed-events legislation, meaning a pay-television broadcaster could have held exclusive rights to most of the tournament. However, the six-week event was not considered a subscription driver and no pay-television broadcasters bid.

Option to sublicense

Under its deal, TF1 will act as the gatekeeper of all 48 Rugby World Cup matches in 2019. It is likely to sublicense some rights to another broadcaster.

TV Sports Markets understands TF1 must show a minimum of 20 matches from the tournament on its flagship TF1 channel. It could sublicense rights to all other matches, or show them on its other channels. TF1 shows some sport on its NT1 and TMC digital-terrestrial channels.

For the 2015 tournament, pay-television broadcaster Canal Plus sublicensed from TF1 the right to show 29 matches: 27 exclusively and two quarter-finals non-exclusively with TF1. The deal was worth close to €15m. TF1 retained the right to show all France matches, the quarter-finals, the semi-finals and the final (*TV Sports Markets* 19:2).

For the 2011 tournament, TF1 agreed sublicensing deals with Canal Plus and public-service broadcaster France Télévisions, covering 28 matches for a total of €13m. Both Canal Plus and France Télévisions simulcast each of the 28 matches. ♦

BASKETBALL

Videoland pays up for expanded NBA deal, sublicenses to Eleven

By David Cook

- Videoland buys NBA in Taiwan for just over \$10m per season, from 2017-18 to 2021-22
- In its previous deal, from 2014-15 to 2016-17, Videoland paid about \$6m per season
- Total NBA fees in 2014-15 and 2015-16 were \$8m; it earned \$8.75m in 2016-17

The NBA has increased its annual media-rights value in Taiwan via a new agreement with Videoland, which has subsequently sublicensed rights to Eleven Sports.

Pay-television broadcaster Videoland is paying just over \$10m (€8.4m) per season for NBA rights over five seasons, from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The deal includes rights to more than 425 games per season – about a third of NBA games. The deal has been active since the start of the 2017-18 season in October.

The NBA earned about \$8m per season in 2014-15 and 2015-16 for all its rights in the country, and about \$8.75m in the 2016-17 season. Videoland's increased fee in its new deal is put down to the increased amount of content it can show.

In the previous three-season cycle, from 2014-15 to 2016-17, Videoland paid about \$6m per season for rights to eight regular-season games per week (*TV Sports Markets* 20:21). Videoland sublicensed three games per week to digital operator Elta.

Pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports Asia paid about \$2m per year for rights to three games per week over the same three seasons in a separate deal with the NBA.

Pay-television broadcaster Eleven had digital rights for three games per week in the 2016-17 season in a deal worth about \$750,000. This package was Eleven's only way to acquire NBA rights, a key property in the country.

New sublicensing deal

Videoland is sublicensing matches to Eleven in the new cycle for the full five seasons. Videoland and Eleven agreed this before negotiating with the NBA about rights in a new cycle. Eleven will continue to show three games per week, though its deal now includes linear as well as digital rights. Videoland also has digital rights.

As a result of the expansion of its coverage, Eleven is thought to be paying significantly more per season than the \$750,000 it paid in 2016-17. Eleven shows three games per week: one on each of Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Videoland and Eleven choose which games to show separately. If both choose the same games they come to a mutual agreement as to which broadcaster shows which games.

On top of the regular-season games, both Videoland and Eleven will show the NBA All-Star game and games from the postseason, including the playoffs, conference finals and finals.

The NBA did not tender its rights in the new cycle. Videoland's deal was announced on December 7, and Eleven's deal was announced on December 8.

While Videoland and Eleven have been showing games since the start of the season, the deals were officially signed off just before they were announced. Up to that point, Videoland and Eleven had a verbal agreement with the NBA while final terms of the contract were being agreed.

Eleven targeting basketball in Taiwan

Basketball forms a key part of Eleven's strategy in Taiwan. The broadcaster also holds rights to International Basketball Federation (Fiba) events in an exclusive five-year deal, from 2017 to 2021, worth slightly less than \$200,000 per year (*TV Sports Markets* 21:13).

