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FOOTBALL

‘Aggressive’ Pro League tender could alienate incumbents

By Robin Jellis

Belgium’s three leading pay-television operators are considering a legal challenge to the Pro League’s domestic tender process on the grounds it discriminates against them and may be anti-competitive.

The Pro League tender has been approved by the local competition authority but some lawyers believe the operators – which are all owned by telcos – would have a strong case to bring a damages claim against the league and its adviser, the MP & Silva agency.

The tender appears designed to break up the incumbent alliance of telcos and help pay-television broadcaster Eleven Sports Network acquire live rights.

It was sent out on February 8 with bids due by March 7. It covers rights to all Pro League matches and the Super Cup, in the Dutch and French languages. Rights are split into six sets of packages.

Belgian Pro League packages

Packages	Rights (broadcast method)	Territory available
Lot 1A, 1B, 1C	All live Pro League matches (platform-neutral)	Belgium and Luxembourg
Lot 2A, 2B, 2C	All live Pro League matches (OTT)	Belgium
Lot 3A, 3B, 3C	Live Super Cup match (platform-neutral)	Belgium and Luxembourg
Lot 4A, 4B, 4C	Digital clips (internet and mobile)	Belgium
Lot 5A, 5B, 5C	Weekend highlights magazines (platform-neutral)	Belgium and Luxembourg
Lot 6A, 6B, 6C	Monday evening magazines (platform-neutral)	Belgium and Luxembourg

Source: TV Sports Markets

Note: A = Dutch language, B = French language, C = Dutch and French languages

The league’s tender is contentious as it makes a distinction between broadcasters owned by telcos, and broadcasters which are standalone channel businesses. The tender provides no explanation as to why this distinction has been made.

Telco concerns

The telcos are understood to have two main concerns with the tender.

First, the tender discriminates against broadcasters owned by telcos on the basis of exclusivity and contract duration. Broadcasters owned by telcos cannot acquire exclusive rights, but standalone channels can. Broadcasters owned by telcos can only bid for three or four seasons, whereas standalone channels can bid for three, four or five seasons.

Second, there is a potential conflict of interest. Andrea Radrizzani, the owner of pay-television broadcaster Eleven, is the co-founder of MP & Silva and retains a 14.5-per-cent stake in the agency (*TV Sports Markets* 20:9).

However, any regulatory complaint may prove fruitless as the tender was issued with the approval of the Belgian competition authority. Both the league and the agency declined to comment when contacted by *TV Sports Markets*.

The league is thought to have created the distinction between broadcasters in response to lobbying from Eleven, which told the league it would only bid for exclusive rights.

Theoretically, any standalone channel could acquire exclusive rights, but Eleven is by far the most likely. Sports broadcaster Eurosport is unlikely to pay the required fee for exclusivity, while channel syndicator Fox Networks Group has already tried and failed to launch a sports channel in the country.

MP & Silva advises the Pro League on the sale of all media rights in a six-season deal, from 2014-15 to 2019-20, for which the agency guarantees the league €450m (\$483m). The guarantee is €70m per season for the first three seasons and €80m per season for the last three seasons (*TV Sports Markets* 18:4).

The agency is expected to lose between €5m and €10m over the current three-season cycle, from 2014-15 to 2016-17. MP & Silva was expected to struggle to make a profit in a new cycle given its guarantee will increase (*TV Sports Markets* 20:22).

Non-exclusive live rights to all matches are currently held by Proximus, Telenet and Voo, for a total of €60m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:12).

The three are said to be seeking legal advice as to whether or not the tender is anti-competitive. However, as the process is ongoing, it is in their interest to maintain a good relationship with the league and MP & Silva.

League attempts market shake-up

The last time the league sold its rights, the three telcos claimed exclusive rights were too expensive for their respective businesses and chose to bid together, each acquiring non-exclusive rights.

The tender is a clear attempt from the league to shake up the cosy relationship that exists between the three. Ultimately, the aim of the tender is to extract the maximum possible value from the market.

It is understood the three telcos are happy with the status quo and would have been prepared to pay a small increase – up to between €65m and €70m per season – to maintain their grip on live rights.

Any potential legal challenge could be complicated further: the league requires any standalone channel that acquires exclusive rights to offer its channel (or channels) to all platforms in the country on a non-exclusive basis.

The tender states: “If the broadcaster is offering for this lot as a channel, and wishes to take the relevant lot exclusively then it shall be required to distribute to telecommunications platforms on a non-exclusive basis, which shall be subject to: (a) any competition law requirements; and (b) the requirement that the channel distributes the content using a carriage agreement of its entire channel.”

This requirement is expected to militate against any claims of anti-competitive behaviour.

Should Eleven win these rights, it would mainly refinance its spend from carriage deals. It would likely house the content on a new Pro League channel, or channels.

This would give the telcos a dilemma as they would either have to a) go without one of the most important subscription-driving properties in the market, or b) fund one of their competitors in order to retain access to Pro League matches.

A source at one of the telcos this week said: “This might be the league’s tactic to get more money from the market, but it’s too aggressive. Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.”

Potential legal challenge

One senior competition lawyer told *TV Sports Markets* this week: “The domestic league is a strong product in the market and has a dominant position in competition law terms. As such, the league has a duty not to discriminate between different bidders.

“The question is, by applying different rules for broadcasters owned by telcos and others, are they discriminating? Are they acting improperly or not? I think there is a reasonable argument they could be acting improperly.”

The lawyer added that as a dominant rights-holder the league “has to trade on FRAND terms – it has to be fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory”.

With regard to the potential conflict of interest, the lawyer said there were two approaches the telcos could take with regard to a legal challenge.

“First, they could claim the tender was not objectively justifiable. When you look at who is advising the league it adds to the fact the distinction between the broadcasters are not fair. The league would need to prove it had good reasons for doing this and that it was not affected by the ownership of MP & Silva or Eleven.

“Second, the broadcasters potentially have a direct damages claim for breach of competition law against one or all of Eleven, MP & Silva, and possibly the league as well, given the three appear party to an arrangement designed to distort competition.” ◆

TV AFRICA

IMG and Pitch struggle to sell with broadcasters looking bigger

By Callum McCarthy

The stream of top-tier properties to be sold in sub-Saharan Africa later this year is making life difficult for the IMG and Pitch International agencies, each of which has English cup competitions for sale.

IMG is seeking \$30m (€28m) per season for FA Cup rights in the region, although informed sources believe the eventual price will likely be closer to \$20m per season. IMG's current asking price represents a 140-per-cent increase on the current value of the rights.

Pay-television broadcaster SuperSport currently pays \$12.5m per season for rights to both the FA Cup and England national team friendlies in a six-season deal struck directly with the English Football Association, from 2012-13 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 16:5).

Pitch's asking price for English Football League rights – which includes rights to the League Cup and the second, third and fourth tiers of English football – is about \$10m per season.

SuperSport's current deal for EFL rights, from 2012-13 to 2016-17, is understood to be worth between \$3m and \$4m per season. The price of the rights is only expected to increase if there is competition.

