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FOOTBALL

Football League considers its options as Sky ponders renewal

By Frank Dunne

To secure an increase in the value of its domestic media rights in its next cycle, the English Football League must do two things. First, make pay-television operator Sky believe it is facing real competition for the live rights. Second, enable the bigger clubs to control their own digital services in a way that neither erodes Sky's exclusivity nor upsets the smaller clubs.

Last week, the league appointed Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates and consultant Phil Lines as joint advisers on the process. Oliver & Ohlbaum is expected to provide the statistical analysis, with Lines providing the input on strategic issues like rights packaging.

Sky is in the second season of a three-season deal, from 2015-16 to 2017-18. This was extended in February 2015 for one season, 2018-19. It is thought the league earns an average of just under £90m (€104m/\$112m) per season across the four seasons, including production costs.

The broadcaster has a further one-season option, for 2019-20, which must be triggered by November. If an extension is not agreed, the rights will go back on the market early next year.

Highlights rights are held by commercial broadcaster Channel 5 in a three-season deal, from 2016-17 to 2018-19, worth just under £700,000 per season.

Oliver & Ohlbaum and Lines will provide league chief executive Shaun Harvey with an assessment of the market and a recommendation on strategy which he can put to the clubs this summer.

The EFL rights include: the three divisions below the Premier League – the Championship, League One, and League Two; the EFL Cup, which is open to all 92 clubs from the EFL and the Premier League; and the EFL Trophy, open to clubs from League One and League Two.

Threats to Sky

The most obvious way for the league to secure greater value for its live rights would be to pit Sky against its main pay-television rival, BT Sport, either for a single exclusive deal or for multiple packages in the same way as the Premier League.

BT is very keen to secure the rights. The broadcaster arguably needs more top English football during the weekend. Currently, it has one Premier League match and some FA Cup matches on occasional weekends.

Sky usually has three Premier League matches and two Football League matches. One UK pay-television expert said, in football terms, Sky “owns the weekend”.

The league has been a successful subscription driver for Sky and with annual churn – the number of people cancelling subscriptions – at a recent high of 11.6 per cent, it is not a good time to allow BT to pick it up.

The EFL clubs have about 16m fans throughout the country. Matches between top Championship sides can deliver big audiences. The November match between Leeds and Newcastle, for example, was watched by 826,000 on Sky Sports 1.

The league has also long been one of the best marketing platforms available for a pay-television broadcaster, with 72 clubs spread across all parts of the country. This gives sales teams a local interest around which they can build campaigns to sell subscriptions and other services.

Discovery-owned sports broadcaster Eurosport is also a potential rival. The broadcaster is building strong local offerings in many markets across Europe and the volume of matches available in an EFL deal would give it content to help push its OTT subscription product Eurosport Player, albeit geo-blocked for the UK only.

Experts believe other OTT players, from Amazon to the Perform Group, will be running the numbers on the property at the very least.

There are two other factors which will go a long way to shaping the level of competition for the live rights. First, the appetite of the clubs to gamble on dumping Sky for a higher bid again, after the OnDigital fiasco of 2001. Second, the outcome of more important deals which will precede any EFL negotiations.

Long memories

In 2000, the league dropped its long-standing partner Sky to take an offer of £105m per season for three seasons, from 2001-02 to 2003-04, from the nascent digital-terrestrial platform OnDigital.

The platform was unable to drive enough subscriptions to refinance the deal and went into administration in March 2002. When the league lost a case in the High Court to secure the unpaid fees from OnDigital’s parent companies – the ITV franchises Granada and Carlton – many clubs teetered on bankruptcy.

Sky stepped back in and acquired the rights for four seasons, from 2002-03 to 2005-06, at just under £24m per season. It has remained the league’s primary rights-holder since then and the relationship between the league and the broadcaster is extremely strong.

One well-placed source said BT would have to pay a “premium on a premium” to convince the league to drop Sky. He added, however, that the perception of BT Sport was very different to the perception of OnDigital in 2000. BT Sport has now been around for almost four years, is growing and is well-funded

by its parent company, former state telco BT.