Danny Menken, Eleven's group managing director, told *TV Sports Markets* this week: "When you are new to a market, as we are, it is very important to have long-term deals in place, because then you know the property you're building is going to add value over time. If you have a short-term deal, it's very difficult to make it work.

"Basketball is the second-biggest sport in Taiwan, and the NBA is one of the top three properties."

The NBA sells cable, IPTV and digital rights separately in Taiwan. It is understood the NBA has held talks with telco Chunghwa Telecom about the IPTV rights. ♦



For the full interview with Danny Menken, visit
www.sportbusiness.com

RUGBY UNION

RTÉ forced to pay IRFU increase after loss of Six Nations rights

By Robin Jellis

- RTÉ to pay close to €2.5m per year to show Ireland autumn internationals, 2018 to 2021
- The broadcaster's current IRFU deal, from 2014 to 2017, is worth about €1.2m per year
- The IRFU is yet to sell rights in the UK; Sky currently pays about £3m per year

The Irish Rugby Football Union roughly doubled the value of domestic rights to Ireland autumn internationals in a deal with public-service broadcaster RTÉ, and is still to sell rights in the UK.

The IRFU, the governing body of rugby union in Ireland, agreed a four-year deal with RTÉ, from 2018 to 2021, worth close to €2.5m (\$3m) per year. The deal, agreed this month, covers either three or four Ireland Test matches each year. RTÉ will host broadcast these matches, as it does in its current deal.

A deal covering exclusive rights in the UK and non-exclusive rights in Ireland to the same matches is likely to be agreed by the IRFU in the coming months.

In the current four-year cycle, from 2014 to 2017, the IRFU earns about £4m (€4.5m/\$5.4m) per year for this set of rights from deals with RTÉ and pay-television broadcaster Sky (*TV Sports Markets* 18:20).

RTÉ is thought to pay about €1.2m per year for non-exclusive rights to Ireland autumn international Tests. Sky pays about £3m per year for exclusive rights in the UK and non-exclusive rights in Ireland to the same matches as RTÉ.

It is understood RTÉ was prepared to pay such a large increase following its loss of Six Nations rights.

In November 2015, commercial broadcaster TV3 agreed a four-year deal for Six Nations rights in Ireland, from 2018 to 2021, worth about €5m per year. This was a 100-per-cent increase on the €2.5m per year RTÉ paid in the previous four-year cycle, from 2014 to 2017 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:21).

The IRFU sales process was handled by Laurence St John's Bridge Television agency. No tender was issued for the rights. Talks were held with all major broadcasters in Ireland.

TV3 is not thought to have bid for the IRFU rights given its spend on Six Nations rights, a contract which begins in February next year. Irish-language broadcaster TG4 is not thought to have bid. It has a smaller sports-rights budget than free-to-air rivals RTÉ and TV3.

RTÉ's IRFU coverage

RTÉ will show Ireland matches on its free-to-air RTÉ2 channel and via on-demand streaming service RTÉ Player. RTÉ Player will also have 21-day catch-up coverage of all games, analysis and interviews. RTÉ will also exploit radio rights.

As part of the deal, RTÉ will have rights to Six Nations matches of the Ireland U-20 team and the final stages of the All-Ireland League club competition. RTÉ2 will also continue to show its rugby magazine programme, *Against The Head*.

IRFU rights in the UK

The IRFU still has just under a year to sell rights in the UK to Ireland's autumn international Tests.

Several local experts suggested that, in the new cycle, Sky will either offer a flat fee or try to reduce the fee it currently pays. This is predominantly because Sky's main pay-television rival, BT Sport, has little interest in the rights.

Irish pay-television broadcaster Eir Sport, which exclusively distributes the BT Sport channels in Ireland, is understood to have unsuccessfully encouraged BT to bid.