Broadcasters are keeping their powder dry due to:

- ongoing private negotiations for Uefa national team properties, from 2018-19 to 2021-22
- upcoming tenders for rights to the 2018 and 2020 Olympic Games, as well as the Uefa Champions League and Europa League
- preliminary discussions for rights to the English Premier League, from 2019-20 onward, expected to begin before the end of the year.

In comparison to these top-tier properties, FA Cup and League Cup rights have somewhat paled in significance.

FA Cup struggle

It is understood both SuperSport and sports broadcaster Kwesé Sports submitted bids for FA Cup rights when the FA originally tendered its global rights in September (*TV Sports Markets* 20:17).

SuperSport is understood to have bid slightly less than \$20m per season for rights across the region, including South Africa (*TV Sports Markets* 20:19). Kwesé is thought to have bid about \$25m per season for rights across the region, excluding South Africa.

The FA eventually awarded its international media rights to IMG and Pitch for six seasons, from 2018-19 to 2023-24, for a total of \$1.01bn. IMG will pay \$730m for rights in all territories excluding Western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

African broadcasters are now reluctant to meet IMG's asking price for a number of reasons.

First, and most importantly, the upcoming sale of the aforementioned top-tier properties has made local broadcasters more circumspect about acquiring FA Cup rights at the present time.

Second, the quality of this season's competition has lessened its appeal. The FA Cup has been consistently attractive to non-UK broadcasters due to the presence of Premier League clubs. But these clubs are increasingly fielding weakened teams in the competition.

Third, sources say broadcaster reluctance is also a response to IMG's large outlay on the rights. One industry expert said: "The broadcasters feel like they are being expected to support an agency's business like the bad old days."

Pay-television operator StarTimes is interested in the rights but is currently restructuring its acquisition staff. It is understood StarTimes will create a new head of content role, as well as resurrecting its head of sport role.

Upcoming tenders

The International Olympic Committee is likely to tender rights to the 2018 and 2020 Games in March or April, ahead of any bidding process for the Uefa Champions League and Europa League – expected to launch in Q3 of this year.

Pay-television rights to the Games have historically been held by SuperSport. Competition for these rights is likely to come from Kwesé and StarTimes. Competition for the free-to-air rights is likely to be a hotter contest, with the Infront Sports & Media agency, the TV Media Sport agency and Kwesé thought to be strongly interested.

Infront paid a minimum guarantee of about \$3m for its free-to-air rights to the 2014 and 2016 Games (*TV Sports Markets* 19:15). Kwesé is likely to bid for free-to-air rights to the 2018 and 2020 Games with a view to using them as a marketing tool for the Kwesé TV pay-television service, as well as selling advertising and sponsorship around its coverage.

African free-to-air specialist agency TV Media Sport assisted Infront in distributing 2014 and 2016 rights in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as producing a tailored African feed for both Games.

Other parties likely to be involved are advertising agencies such as the WPP-owned Group M, whose ESP Properties subsidiary sold sponsorship inventory on behalf of Infront for the 2016 Games. A free-to-air sales model combining sponsorship, advertising and low asking prices for broadcasters is considered the most successful way to get close to market value for marquee events such as the Fifa World Cup and the Olympics.

Competition for rights to the Champions League and Europa League may be less fierce. Experts believe SuperSport may be willing to give up rights outside South Africa should Kwesé bid strongly.

SuperSport currently pays about \$130m per season for free-to-air and pay-television rights to both competitions, from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 17:21).

Uefa national team rights

The tender process for Uefa national team rights in the region has moved to private negotiations, where English-language rights are expected to be divided or shared between SuperSport and Kwesé. French-language rights will almost certainly be acquired by pay-television operator Canal Plus.

A deal is expected to be agreed in principle by the end of the month. ◆

TV INDIA

Experts claim DSport channel must compete for cricket rights

By Richard Welbirg

Indian television experts have questioned the viability of pay-television channel DSport – a partnership between Discovery Communications and Indian broadcast executive RC Venkateish which launched in India last week – in its current form.

DSport uses similar branding to Discovery's international sports broadcaster Eurosport. Discovery also provided the channel's broadcast licence.

But Indian sources say the international media company has only a minority stake in the channel. And they questioned the viability of the channel's proposed business model.

TV Sports Markets spoke this week to Eurosport chief executive Peter Hutton, who also works across Discovery's sport interests. Hutton said the channel would focus on niche sports of interest to a wealthy, urban audience.

Most DSport content at launch will be horse racing, acquired via a four-year output deal with UK pay-television channel At the Races.

Deals have also been agreed with the IMG agency for rights including golf (US Open, British Open and US PGA Championship) and football (Major League Soccer and the Chinese Super League). Most of these run for three years, from 2017 to 2019.

DSport will also have access to Discovery content, including Six Nations rugby, Tour de France cycling and the World Touring Car Championship motor-racing series.

It will broadcast in English only. Venkateish, formerly chief executive of pay-television operator Dish TV India, and before that managing director of pan-Asian broadcaster ESPN Star Sports, will be in charge of day-to-day operations.

The channel will be funded by a mixture of carriage fees and advertising. But local experts questioned how it would extract significant carriage fees without major sports rights.

Horse racing is well-attended in India but has historically received little television coverage. Interest in the sport is driven by betting in many countries but in India this is illegal away from the racecourses.

Nimbus Communications founder Harish Thawani told *TV Sports Markets* “there aren’t more than 50,000 racing fans in the country” and claimed it would be impossible to build a profitable channel around the sport.

Interest in these golf properties from other pay-television broadcasters has been weak: Sony struck a last-minute deal for the 2016 US Open while the British Open received no television coverage at all last year.

Hutton said DSport would focus on carriage deals with direct-to-home operators, whose subscribers tend to be urban and more affluent: “It’ll be rolled out to cable operators but the initial target was to get DTH done. Realistically this is the market we are aiming at.”

As *TV Sports Markets* went to press, DSport was carried in the sports package of DTH operators Dish TV and Videocon d2h. Venkateish was chief executive of Dish TV until October 2015.

As of Q3 2016, the two operators had 15.1m and 12.3m subscribers respectively. They are in the process of merging under a deal announced in November last year.

DSport is also available on cable operator Hathway Cable & Datacom, which has about 12.3m subscribers.

A change is going to come?

Indian sports broadcasters need cricket in order to attract sponsors and viewers, and thus to survive.

Local experts agree that the niche sports offered by DSport at present are insufficient for an Indian sport channel, and that it would have to compete for cricket rights at some point.

Two of India’s most important cricket properties will come to market in the next 12 months.

Rights to the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament will be sold after the 2017 edition, which runs from April 5 to May 21. A previous tender, opened in October last year, was cancelled after the intervention of India’s Supreme Court.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India, which sells IPL rights, will offer broadcast rights over 10 years, from 2018 to 2027, plus ex-India and digital rights over five years, from 2018 to 2022.