When the league's current deal was signed in July 2013, BT had yet to launch its sports channels. Sky's £90m-per-season offer, up 38 per cent on the £65m per season it was paying in the previous cycle, was a pre-emptive strike to take the rights off the market (*TV Sports Markets* 17:14).

One senior figure in English football said: "It was probably the best deal the league could have got at the time but in the current market there is a considerable margin for improving that."

Few independent experts share the optimism of Derby County chairman Mel Morris, who reportedly believes the rights could be worth £300m per season.

Champions League impact

It will become clear within about a week what kind of broadcaster budgets the EFL will have to contend with. The outcome of the current negotiations for UK rights to the Uefa Champions League and Europa League will shape the landscape for the next two years at least. Bidding went to a second round late this week.

BT is paying just under €359m per season for all Champions League and Europa League rights in its three-season deal from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 17:21). It is desperate to hold on the rights.

If it pays the same or more to do so, the case for spending a further £100m-plus per season on EFL rights will be considerably weakened. Conversely, if it fails to renew its Uefa deal, it will have a greater need for top football.

The same arguments apply to Sky, which is still smarting from having lost out on Champions League rights to BT last time. If it pushed to pay several hundred million euros per season for Uefa rights this will inevitably have a knock-on effect on its budget for other properties.

Sky is considered loyal to sports bodies which have been loyal in return. Few UK experts think it would simply dump the EFL. But it would be a surprise if it were to increase its offer in these circumstances.

The league will also be hoping that one other important rights-holder does not come to market this summer: the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Sky's current deal, worth £75m per year, expires in 2019 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:1). It will face strong competition from BT for rights which not only provide high-quality content across the summer, but also deliver a more upmarket demographic than football.

Big clubs want OTT

A small handful of big league clubs, such as Derby, Leeds United and Nottingham Forest, are keen to expand their digital services and believe they can drive substantial additional revenues from them.

One of the most delicate tasks for Oliver & Ohlbaum and Lines will be to devise a strategy which placates these clubs without undermining the value of any main broadcast deal. A large part of Sky's £90m-per-season investment lies in its absolute exclusivity over live coverage.

From next season, 2017-18, clubs will be able to live-stream matches for the first time. These will be matches which are not made available to broadcasters as part of the international rights sold by the Pitch International agency.

The clubs already have the technical infrastructure in place, as part of the seven-season deal the league agreed in July last year with UK-based digital agency Realise and US company NeuLion – from 2016-17 to 2022-23 – to overhaul all 72 club websites, providing a new platform for streaming services and upgraded payment systems.

However, it remains unclear to what extent the clubs will be able – or will want – to show their own live matches in the UK. Most league matches kick-off at 3pm on Saturdays, when live football broadcasts are not permitted in the UK due to the Football Association's invocation of Uefa's Article 48.

A new window would have to be created for live club coverage, inevitably undermining the value of the linear broadcast rights. Live coverage would also probably undermine stadium attendances and match-day revenues.

A far more likely scenario is that some clubs will look to live-stream matches outside the UK. Within the UK, they will be given greater scope to show full matches on a delayed basis, extended highlights and near-live clips, both for use on their own websites and on social media platforms.

These changes would enable the bigger clubs to offer an attractive OTT subscription product and to enhance sponsorship agreements by providing exclusive digital content. The discussion is likely to focus on holdback periods.

Selection process

Oliver & Ohlbaum and Lines were chosen from a shortlist of two, after dozens of applications were submitted to the league for the adviser role late last year.

The other shortlisted company was sports-rights newcomer Ravensbeck, a London-based media-rights consultancy. Keith Porritt, an associate at Ravensbeck, said the company provided services from research and analysis through to strategy formulation and negotiation.

Oliver & Ohlbaum and Lines initially submitted separate proposals but were persuaded to work together by league chief executive Harvey. The two have worked together in the past and submitted a joint bid to advise the league on the sale of its international rights in 2015 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:23).

The league chose not to appoint an adviser for those rights. Instead, it renewed its distribution deal with Pitch. Its five-season deal, from 2012-13 to 2016-17, worth about \$20m per season, was extended for five more seasons, from 2017-18 to 2021-22, at about \$35m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 20:5). ◆

FOOTBALL

Discovery and Bonnier battle it out for Swedish league rights

By Robin Jellis

The Swedish football league is likely to double the value of its rights as media groups Bonnier and Discovery go head to head in an ongoing tender.