One local expert claimed the likeliest outcome was Sky retaining the rights it currently holds, or UK public-service broadcaster the BBC acquiring exclusive rights in the UK only. This latter option would mean RTÉ's rights in Ireland would be exclusive.

International rights

The IRFU is expected to agree a new deal for its international rights from 2019 onward next year.

Rights to Ireland autumn internationals outside the UK and Ireland are currently held by the Pitch International agency in a four-year deal, from 2015 to 2018, worth a minimum of about \$1m per year.

One rugby rights expert suggested Pitch was the likeliest buyer of the rights in a new cycle given it holds the international rights of most other rugby unions. ♦

FOOTBALL

MP & Silva sells football package to new Ukrainian player Megogo

By David Svenson

Video-on-demand service Megogo has made its first move into the Ukrainian sports-rights market with the acquisition of exclusive rights to three top European football leagues.

Megogo last month acquired rights to Italy's Serie A, France's Ligue 1 and Germany's Bundesliga in a single package deal with the MP & Silva agency. The deal is worth a total of just under €500,000 (\$590,000).

The package includes rights to the remainder of this season's Serie A, Ligue 1 and French Coupe de la Ligue competitions. It will hold Bundesliga rights for three seasons, from 2017-18 to 2019-20. Megogo also has an option to extend its Bundesliga deal to cover the 2020-21 season.

The package deal was originally agreed at the end of October, but it wasn't until November 3 that Megogo could broadcast coverage from all three leagues due to technical difficulties.

MP & Silva holds rights in Ukraine to all three football leagues in three separate deals. The agency holds Bundesliga rights as part of a wider 31-territory deal across Europe and Central Asia, from 2017-18 to 2020-21, worth about €40m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 20:14).

The agency also holds Serie A international rights in a deal worth €185.7m per season, from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 18:20).

MP & Silva is also in the final season of its deal to sell Ligue 1 rights in Europe. The agency distributes these rights on behalf of the league's international rights-holder, beIN Sports (*TV Sports Markets* 15:18).

Serie A and Ligue 1 have not been broadcast in the country for the past two seasons. The Bundesliga was broadcast by pay-television broadcaster Poverkhnost in 2015-16 and 2016-17, in a deal with the Sportsman Media Group agency.

Sportsman acquired rights in Russia, Ukraine and former CIS territories in these seasons from the Bundesliga for just over €2.5m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:22).

A future in sports rights?

Megogo is an international video-on-demand service specialising in entertainment, currently operating in 15 territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Estonia;

Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Lithuania; Moldova; Russia; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Ukraine; and Uzbekistan.

It will broadcast five matches per match-week from Ligue 1 this season, but it will be limited in its coverage of the Bundesliga and Serie A. Megogo is taking the feed from multi-territory sports broadcaster Setanta Sports Eurasia, which holds rights to both leagues across Eurasia. Megogo can only show matches Setanta covers as it is unable to take either league's international feed for technical reasons.

This is Megogo's first sports-rights acquisition. It will act as a relatively low-cost test for its future sports-rights strategy. It also allows MP & Silva to earn money from a difficult market.

Media Group Ukraine dominance

Ukraine's media-rights market is dominated by Media Group Ukraine, which holds rights to the most valuable sports properties in the country. It currently holds rights to the Uefa Champions League and Europa League, English Premier League and the Ukrainian Premier League (*TV Sports Markets* 18:18).