The IPL’s current deals expire this year. Sony paid about \$775m (€722m) for broadcast rights from 2008 to 2017 (*TV Sports Markets* 12:2). Rival Star paid Rs3.022bn (€42m/\$45m) for digital and selected international rights to three IPL seasons from 2015 to 2017 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:4).

Rights to India’s domestic international matches will also be sold by the BCCI in late 2017 or early 2018. These are currently held by Star in a six-year deal, from 2012-13 to 2017-18, worth Rs38.51bn (*TV Sports Markets* 16:7).

Third time lucky

Discovery has twice failed in attempts to enter the Indian sports broadcasting market in the past year.

It is understood to have agreed to acquire pay-television broadcaster Ten Sports last year for about \$250m. But negotiations broke down and the broadcaster was eventually acquired by rival Sony (*TV Sports Markets* 20:16).

In Q3 2016, the media group held talks to acquire pay-television broadcaster Neo Sports, but its final offer – in the \$30m to \$40m range – was between \$20m and \$25m short of shareholders' valuation.

Hutton said the idea for the DSport channel had sprouted in 2015, from discussions between Venkatesh and Rahul Johri, then Discovery's general manager for South Asia and now chief executive of the BCCI. ◆

ATHLETICS

USATF overhaul continues with recent NBC and Lagardère deals

By Frank Dunne

Two recent media-rights deals agreed by USA Track & Field, the governing body for US athletics, continue the upturn in commercial fortunes of an organisation which nearly went bust in the 1990s.

Earlier this month, USATF agreed a three-year deal with the Lagardère Sports agency to distribute four of its most prestigious events. It is the body's first international deal for live coverage of its events.

In December, the body agreed an eight-year deal with NBCUniversal for the domestic rights to its events. It is the first long-term deal it has struck with a broadcaster.

Max Siegel, USATF's chief executive, was appointed in May 2012 and has brought a hard-headed commercial approach. Revenues have increased from \$11m (€10.3m) per year in 2011 to \$35m per year in 2016. The bulk of the growth in revenue comes from improved sponsorship deals, including a \$500m, 23-year deal, from mid-2017 to mid-2040, with sporting goods manufacturer Nike.

Improving levels of television exposure, both domestically and around the world, is vital to delivering value to its sponsors.

First international deal for live coverage

Adam Schmenk, USATF's director of entertainment properties, said the body had held talks with several agencies. Lagardère was chosen because it had the best distribution proposal and made the best financial offer.

The deal is not a buyout. It is understood to include a modest minimum guarantee and a revenue share above that. One US athletics expert said the guarantee would be in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, at most.

It represents the first time USATF has agreed a genuine international distribution deal for live coverage of its events. IEC in Sports, one of the agencies acquired by Lagardère and subsumed into Lagardère Sports, had done some work with the body in the past. This consisted of USATF providing IEC with tapes of some events which they would include in their deals.

"We wanted to change the game and get much bigger in terms of global distribution," Schmenk said.

Many USATF events take place in the afternoon in the US, and therefore in the evening in Europe. The time zone would not be an obstacle to broadcasters who wanted to cover the events, he said.

The body “had to be realistic” about what could be achieved with just four events, but it is working on expanding the number of events it schedules and distributes. “As we get more events, Lagardère will be able to add them to the overall package. We will grow together,” Schmenk added.

The basic international feed will come from NBC’s coverage but will be augmented by USATF’s own production facility which continues to film events in the periods where NBC goes to a commercial break. Broadcasters can either take the US production, with the original English-language commentary and graphics, or a clean feed, adding commentary and graphics locally.

Stefan Felsing, executive vice president media, global sales and acquisitions, for Lagardère, said the property “ticked many boxes” for the agency. He said the rights would be a “great asset” in the agency’s wider athletics portfolio.

Felsing said the agency had moved away from buyout deals. “Since we virtually reinvented Lagardère Sports, this is how we deal with our clients. We don’t believe in the old models where you just pay a fee and walk away. We work closely with rights-holders. For example, we tell them how they can improve the production to make it more attractive for broadcasters.”

As a standalone property, the package has little value to broadcasters, especially in Europe. Even the more prestigious Olympic trials of the US team were not shown in Europe last year.

But by bundling events in the agency’s wider package of athletics content, Lagardère both enriches its own proposition and will enable the four USATF events to get some live exposure outside the US. Felsing said bundling enabled them to provide broadcasters with “a story to tell across the year”.

The agency’s athletics portfolio includes 10 International Association of Athletic Federations Gold Label Marathons, nine IAAF World Challenge events, two EAA Premium Meetings, four IAAF World Indoor Tour events and the ISTAF Indoor Berlin event.

Lagardère sells its athletics package in multiple territories around the world. These include deals with: Astro (Malaysia); Band Sports (Brazil); beIN Sports (France, the Middle East and North Africa, the US and Canada); DirecTV (Latin America); LeSports (China); MTV3 (Finland); SportsMax (Jamaica); StarHub (Singapore); SuperSport (South Africa); and TVP (Poland).

Stability helps build audiences

NBC is not thought to be paying a rights fee in its USATF deal but is making a substantial contribution to production costs for the first time. This includes producing shoulder programming to promote the body’s events, and showing additional content on its digital platforms.

Schmenk said the deal was “financially viable for both parties”. USATF also controls the category exclusivity in advertising around the coverage to ensure exposure for its own sponsors. The airtime is sold by NBC.

Until this year, USATF had a series of rolling one-year deals with NBC. Schmenk said the new deal was “historic” because “we now have stability with a partner that has doubled down on the sport, which shows the IAAF World Championships and the Olympic Games. They are the perfect partner to help us to grow.”

He said the deal meant “we know every year how many hours will air on network, how many on cable and how the two will support one another.

“It’s very important to us that our fans can find us at the same place at the same time during the season. That’s how you build an audience.”

NBC and Lagardère deals with USATF

NBC Sports Group, a division of NBCUniversal, holds exclusive rights in the US to all elite-level USATF events in an eight-year deal, from 2017 to 2024. The company will show at least 18 hours of live coverage each year: eight hours per year on the main NBC network and the rest on cable channel NBC Sports. All linear content will also be streamed via NBCSports.com and the NBC Sports app. The two platforms will also deliver digital-only USATF content.

Lagardère will distribute global rights – outside the US – for three years, from 2017 to 2019, to four events:

- the Indoor Grand Prix held in January in Boston (part of the IAAF World Indoor Tour)
- the Millrose Games indoor meeting in February in New York
- the Drake Relays outdoor event held in April at Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa
- and the USATF Outdoor Championships held in June; the 2017 event will be held in Sacramento, California. ◆

TV UK

BBC shores up sports-rights portfolio with two early deals

By Robin Jellis

- BBC acquires rights to the 2021 Rugby League World Cup for about £2m
- Public-service broadcaster renews Queen's Club rights for about £200,000 per year

UK public-service broadcaster the BBC has renewed rights to two properties in the last month as it seeks to protect its sports-rights portfolio well into the future.