The league is understood to currently earn close to SEK230m (€24.3m/\$25.8m) per year for its rights over the four years from 2016 to 2019. Bonnier, the incumbent, pays close to SEK225m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 17:7).

Non-exclusive highlights rights are sold jointly by Bonnier and the league. Bonnier is understood to spend about SEK70m per year on production on top of its rights fee.

Svensk Elitfotboll (SEF), the body which operates the top two tiers of Swedish football, splits its income about SEK172.5m per year for the Allsvenskan and SEK57.5m per year for the Superettan.

The SEF has offered rights in a new cycle to broadcasters for four, five, or six years from 2020. First-round bids were due on February 17, and second-round bids on March 1. The league is being advised on the sale of its media rights by the Profile Partners agency. As *TV Sports Markets* went to press, Discovery is understood to be close to securing all SEF rights.

Local media reports claim Profile will only be paid by the league if it doubles the current value of the rights, to at least SEK460m per year. Some local experts spoken to by *TV Sports Markets* this week felt the value of the rights could rise as high as SEK500m per year in a new deal.

Why such an early sale?

The league is selling its rights so early – more than three years before the Bonnier deal expires – for three main reasons.

First, it wants to take advantage of strong competition in the country.

Discovery is well-known to have sought local, premium properties in each of the Nordic territories. It holds domestic top-tier Tippeligaen football rights in Norway, and has rights in Denmark to some top-tier domestic Superliga football. It is yet to acquire such a property in Sweden – buying one would help it negotiate improved carriage deals.

If Discovery fails to acquire SEF rights, it will be a long time until another domestic property is on the market as many local leagues have been sold well into the future.

Bonnier's TV4 commercial and C More pay-television channels have carved a niche as broadcasters of domestic sport. The company's sports-rights strategy would be in question if it did not renew rights to the top two domestic football leagues.

As well as its existing Swedish football league deal, Bonnier holds rights to: the top-tier ice hockey league, the Swedish Hockey League; the second-tier ice hockey league, the HockeyAllsvenskan; and all Sweden national football team European Qualifier and Nations League matches until 2021-22.

Commercial and pay-television broadcaster Modern Times Group is understood to have bid for the SEF rights, but its focus is on retaining its Champions League rights across Scandinavia and its English Premier League rights in Denmark, Finland and Sweden when they next come to the market.

The second reason the SEF is keen to sell so early is it wants to agree a deal before Uefa approaches Scandinavian broadcasters with Champions League and Europa League rights in new cycles, from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

Champions League rights are currently held across Scandinavia by MTG, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, in a deal worth about €73m per season. Europa League rights are held across the region by Discovery over the same three seasons in a deal worth about €10m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 17:20; 19:11).

Third, the league would like to replicate the recent success of the SHL, which sold its media rights to Bonnier in a six-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2023-24, for about SEK670m per season – a 90-per-cent increase on the value of the current deal. It is the most valuable deal in Scandinavia (*TV Sports Markets* 20:17).

Selling Allsvenskan and Superettan rights so far in advance would also allow a new entrant time to plan a launch. Domestic football rights are an important subscription driver.

Previous Swedish league deals

When the SEF sold its rights for the current cycle, it did so directly to Bonnier, without a tender and without agency help.

In the previous deal, from 2011 to 2015, the league – in combination with the Swedish football federation, the Svenska Fotbollförbundet, and the women's league, the Damallsvenskan – sold rights to the now-defunct Kentaro agency for about SEK270m per year.

Kentaro sold on to Bonnier for about SEK310m per year. As well as league matches, the deal included national team home matches, men's cup matches and women's league matches. The majority of the value of the deal was for rights to the league and national team matches, which were of similar value.

From 2006 to 2010, Kentaro also held the rights, in a deal worth an average of about SEK275m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 13:19).

Profile a controversial choice

When the league sold its rights directly last time, it ended a long relationship with Profile. For this tender, the league has again turned to the agency.

At the time it agreed its current deal with Bonnier, the league's chief executive Mats Enquist told *TV Sports Markets*: "We have no complaints with agents we have worked with in the past, but in this instance it was more of a case of building a partnership than selling media rights."