Media Group Ukraine has no interest in acquiring additional football content, making sales difficult – at least until now – for other football rights-holders. ♦



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DEALS ROUND-UP

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

FOOTBALL

- ◆ Hong Kong telco PCCW acquired rights to the 2018 Fifa World Cup ([page 22](#)).
- ◆ The Saran Media agency acquired rights in Turkey for the 2017 and 2018 editions of the Fifa Club World Cup.
- ◆ Spanish commercial broadcaster Mediaset acquired exclusive rights to the 2018 Fifa World Cup ([page 9](#)).
- ◆ The Premier Soccer League, organising body of the top two divisions of South African football, agreed a five-season extension to its deal with SuperSport, the pay-television broadcaster that operates in sub-Saharan Africa ([page 19](#)).
- ◆ Mexican commercial broadcaster TV Azteca acquired rights to the final of Liga MX's Apertura, the first half of the top-tier domestic season, in a deal with pay-television operator Televisa.
- ◆ SuperSport renewed its rights to the Uefa Champions League club competition, from 2018-19 to 2020-21 ([page 16](#)).
- ◆ Greek pay-television broadcaster Cosmote extended its deal for the Champions League and Europa League ([page 25](#)).
- ◆ The French football federation struck a deal with Chinese media company NetEase. The deal will run until the end of the 2018 Fifa World Cup. NetEase will be granted exclusive content focused on the France national team.
- ◆ Benfica's in-house pay-television channel, BTV, will continue to show the Portuguese

Primeira Liga club's matches until the end of the 2018-19 season.

OTHER SPORTS

- ◆ **American Football:** US telco Verizon signed a five-year extension to its deal with the NFL, from 2018 to 2022. US media reports claim Verizon will pay a total of about \$2.5bn (€2.16bn). Verizon's portfolio of digital and mobile media properties will stream in-market and national games in the US. The deal will begin in January with the streaming of the NFL playoffs on Yahoo and Yahoo Sports, in addition to the telco's go90 service and the NFL mobile app.
- ◆ **Athletics:** The International Association of Athletics Federations expanded its deal with the European Broadcasting Union and ESPN Media Distribution to include its World Indoor Tour. ESPN Media Distribution, the rights agency division of the global sports broadcaster, and the EBU, the consortium of public-service broadcasters, will represent global media rights to Tour events held in Karlsruhe and Düsseldorf (Germany), and Toruń (Poland), which all take place next February. The agreement includes the Indoor Grand Prix in Glasgow from 2019.
- ◆ **Basketball:** International sports broadcaster Eleven Sports agreed a five-year sublicensing deal for NBA rights in Taiwan ([page 29](#)).
- ◆ **Boxing:** US pay-television broadcaster Showtime agreed a deal to stream live coverage of the women's lightweight bout between Katie Taylor and Jessica McCaskill on December 13 via its channel on video-sharing website YouTube and its page on social media platform Facebook.

DEALS ROUND-UP

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

◆ **Cricket:** The Sony Pictures Networks India media group acquired linear and digital rights for the T10 Cricket League, a new franchise-based, 10-over competition held in the United Arab Emirates from December 14-17.

◆ **Equestrian:** The NBC Sports Group division of US media company NBCUniversal acquired exclusive, multi-platform rights in the US to next year's World Equestrian Games in Tryon, USA.

◆ **Formula E:** The electric car-racing series extended a deal with Australian pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports for three seasons, from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

◆ **Formula E:** The series extended its partnership with New Zealand-based digital free-to-air broadcaster Three. The deal will cover at least the 2017-18 season.

◆ **Formula E:** Sony acquired exclusive rights in the Indian subcontinent for the series. The deal will run until at least the end of 2017-18.

◆ **Handball:** The DOSB New Media division of the German Olympic Sports Confederation launched its first sports-specific media platform, Handball-Deutschland.TV, after acquiring rights to the 2017 women's World Championship. The tournament takes place in Germany from December 1-17. DOSB New Media's deal includes live and on-demand rights to all 84 games.

◆ **Kickboxing:** The Glory promotion struck a deal with US streaming service Pluto TV. Pluto TV will stream live coverage of preliminary fights that take place before Glory Superfight Series events. The deal runs into 2018.

◆ **Lacrosse:** The CBS Sports Digital division of US network CBS sealed a digital rights deal with the North American National Lacrosse League. CBS's SportsLive OTT subscription service will stream live and on-demand coverage of the men's indoor club competition, including regular-season and playoff games.