The BBC acquired rights to the 2021 Rugby League World Cup in a deal thought to be worth about £2m (€2.3m/\$2.5m). The deal was agreed directly between the BBC and the Rugby League International Federation.

The public-service broadcaster also renewed rights to the Queen's Club Championships in a seven-year deal, from 2018 to 2024, with the Lawn Tennis Association. The deal is worth about £200,000 per year.

Both deals are seen by local experts as further moves from the BBC to tie down rights for the long term. In recent years, the public-service broadcaster has spent most of its budget to secure key properties well into the future, including:

- the Fifa World Cups of 2018 and 2022
- the European Championships of 2016 and 2020
- the Olympic Games of 2022 and 2024
- the English FA Cup until 2020-21
- the Wimbledon grand slam until 2024
- Six Nations rugby until 2021.

The next big deal the BBC will look to agree is for English Premier League highlights. Its current three-season deal, from 2016-17 to 2018-19, is worth £68m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 19:3).

Rugby League World Cup coverage

The BBC's deal for World Cup rights in 2021 will see more coverage on the public-service broadcaster than recent editions.

Rights to the 2013 and 2017 tournaments were acquired by the BBC and pay-television broadcaster Premier Sports. The total value of the rights is thought to have been about £3m, split about £2m for 2013 and £1m for 2017.

The 2013 tournament was more valuable as it was hosted in England and Wales. The 2017 tournament will be hosted in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

Premier Sports showed all matches in 2013, and will do so again this year. The BBC showed non-exclusive coverage of seven matches for 2013, including three England group-stage matches, one quarter-final, one semi-final and the final.

The total fee is thought to split about 2:1 between the two broadcasters, with the BBC paying the greater share. Rights to the Four Nations tournament were also included in the deal.

The BBC's deal for 2021 is for the World Cup only. The broadcaster has said it will show all 31 matches, 16 of which will be on its BBC1 or BBC2 channels. Other matches will be available via its Red Button service or the BBC Sport website.

It is thought the BBC was willing to guarantee more coverage on its linear channels than for 2013 or 2017 due to its dwindling sports-rights portfolio.

The RLIF tendered the rights last year. Its preference was to agree a deal with the BBC due to the exposure it can guarantee.

The BBC and Premier Sports deals were agreed by the IMG agency. IMG had a buyout deal with the RLIF for global rights to the 2013 and 2017 World Cups and the Four Nations in 2014 and 2016.

IMG will not renew its contract beyond 2017. About six months ago, the RLIF issued a prospectus in which it stated any buyer would have to cover production costs for any new RLIF events. The agency was unwilling to shoulder this cost.

It is also understood IMG struggled to make money back on its deal. The two big markets for Rugby League World Cup rights are the UK and Australia.

Australian commercial broadcaster Seven will pay \$6.6m in cash and \$4m in contra for rights to the 2017 tournament (*TV Sports Markets* 20:7). This total is about three times what Seven paid for rights to the 2013 tournament.

In the UK, IMG had hoped to coax aggressive offers for the 2013 and 2017 editions from pay-television broadcasters BT Sport and Sky. None materialised – Sky was looking to reduce costs following its

Premier League renewal, while BT decided the five-week tournament was unlikely to help add subscribers as it had no other rugby league rights.

Sky previously held exclusive rights to the 2008 World Cup for just over £2m.

Queen's renewal

The BBC's new deal for Queen's Club Championships rights is thought to be only slightly more valuable than its existing five-year deal, from 2013 to 2017.

The new deal was agreed directly between the BBC and the LTA, the sport's UK governing body. There is thought to have been little interest from other broadcasters. The tournament acts as a warm-up event for the Wimbledon grand slam, for which the BBC also holds rights.

The BBC's current Wimbledon deal, from 2015 to 2017, is worth £42m per year. It has since extended the deal twice: it will hold the rights from 2018 to 2020 in a deal worth £61m per year, and from 2021 to 2024 in a deal worth about £65m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 20:21). The BBC generally seeks to have coterminous deals for Wimbledon and Queen's.

The LTA has a separate non-exclusive deal for Queen's rights with the UK arm of sports broadcaster Eurosport. The three-year deal, from 2015 to 2017, is worth slightly more than £100,000 per year.

Together, the BBC and Eurosport deals more than cover the cost of producing the event. The event costs the LTA about £250,000 in production each year.

The LTA was keen to renew with the BBC because the exposure it provides helps it secure lucrative sponsorship deals.

The BBC's new deal coincided with the announcement that Britain's world number one Andy Murray will compete in the tournament until he retires.

Since 2015, the Queen's Club Championships have been an ATP 500 event. It was previously an ATP 250 event.

Domestic rights to ATP events are sold by the local organiser. All other ATP rights in the UK are held by Sky in a five-year deal, from 2014 to 2018, worth about £8m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 17:22). ◆

TV TURKEY

Digiturk mulls over free-to-air channel as Saran is made to wait

By Callum McCarthy

BeIN Media Group, which owns Turkish pay-television operator Digiturk, is considering opening its own free-to-air sports channel in the country, *TV Sports Markets* understands.

Opening a free-to-air channel would prevent Digiturk having to sublicense its rights to live second-tier 1. Lig football matches and top-tier Süper Lig highlights.

But while sources agree this would be the most efficient way for Digiturk to exploit the rights, the operator would have to apply for a new channel licence from Turkey's media regulator, Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu. This would likely be a protracted process.

BeIN had not responded to a request for comment as *TV Sports Markets* went to press.

Süper Lig highlights and live 1. Lig rights are currently held by Digiturk as part of its two-season deal for exclusive rights to the top two divisions of Turkish football, covering 2015-16 and 2016-17 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:1). The operator will also hold these rights for the next five seasons, from 2017-18 to 2021-22 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:20).

Süper Lig highlights and 1. Lig matches must appear on free-to-air television, and for the last two seasons these rights have been sublicensed to state broadcaster TRT on a season-by-season basis.

TRT's current deal, for 2016-17 only, was agreed during the seventh match-week of both leagues as Digiturk and TRT struggled to agree a fee. To mitigate the cost, TRT shared its Süper Lig highlights rights with commercial broadcaster NTV.

These negotiations are often protracted, and it is thought Digiturk receives below market value for them. Digiturk paid \$48.25m (€45m) for these rights in 2015-16, and this increased by between nine and 10 per cent in 2016-17 due to inflation. TRT's ability to pay large rights fees has been severely diminished due to the depreciation of the Turkish lira.

International rights

Digiturk is understood to have begun an international sales process for Süper Lig rights. After renewing its rights in November, Digiturk's owner – beIN – confirmed its ambition to improve the international status of the league by selling on the rights from the 2017-18 season onward.

It is thought unlikely Digiturk will open a tender for the rights. Interest in the league is low outside territories with large Turkish populations, and in these countries Digiturk operates a successful business selling its set-top boxes. For these reasons, and also to prevent piracy, Digiturk has previously warehoused international Süper Lig rights.

Saran waiting for channel clearance

Pay-television channel S Sport, owned by media group Saran Media, is tentatively expected to go on-air in mid-to-late March despite suggestions it would be ready for launch earlier this month.

Turkish media outlets reported S Sport was due to launch on February 3, three months later than originally expected by Turkish pay-television operators. The channel has carriage deals with pay-television operators Digiturk and D-Smart, as well as telco Turkcell, from the beginning of the 2016-17 English Premier League season to the end of 2018-19 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:17). It is also in negotiations with pay-television operator Tivibu, owned by telco Türk Telekom.

Saran's Premier League rights, which will form the backbone of the channel, are split across the three operators. Digiturk shows five matches each matchday, D-Smart three and Turkcell two. Saran pays just under \$15m per season for the rights, from 2016-17 to 2018-19 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:1).

Saran's rights to the NBA, from 2014-15 to 2016-17, have temporarily been sublicensed to Digiturk, D-Smart, Turkcell and commercial broadcaster TV8, which broadcasts games on its free-to-air TV8.5 sports channel. It is thought D-Smart and TV8 will retain their NBA rights after the launch of S Sport.

S Sport will take over the licence of pay-television channel Smart Spor 2, which is owned by D-Smart, instead of applying for a new licence. It was thought this would prevent delays when dealing with Turkey's media regulator.

Saran is seeking only to make minor changes to Smart Spor 2's licence: adding the ability to broadcast via cable (which covers IPTV and mobile TV) as well as via satellite, changing the channel's name and applying a new logo.

Informed sources believe approval has been delayed mainly because the regulator has greater priorities. Shortly after the attempted coup in July, the regulator withdrew licences from 25 television and radio stations. Since then, its main priority has been enforcing stricter rules on what content can be aired in the country.

Saran recently struck a deal with pay-television broadcaster HBO for its boxing content, which could further complicate its application. The regulator's remit to prevent "harm to the moral development of children and young people" includes tight restrictions on what combat sports can be shown or advertised in the country.

One source said extra checks on all new applicants are now compulsory. These include the owners of any platform being vetted by the Turkish intelligence agency. ◆

FOOTBALL

SRG sees off new competitors for Swiss national team rights

By Robin Jellis

- SRG pays just over €18m for host of Uefa national team rights
- Euro 2020 worth about €8m, European Qualifiers and Nations League about €10m
- Uefa close to third-party deals with TV24 and DAZN from 2018-19 to 2021-22

Swiss public-service broadcaster SRG renewed rights to Uefa national team competitions late last month despite facing a rare challenge for premium sport from rival free-to-air broadcasters.

SRG agreed deals with Uefa, European football's governing body, for rights to: Euro 2020; Swiss national team European Qualifier and Nations League matches from 2018-19 to 2021-22; and the women's Euro 2017 tournament.

The total value of SRG's deals for these rights is just over €18m (\$19.3m). It will pay about €8m for Euro 2020, about €10m for all European Qualifier and Nations League matches of the Swiss national team, and about €200,000 for Euro 2017.

These rights were tendered by Uefa and CAA Eleven, the body's sales agent for its national team matches, 10 months before a deal was finalised. The rights were offered to broadcasters on April 1, 2016, with bids due by April 21. It is understood a deal was agreed in principle last summer.

SRG faced competition from two commercial broadcasters in the tender, neither of whom have a strong history of acquiring sports rights in the country: 3+ and TV24. Both operate in German-speaking Switzerland. TV24 is owned by Swiss media company AZ Medien.

Neither was able to seriously compete against SRG on a financial basis. 3+ is now using these SRG deals to highlight the broadcaster's dominance when it comes to buying sports rights in the country.

3+ owner Dominik Kaiser told Swiss newspaper *20 Minuten*: "We think it is very problematic that SRG buys all the games and surpasses us with their gigantic budget and their tax breaks." On its website, SRG states its turnover is about CHF1.65bn (€1.548bn/\$1.661bn), and that 75 per cent of its income derives from licence fees.

Roland Mägerle, SRG's head of Business Unit Sport, told the newspaper: "Sport cannot be refinanced in the small, fragmented Swiss TV market with its four language regions, neither via advertising nor via pay-TV."

As well as its stronger financial offer, Uefa is thought to have been keen to remain with SRG as it is the only national broadcaster which can produce coverage in all four local languages: French, German, Italian and Romansch.

Existing SRG deals

SRG held Euro 2016 rights via its membership of the European Broadcasting Union, the consortium of Europe's public-service broadcasters.

The EBU's 26-territory deal with Uefa for rights to the 2016 tournament was worth close to €80m – not the €120m previously reported by *TV Sports Markets*. SRG contributed close to €10m toward the deal.

Via its EBU membership, SRG also has access to European Qualifier matches of the Swiss national team from 2014-15 to 2017-18. The EBU's 30-territory deal is worth about €90m (*TV Sports Markets* 17:11). SRG is thought to have contributed about €5m toward the deal.

SRG also holds rights to Switzerland's home national team friendly matches in a four-year deal with the Schweizerische Fussballverband, the Swiss football federation. The broadcaster pays about €150,000 per match, plus production costs of about €50,000 per match, from 2014-15 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 18:14).

SRG did not hold rights to the last women's European Championship, in 2013 – that tournament was shown by sports broadcaster Eurosport as part of its wider pan-European deal.

The new deals mean SRG has maintained its grip on top national team football rights in the country. It also has 2018 and 2022 Fifa World Cup rights via the EBU, which pays a total of between €310m and €315m for rights across Europe (*TV Sports Markets* 16:7). SRG is thought to contribute between €11m and €12m per tournament to the EBU deal.

Other Uefa deals

TV Sports Markets understands Uefa is also close to awarding its third-party European Qualifier and Nations League rights from 2018-19 onward.

Uefa failed to agree a deal for third-party qualifier matches ahead of Euro 2016. But it has sold rights to third-party qualifier matches ahead of the 2018 World Cup to TV24 and OTT service DAZN, owned by the Perform Group.

TV24 has non-exclusive rights to the top-pick third-party qualifier match per matchday from 2016-17 to 2017-18, while DAZN has rights to all third-party qualifier matches over the same period.

Uefa is close to finalising deals with the same two companies for third-party rights in its new cycle, from 2018-19 to 2021-22. TV24 would have non-exclusive rights to the top-pick third-party European Qualifier and Nations League match per matchday, while DAZN would have rights to all matches. ◆

FOOTBALL

Canal Plus wins World Cup pay-TV rights in Francophone Africa

By Callum McCarthy

- Canal Plus Afrique pays about \$4m for French-language pay-television World Cup rights
- It also sublicenses French-language NBA rights from Econet for about \$500,000 per season

Canal Plus Afrique has agreed a direct deal for rights to the 2018 Fifa World Cup, staving off the challenge of rival StarTimes.

Pay-television operator Canal Plus will pay about \$4m (€3.7m) for French-language pay-television rights to the tournament in Francophone territories across sub-Saharan Africa. It will be able to show all 64 matches from the tournament.