◆ **Mixed Martial Arts:** UK commercial broadcaster ITV agreed a deal with the Bamma series. ITV will broadcast live coverage of the Bamma 33: Scope vs. Lebout event on its digital-terrestrial channel ITV4 on December 15.

◆ **Motorsport:** German media group ProSiebenSat.1 agreed a two-year deal with the DTM domestic touring cars series. Sat.1 will cover the series in 2018 and 2019.

◆ **Olympic Games:** Latin American telco América Móvil agreed a deal for the next four editions of the Olympic Games ([page 3](#)).

◆ **Paralympic Games:** Canadian public-service broadcaster CBC renewed its deal with the Canadian Paralympic Committee. The deal covers the Pyeongchang 2018 winter Games and the Tokyo 2020 summer Games.

◆ **Rugby League:** UK public-service broadcaster the BBC acquired rights to next year's three-match series between England and New Zealand.

◆ **Rugby Union:** CBC agreed a multi-year deal with the Rugby Canada national governing body. CBC will hold rights to all international rugby sevens fixtures, the men's and women's World Rugby Sevens Series, as well as next year's Rugby World Cup Sevens.

DEALS ROUND-UP

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

◆ **Rugby Union:** Irish public-service broadcaster RTÉ renewed a deal for rights to Ireland's autumn international Test matches ([page 31](#)).

◆ **Rugby Union:** UK news outlet Unilad streamed live coverage of the 2017 Varsity Match series between the universities of Cambridge and Oxford.

◆ **Snooker:** The BBC extended a deal with World Snooker to cover the World Championship, UK Championship and the Masters tournaments for five seasons, from 2019-20 to 2023-24.

◆ **Tennis:** Brazilian pay-television broadcaster BandSports extended its deal for the French Open grand slam and acquired a package of rights for the men's ATP World Tour. The deals will both run for three years, from 2018 to 2020. BandSports will exclusively broadcast 13 ATP 250 tournaments per year, along with the Next Gen Finals and 12 ATP 500 series events.

MEDIA RIGHTS NEGOTIATIONS

◆ LaLiga, the body which oversees the top two divisions of Spanish club football, launched a tender process for its media rights in Europe, excluding Spain. The tender includes rights to matches from the top-tier Primera División, along with the play-off matches that determine promotion to the league, as well as additional programming. The tender covers 32 markets. The rights are being marketed in countries within the European Economic Area for three seasons, from 2018-19 to 2020-21. Offers are being accepted for rights in countries outside the EEA for five seasons, from 2018-19 to 2022-23. The deadline for offers is 6pm CET on January 15.

◆ The Indian government is working on a directive that would force pay-television broadcaster Star India to share its rights to the Indian Premier League T20 cricket tournament with public-service broadcaster Doordarshan ([page 13](#)).

◆ UK pay-television broadcaster Sky is set to agree a new deal for US Masters golf rights, according to *The Irish Times*. The newspaper said Sky has all but finalised a single-year extension with event organiser Augusta National Golf Club.

◆ Lega Serie A, the organising body of the top division of Italian club football, will reportedly launch a new tender for its next set of domestic broadcast rights in January. Italian news agency Ansa said a meeting of the Lega's television rights committee on December 5 settled on a provisional launch date of January 4. Bids for the five packages on offer will be due by January 22.

◆ Ted Sarandos, chief content officer at Netflix, said the online streaming service has no intention of expanding into the live sports-rights market as he believes leagues will eventually offer their content directly to fans.

◆ France Télévisions could forgo rights to the country's home Olympic Games in 2024, according to reports. French newspaper *Le Journal du Dimanche* detailed plans for a substantial cut to France Télévisions' sports budget amid wider budget restrictions at the public-service broadcaster. The newspaper said France Télévisions' annual sports budget of €230m (\$266.5m) is set to be cut by seven to eight per cent.