Pay-television operator StarTimes, which plans to expand its business into Francophone territories, was targeting World Cup rights across the region in order to spearhead its growth into French-speaking Africa.

Free-to-air French-language rights to the 2018 tournament have already been acquired by telco Econet, which owns sports broadcaster Kwesé Sports. It will exploit its rights on its Kwesé Sports Free channel.

The Canal Plus deal takes Fifa's total income from 2018 World Cup media rights in sub-Saharan Africa to about \$50m. It will earn about \$46m from deals with Kwesé and pay-television broadcaster SuperSport (*TV Sports Markets* 21:1).

It is the first time Canal Plus has acquired French-language World Cup rights directly from Fifa, football's global governing body. SuperSport acquired pan-regional rights to the 2010 and 2014 World Cups in a deal worth \$22m. It then sublicensed French-language rights to Canal Plus.

Canal Plus is also thought to be close to a deal with Uefa for at least the Euro 2020 tournament. It is also interested in acquiring European Qualifier and Nations League matches, from 2018-19 to 2021-22. The operator paid CAA Eleven, Uefa's national team sales agent, about \$2.5m for rights to Euro 2016 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:10).

Canal Plus sublicenses NBA rights

The operator also acquired French-language pay-television rights to the NBA from Econet in a three-season deal, from 2016-17 to 2018-19. The sublicensing deal began in December.

Canal Plus will pay about \$500,000 per season for the right to show three regular-season matches per week, selected matches from the playoffs and every game of the season-ending NBA Finals. The operator will also continue to receive carriage of the league's NBA TV channel.

The deal represents an increase of about 60 per cent on Canal Plus's previous deal, thought to be worth about \$300,000 per season, from 2013-14 to 2015-16. That deal was agreed directly with the NBA.

Econet acquired all NBA rights in April, from 2016-17 to 2020-21, for which it pays between \$6m and \$7m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 20:7). ◆

OLYMPIC GAMES

TVP signs off on large Olympics increase despite budget woes

By Callum McCarthy

- TVP will pay Discovery just over €14m for rights to the 2018 and 2020 Olympic Games
- Discovery also sells 2018 and 2020 rights to LTOK in Lithuania, for about €750,000

Polish public-service broadcaster TVP has paid an increase of over 40 per cent to acquire rights to the 2018 and 2020 Olympic Games from media group Discovery Communications.

It is thought TVP will pay just over €14m (\$15m), a considerable increase on the €10m it paid the Sportfive agency for rights to the 2014 and 2016 Games. Both deals are thought to be weighted toward the summer Games.

Its investment will earn TVP a greater amount of coverage than many of its European public-service counterparts. It will show 200 hours in 2018, 350 hours in 2020, and will retain digital rights to the content it shows on its linear channels.

TVP will also be able to show every discipline from both Games. Discovery has previously carved out rights to certain sports so it can show these exclusively. For example, in deals with Dutch public-service broadcaster NOS and Finnish public-service broadcaster YLE, Discovery has kept exclusive rights to ice skating from the 2018 Games (*TV Sports Markets* 20:6; 20:7).

TVP did not face any rival bids, though multiple Polish broadcasters enquired about acquiring selected rights. It is thought Discovery held discussions with both free-to-air and pay-television broadcasters about a possible deal.

Local experts are surprised at the amount TVP has paid as the broadcaster has serious financial problems. In January, TVP president Jacek Kurski said the broadcaster would be facing “a budget of death” should the government not better enforce licence-fee payment in Poland.

In August, TVP went public on plans to open a second sports channel alongside its pay-television TVP Sport channel, with a view to making TVP Sport a free digital-terrestrial channel. The plan was abandoned in October.

Discovery goes off-piste in Lithuania

Discovery has also completed a deal with the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee (LTOK) for the 2018 and 2020 Games, thought to be worth just over €750,000.

LTOK approached Discovery about acquiring the rights in order to act as a gatekeeper. In order for its bid to be accepted, the committee agreed to sublicense linear free-to-air rights and non-exclusive digital rights for 2018 and 2020. It struck such a deal in January with commercial broadcaster TV3, owned by Modern Times Group.

LTOK is thought to have acquired the rights in order to retain digital rights to both Games. The committee will live-stream events and post clips on its website. ◆

TENNIS

Splitting rights brings Japanese windfall for Tennis Australia

By Richard Welbirg

- Tennis Australia earns just over \$9m from 2017 Australian Open rights in Japan
- Fox Sports Asia renews pan-Asian rights for just over \$6m per year, from 2018 to 2022

Striking a digital rights deal is thought to have helped Tennis Australia earn a large increase in Japan for the 2017 Australian Open.

For the first time, the national governing body agreed a separate deal for digital rights, covering just the 2017 tournament, with telco SoftBank.

This involved carving digital video-on-demand rights out of its deal with pay-television broadcaster Wowow, which was renewed in October last year for five years, from 2017 to 2021.

A renewal with public-service broadcaster NHK, also for five years from 2017 to 2021, was struck just before this year's tournament, which ran from January 16-29.

From these three deals, and a news access agreement with the Japan Sports News Association, Tennis Australia is thought to have earned just over \$9m (€8.4m) for 2017.

Tennis Australia earned about \$4m for the 2016 tournament, from: Wowow's five-year deal, from 2012 to 2016, worth about \$2.7m per year; and NHK's two-year deal for the 2016 and 2017 tournaments, worth about \$1.3m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 20:3).

TV Sports Markets understands NHK and Wowow both increased their fees in new deals, though neither faced competition for the rights on their platforms.

Both Tennis Australia and SoftBank are thought to have been satisfied by the outcome of the 2017 deal, as talks are underway over a longer-term deal, likely to run for three or five years.

The length of NHK's new deal is a surprise. The broadcaster traditionally agreed one-year deals for major matches in the tournament, until the rise of local star Kei Nishikori persuaded it to strike a two-year deal covering 2015 and 2016.

Pan-Asia deal

Tennis Australia also recently renewed a deal with channel syndicator Fox Networks Group for rights across Asia, excluding China and Japan.

The new deal is for five years, from 2018 to 2022, and will be worth just over \$6m per year. This is a decent increase on the \$4.5m per year Fox paid for rights in the same territories from 2015 to 2017.

There was little market-by-market interest in the rights, and Fox is thought to have been the only interested pan-regional broadcaster. ◆

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MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

FEBRUARY 2 TO 15

FOOTBALL

◆ **Abu Dhabi Sports** – the sports channel of state-run media group Abu Dhabi Media – and Egyptian sports broadcaster On Sport acquired rights to the Arab Club Championship, which will relaunch later this year. The deals will run for three years, from 2017 to 2019.

◆ **Social media website Facebook** struck a deal to stream US pay-television broadcaster Univision Deportes' coverage of selected live matches from Liga MX, the top Mexican league. Coverage begins on February 18 and the deal will run until the end of the year. Matches will be available via the Univision Deportes Facebook page in the US.

OTHER SPORTS

◆ **Air Sports:** Sports broadcaster Sport1 renewed its deal for the Red Bull Air Race World Championship in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The deal covers the 2017 series.

◆ **Air Sports:** The NBC Sports Group division of US media company NBCUniversal acquired rights for the Red Bull Air Race World Championship. The multi-year deal starts with the 2017 series.

◆ **Athletics:** Pay-television broadcaster SFR Sport acquired rights in France for the Diamond League series. The deal will run for three years, from 2017 to 2019. SFR Sport will show exclusive coverage of 13 race meetings during 2017.

◆ **Athletics:** The Lagardère Sports agency agreed a deal to distribute the USA Track & Field body's international media rights for three years, from 2017 to 2019 (page 13).

◆ **Baseball:** Regional broadcaster SportsNet New York agreed a deal with MLB Advanced Media to live-stream several New York Mets MLB games during the 2017 season.

◆ **Basketball:** French pay-television broadcaster Canal Plus renewed a deal with the International Basketball Federation (Fiba). The five-year deal, from 2017 to 2021, covers exclusive rights to Fiba national team tournaments including World Cups, EuroBaskets and Olympic qualifying tournaments for the 2020 Games. It also includes Fiba's AfroBasket, AmeriCup and Asia Cup competitions and the U17 and U19 World Cups.

◆ **Boxing:** UK pay-television broadcaster BoxNation acquired rights for the Saúl Álvarez v Julio César Chávez Jr. fight on May 6.

◆ **Cricket:** The RDA agency agreed a three-year deal, from 2017 to 2019, to distribute global media rights to the Emirates Airline Twenty20 tournament. The 2017 edition will be held at Dubai Sports City Stadium on March 23-24.

◆ **Cricket:** Pan-African pay-television operator StarTimes agreed a two-year deal for rights in sub-Saharan Africa to the Pakistan Super League Twenty20 competition. The contract covers the 2017 and 2018 PSL seasons.

◆ **Ice Hockey:** New York-based broadcaster MSG Network agreed a deal with the NHL to live-stream games featuring the New York Rangers, New Jersey Devils, New York Islanders and Buffalo Sabres.

◆ **Ice Hockey:** Rights to the Champions Hockey League pan-European club competition were

MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

FEBRUARY 2 TO 15

sold in six-season deals, from 2017-18 to 2022-23, to: pay-television broadcaster Arena Sport in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; German sports broadcaster Sport1; Israeli pay-television broadcaster Charlton; Slovenian public-service broadcaster RTV; Swedish public-service broadcaster SVT; Turkish digital-terrestrial channel SportsTV; and international sports broadcaster ESPN in Brazil. AMC Networks International Central Europe acquired rights in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia for three seasons, from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

◆ **Mixed Martial Arts:** International sports broadcaster Eleven Sports Network acquired rights for the Cage Warriors Fighting Championship. The three-year deal, from 2017 to 2019, gives Eleven exclusive live rights to all Cage Warriors events in all its territories.

◆ **Modern Pentathlon:** International sports broadcaster Eurosport agreed a pan-European, multi-platform rights deal with the International Modern Pentathlon Union (UIPM). Eurosport will show coverage of various major UIPM events across its platforms throughout 2017.

◆ **Motorcycling:** Fox Sports Asia acquired rights for the International Motorcycling Federation's (FIM) Endurance World Championship.

◆ **Motorcycling:** UK commercial broadcaster ITV extended its deal for the British Superbike Championship. ITV will show free-to-air coverage of the series until the end of the 2020 season, with an hour-long highlights programme to air on Wednesday evenings on digital-terrestrial channel ITV4.

◆ **Motorcycling:** Japanese pay-television broadcaster J Sports extended an agreement for rights to the Superbike World Championship. The new agreement covers the 2017 season, with J Sports to broadcast every round.

◆ **Motorcycling:** North American television network Velocity acquired rights in the US and Canada to the FIM Endurance World Championship. Velocity will broadcast the *Pit Stop* programme and 45-minute highlights programmes from all races during 2017.

◆ **Motorsport:** Rights to the 2017 World Touring Car Championship in India were acquired by pay-television broadcaster Neo Sports and DSport, the new Indian sports channel part-owned by media company Discovery Communications. Neo will broadcast a 24-minute highlights programme following each event; DSport will show all 20 races from the 2017 season on a delayed basis.

◆ **Rugby Union:** ITV struck a deal with World Rugby for exclusive rights to the Rugby World Cup national team tournament. It covers the World Cups in 2019 and 2023, the 2017 Women's World Cup and the World Rugby U20 Championship between 2017 and 2019. The deal was first reported in *TV Sports Markets* 20:20.

◆ **Rugby Union:** Irish pay-television broadcaster Eir Sport acquired rights for the 2017 Women's World Cup, which will take place in Ireland from August 9-26. Eir Sport will show live coverage of all Ireland games. It sold on free-to-air rights to Ireland's matches and the final to public-service broadcaster RTÉ.

MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

FEBRUARY 2 TO 15

◆ **Rugby Union:** Social media platform Twitter agreed a sublicensing deal for rights to France's games in the Six Nations. The deal was agreed with French public-service broadcaster France Télévisions, the competition's rights-holder in the country. Only Twitter users in France are able to access the live stream.

◆ **Surfing:** Australian commercial broadcaster Nine entered into a partnership with the Surfing Australia national governing body. The two-season deal covers 2017-18 and 2018-19.

◆ **Winter Sports:** The Alisports division of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba acquired exclusive digital rights in China for the 2017 Asian Winter Games.

◆ **Winter Sports:** The International Olympic Committee's Olympic Channel agreed a deal to broadcast live coverage of the 2017 Winter European Youth Olympic Festival.

◆ **Wrestling:** The NBC Olympics division of NBCUniversal entered into a partnership with United World Wrestling, the sport's global governing body, until the end of 2020. NBC Sports Group will hold exclusive television and streaming rights in the US to the World Championships, Freestyle World Cup, Women's World Cup and Greco-Roman World Cup.

a timeline to decide a new rights-holder. A tender was reportedly issued on February 9, with bids to be opened and analysed on February 20. A key meeting will be held on February 24 to announce the successful bidder.

◆ Outgoing Liverpool chief executive Ian Ayre said leading teams in football's English Premier League remain keen on obtaining a larger proportion of centrally-sold commercial rights revenues.