DEALS ROUND-UP

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

◆ Live rights to 200 football matches per season were tendered in seven packages by the English Premier League for its next cycle of domestic rights, from 2019-20 to 2021-22. This is an increase from the 168 matches per season currently broadcast live by pay-television broadcasters Sky and BT Sport. The next cycle will also include entire rounds of Premier League matches being shown live for the first time, but no single buyer will be allowed to acquire more than 148 matches per season.

◆ The Telesport agency was said to be in talks with a host of Russian broadcasters for rights to the 2018 winter Olympic Games. Telesport holds rights in Russia to next year's Games, along with the 2020, 2022 and 2024 events. State broadcaster VGTRK said it would not televise the Games after the International Olympic Committee's decision to ban Team Russia from the event. According to the Tass news agency, commercial broadcaster Channel One will show parts of the 2018 winter Games.

◆ The Rugby Football Union is keen to maintain a balance by offering coverage of the England national rugby union team to free-to-air and pay-television broadcasters, according to chief executive Steve Brown.

◆ The National Rugby League, the sport's top division in Australia, insisted its new digital venture, NRL Digital Network, will not cannibalise the rights and audiences of its existing media partners. Rebekah Horne, the NRL's chief digital officer, said there will be a "promotion of" coverage provided by rights-holders Fox Sports, Telstra and Nine.

◆ German commercial broadcaster RTL is set to agree a three-year extension, from 2018 to 2020, to its deal for the Formula One championship, according to the *Bild* newspaper.

INDUSTRY NEWS IN BRIEF

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

- ◆ ESPN will make approximately 150 employees redundant in its third round of job cuts in the past two years. The US sports broadcaster laid off around 300 staff in October 2015 and a further 100 employees in April this year. ESPN currently employs about 8,000 people.
- ◆ International sports broadcaster Eleven Sports widened its reach in the US through a deal with social network YouNow.
- ◆ The English Football League, which operates the three divisions below the top-tier Premier League, issued a Request For Proposals to potential partners as it seeks offers for its central broadcast production requirements. The RFP covers all of the EFL's broadcasting requirements, from filming and distributing over 1,500 matches each season to delivering live streaming of matches online via its digital platform, iFollow.
- ◆ UK pay-television broadcaster BT Sport introduced a number of virtual reality features to its official mobile application. Users will be able to access 360-degree video highlights and instant replays across a range of sporting events.
- ◆ The UK's Competition and Markets Authority expects to publish its initial verdict on 21st Century Fox's proposed takeover of pay-television broadcaster Sky in mid-January – a month later than originally planned.
- ◆ Media company Liberty Global is exploring the sale of the Swiss and Austrian divisions of its telco brand UPC, according to UK newspaper *The Telegraph*.
- ◆ LaLiga, the organising body of the top two divisions of Spanish football, struck a carriage deal with the Sky España arm of European pay-television group Sky. LaLiga 1|2|3 TV, the official television channel for the second-tier Segunda División, will be available on Sky, the OTT platform that launched in September.
- ◆ Ernst & Young claimed in a letter to the Lega Serie A assembly that an unnamed client of the consultancy is ready to invest at least €1bn (\$1.18bn) per season in the body that operates the top division of Italian football, according to Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. The funding plan would reportedly run for 10 years and could help the league establish a television channel to exploit matches.
- ◆ Belgian pay-television operator Telenet said it would expand its Play Sports service to customers who do not have a television subscription with the company. Telenet product manager Matthias Lehaen said the company will use its rights to the Pro League, the top division of domestic football, to open up Play Sports.
- ◆ Slovakian public-service broadcaster RTVS plans to launch a new sports channel ahead of the country's staging of the International Ice Hockey Federation's World Championship in 2019. The broadcaster also plans to launch an online-only youth-focused channel.
- ◆ Finnish telco DNA said it is preparing to suspend the distribution of channels owned by Discovery as of January 1, citing the "disproportionate increase" in the distribution fees sought by the US media group.