MEDIA RIGHTS NEGOTIATIONS

◆ Intellectual asset management company Consor emerged as a contender for Argentinian football rights. It reportedly offered \$336m (€313m) per year over five years for rights to Argentinian Football Association league competitions. Argentinian clubs have agreed on

NEWS IN BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2 TO 15

- ◆ A+E Networks became an equity investor in the North American National Women's Soccer League in a deal that will allow the media company's Lifetime channel to show coverage of the competition. Lifetime will become a sponsor and broadcast partner of the league for three years, from 2017 to 2019. It will broadcast the NWSL 'game of the week' every Saturday at 4pm ET. A new joint venture, NWSL Media, will be established under the deal. NWSL Media will serve as the media and commercial division of the league, brokering rights deals worldwide, and managing all digital assets for the NWSL. The joint venture will oversee the live streaming and production of matches.
- ◆ European Union negotiators reached a deal allowing Europeans to access their online media subscriptions when they travel to other EU member states from the start of 2018. Content service providers will verify the subscriber's country of residence.
- ◆ Torneos confirmed former chief executive Alejandro Burzaco has divested his remaining equity interest in the Argentinian media group and is no longer a shareholder of the company. The announcement came after Torneos in December agreed a deal with US prosecutors to pay \$112.8m (€105.1m) to settle charges in relation to the US Department of Justice's investigation into corruption in football.
- ◆ Virtual-reality provider LiveLike partnered with the Fox network to offer VR highlights of the NFL Super Bowl on February 5. The highlights were available near-live via the Fox Sports VR application for iOS and Android devices.
- ◆ The Denver Broncos NFL team partnered with technology provider Laduma to offer a virtual-reality service. The VR experience is available via the Broncos' official app.
- ◆ The Super Bowl attracted its smallest audience in the US for four years. Audience measurement company Nielsen said the game attracted an average 111.3m viewers on the Fox network, peaking at 117.7m during overtime, when the New England Patriots came back from 28-3 down to defeat the Atlanta Falcons.
- ◆ Major League Soccer franchise FC Dallas will live-stream two of its games from the 2017 regular season exclusively via its official website, in what is believed to be a first for the league. The May 31 clash against Chicago Fire and the September 27 game against Colorado Rapids will be available exclusively via FCDallas.com. The streams will be geo-locked to the Dallas-Fort Worth area.
- ◆ The International Paralympic Committee appointed UK sports production company Sunset+Vine as host broadcaster for the 2017 Para Athletics World Championships in London.
- ◆ Canadian pay-television broadcaster Rogers Sportsnet unveiled a six-week virtual-reality trial which it claims will be a first for NHL broadcasts. Fans will be able to watch games in VR on Sportsnet.ca and the Sportsnet app by using special VR viewfinders. The scheme begins with the Vancouver Canucks and Calgary Flames game on February 18 and concludes with the Ottawa Senators' trip to the Montreal Canadiens on March 25.

NEWS IN BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2 TO 15

- ◆ The English Premier League hailed a police crackdown on the sale and distribution of illegal television set-top devices. Five people were apprehended in Wales and the north-west of England on February 8, with fully-loaded illegal set-top devices seized at their homes.
- ◆ Spanish police raided a store owned by an internet service provider in Malaga on suspicion of hosting a pirate IPTV service that shows Premier League action. The arrests followed a joint investigation between the league and digital protection company Irdeto.
- ◆ Premier League club Manchester United revealed plans to launch a premium app with coverage from its in-house television channel, MUTV. Executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward said United would launch the app in more than 160 countries later this year.
- ◆ UK public-service broadcaster the BBC urged the country's government to update its 'crown jewels' legislation, which outlines which events must be broadcast on free-to-air channels available to 95 per cent of the population. The law currently only includes television and not consumption of content via devices such as mobiles and tablets. BBC Sport director Barbara Slater said the government should act to deliver a regime "fit for the digital era" to avoid free-to-air broadcasters losing rights to events "by the back door".
- ◆ Meo, the pay-television platform of Portugal Telecom, agreed a carriage deal for NBA TV, the channel operated by the North American basketball league. NBA TV will also be available via Meo Go, the platform's service for mobiles.
- ◆ Telco Deutsche Telekom and Bayern Munich will launch a linear television channel dedicated to the German Bundesliga football club. It will offer programming that is currently available via the FCBayern.tv online platform.
- ◆ The Puls4 division of German media group ProSiebenSat.1 Media agreed a takeover deal for Austrian commercial broadcaster ATV. The acquisition must be approved by media and antitrust authorities in Austria.
- ◆ The French Olympic Committee agreed a four-year deal with public-service broadcaster France Télévisions, from 2017 to 2020.
- ◆ Australian pay-television operator Foxtel said it would take action against at least two social media users who used the Facebook Live service to share its pay-per-view coverage of the boxing match between Danny Green and Anthony Mundine on February 2.
- ◆ The AFL Aussie rules football league partnered with its domestic pay-television rights-holder Fox Sports to launch a streaming service targeting international fans and Australians overseas. Every AFL match in 2017 will be delivered live and on-demand via the Watch AFL app as part of the agreement. Watch AFL will be Fox Sports Australia's first direct-to-consumer international streaming product.
- ◆ Free TV, the industry body representing Australia's commercial free-to-air broadcasters, hit out at a proposal to ban all advertising of betting services during live sporting events. The proposal was put forward by the Australian Labor Party, which has introduced an

NEWS IN BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2 TO 15

amendment to the Interactive Gambling Bill currently being read. Measures proposed include a ban on the promotion of live odds during play, as well as a ban on the promotion of odds by commentators and their guests for 30 minutes before and after play. Free TV described the new proposal as “unwarranted” and insisted complaints about betting are low.

◆ DAZN, the OTT service operated by the Perform Group, agreed a carriage deal in Japan with mobile phone operator NTT DoCoMo. The deal will create ‘DAZN for DoCoMo’, granting the operator’s customers access to DAZN content. The service is available in February via a 31-day free trial. Thereafter, four different monthly subscription options will be available, ranging in price from ¥980 (€8/\$9) to ¥2,050.

◆ Media company Discovery Communications launched a new sports channel in India. The DSport channel will broadcast 4,000 hours of live content annually, across sports such as horse racing, football, golf, rugby and cycling (page 10).

◆ Fox Sports Latin America signed carriage deals with pan-regional pay-television operator DirecTV and Brazilian pay-television operator Sky Brasil.

◆ Nigerian broadcaster Arewa24 launched A24 Sports, which will produce and broadcast original sports series and short-form content.

◆ Sports-media industry veteran David Hill established a production service in collaboration with the ESL esports organisation. Esports by Hill will work exclusively with ESL on special projects with selected publishers and sponsors.

◆ Tata Communications was appointed as the exclusive video-distribution partner of the MotoGP and Superbike World Championships motorcycling series. The telco will distribute coverage of the championships to more than 80 broadcast partners.

◆ The European Handball Federation launched a new magazine show for its Champions League club competition on social media platform Snapchat. *Handball Zap* will be shown twice a week, with the Monday show featuring video highlights from the latest round of matches and the Friday programme looking ahead to upcoming games.

◆ Discovery Communications chief executive David Zaslav said the strategy for the media company’s international sports channel, Eurosport, is for it to “always be profitable”. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, Zaslav said the aim is to drive affiliate-fee growth with sports investments – an area in which he said Eurosport has made “strong progress”.

INDUSTRY MOVES

◆ The Sponsors.de website reported that Marisa Reich was appointed as the new associate director of corporate communications at the Infront Sports & Media agency.

◆ Jay Danzi was appointed as US chief operating officer of the Lagardère Sports agency. Marc Riccio was named executive vice-president, US commercial sales and business development.