INDUSTRY NEWS IN BRIEF

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

- ◆ Maltese telcos Vodafone and Melita pulled out of a planned merger after failing to gain approval from authorities. Vodafone said the two parties were not able to satisfy the requirements of the Maltese Competition Authority that would allow the deal to go through.
- ◆ The Gold Coast Commonwealth Games Corporation is powerless to resolve a dispute about domestic coverage for next year's multi-sport event in Australia, according to chairman Peter Beattie. Media organisations News Corporation and Fairfax Media have said they will not send journalists to the Games under the current coverage rules imposed by commercial broadcaster Seven, the event's domestic rights-holder.
- ◆ Jia Yueting, founder of Chinese tech company LeEco, was placed on a debt defaulter blacklist by a Beijing court. Jia failed to fulfil a court order to pay Ping An Securities Group more than CNY470m (€60m/\$71m).
- ◆ José Hawilla, founder of the Traffic agency, confirmed his business was party to a \$10m (€8.6m) bribe paid to ex-Concacaf president Jeffrey Webb to secure rights to last year's Copa América Centenario. Hawilla testified at the trial of: Juan Ángel Napout, former president of the South American Football Confederation (Conmebol) and the Paraguayan Football Association; Manuel Burga, former president of the Peruvian Football Federation; and José Maria Marin, former president of the Brazilian Football Confederation in federal court in New York. The trio are charged with racketeering, wire fraud and money laundering.
- ◆ The Board of Control for Cricket in India was fined INR520m (€6.94m/\$8.36m) after being found guilty of breaching competition rules when negotiating rights deals for the Indian Premier League T20 tournament. The Competition Commission of India ruled the BCCI abused its position by acceding to broadcasters' demands that it would not sanction another T20 tournament that could rival the IPL.
- ◆ A committee established by the Chilean Football Association (ANFP) to evaluate offers for pay-television football broadcaster Canal del Fútbol called for improved bids. The ANFP received four bids for CdF, reportedly from: US media group Turner; media conglomerates Fox and Liberty Global; and private equity firm Citi Venture Capital.
- ◆ Sportsfix, an OTT service in Southeast Asia, backed a new club football competition that is set to launch in the region. The Boost Sportsfix Super Cup pre-season tournament will debut in January at the National Stadium at Kuala Lumpur Sports City in Malaysia.
- ◆ South African multi-platform media outlet Soccer Laduma entered into a digital partnership with the Bundesliga, the top tier of club football in Germany. Soccer Laduma will serve as an official media partner of the Bundesliga in Africa. Soccer Laduma will have exclusive access to Bundesliga clubs and players for video interviews, and will receive exclusive video footage of each league match.
- ◆ Specialist cycling and tri-sports video distributor Play Sports Network launched the Electric Mountain Bike Network channel.

INDUSTRY NEWS IN BRIEF

NOVEMBER 30 TO DECEMBER 13

◆ The Infront Sports & Media agency unveiled a new brand identity after detailing plans to place a “sharper focus” on “booming” markets such as personal and corporate fitness, virtual sports and community sports. The agency will now be known simply as Infront.

◆ The International Olympic Committee’s Olympic Channel signed content partnerships with the Alliance of Independent Recognised Members of Sport and the international federations for fistball, muay thai, polo, powerlifting and tug of war.

INDUSTRY MOVES

◆ Kasia Kieli was promoted to lead operations at Discovery Communications after the US media company transformed the structure of its regional businesses across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Kieli was named Discovery’s president and managing director, EMEA.

◆ Media group 21st Century Fox elevated Uday Shankar, the chairman and chief executive of pay-television broadcaster Star India, to the position of president of its Asia division. In his new role as president of 21st Century Fox, Asia, Shankar will lead the company’s video businesses across the continent.

◆ Specialist cycling and tri-sports video distributor Play Sports Network promoted Matt Skinner to the newly-created role of content director across the Play Sports Group.

◆ Brian Sullivan was promoted to president and chief operating officer of the Fox Networks Group division of 21st Century Fox.