Things are clearly different now. The SEF has seen the result of the SHL sales process and is keen to replicate it. It is also keen to sell early to take advantage of the current competitive dynamic in the Swedish rights market.

Local sources say Profile is a curious choice. Profile founder Rune Hauge is a controversial character, having been banned from acting as a player agent by Fifa in 1995 – he served a two-year suspension. The Panama Papers leak also revealed that Hauge was paid SEK150m by the SEF for agreeing their deal with Kentaro, from 2011 to 2015.

Hauge is understood to be running the latest tender process, although he is working with Profile colleagues Mark Deckelmann and Michael Gott.

Enquist told *TV Sports Markets* this week: "Every time you do a media agreement, you need to evaluate the best set-up. At this time, we needed a different set-up and process to last time. We wanted to run a complete, open and transparent process.

"We therefore evaluated different possible partners to help us in this process, and we finally chose Profile Partners. We have chosen them as a company, not any person in specific terms, based on their offering.

"We must also state that we have had no previous bad experiences whatsoever with Profile Partners or Rune Hauge. Any alleged controversy is beyond our knowledge and/or personal experience."

There are two schools of thought as to how much Profile will earn from any new SEF deal. Most think they will earn three per cent of the total if they reach at least SEK460m per year. Enquist told Swedish media this was incorrect. Others say they will earn three per cent on any revenue above SEK460m per year.

Current coverage

All 240 Allsvenskan matches per year are currently shown live on C More, and on its C More OTT service. Of the 240 Superettan matches per year, 150 are shown on the C More OTT service and 90 are shown on free-to-air sports channel TV12.

The Bonnier deal includes non-exclusive highlights rights. These have also been sold to Swedish public-service broadcaster SVT over the same four years, from 2016 to 2019. These were sold together by the league and Bonnier.

Bonnier's current deal is global. Outside Sweden, however, there is little interest in the rights. ◆

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

Sityodtong: Local focus keeps One ahead of UFC across Asia

By Callum McCarthy

Greater free-to-air exposure and a deep understanding of Asian media-rights markets has helped One Championship create a “global duopoly” in mixed martial arts, according to its chairman Chatri Sityodtong.

Speaking exclusively to *TV Sports Markets*, Sityodtong said he believes One’s commitment to agreeing free-to-air deals in major markets in Asia has had a significant impact on its ascendance to become the region’s number one MMA promotion.

As with many emerging combat sports promotions, One’s media-rights strategy has focused on exposure over income. Multiple sources believe this strategy was aimed at securing third-party investment on the back of anticipated growth in popularity. In July 2016, One secured a reported eight-figure investment from a consortium led by investment firm Heliconia Capital Management.

One’s pan-regional deal with pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports Asia, from 2012 to 2021, is understood to be worth just \$250,000 (€235,500) per year.

The fee One receives is low compared to what it could earn from an exclusive pay-television deal, but the deal’s flexibility has ensured One can sell free-to-air rights separately while guaranteeing some coverage should it be unable to do so.

A source close to the broadcaster believes One sought this deal with Fox as an additional asset with which to attract investment.

Sityodtong said: “More people in Asia are getting pay-television subscriptions, but those numbers are still small in comparison to free-to-air. We have 4bn people in Asia and we want 4bn people to watch One. You can’t just be on cable and the internet. You have to be on every platform. That’s why we’ve been able to dominate.”

Since 2013, One has had at least one free-to-air deal in each of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Between two and eight hours per week of One content is shown in each of these markets. Its most valuable deal is in the Philippines with commercial broadcaster ABS-CBN.

One’s market-by-market approach in Asia has yielded relatively little revenue, but Sityodtong believes this is a small price to pay for its ability to attract large audiences and local sponsors.

“In Asia, every country is different,” he said. “Some countries have high-speed internet like South Korea and Japan. In some countries like Thailand, penetration is low and almost everyone is a free-to-air viewer. In Indonesia you absolutely need a free-to-air deal for the disparate islands.

“Every single country has different degrees of interconnectivity and penetration. Our content is localised, our strategy is localised, and our execution is localised.”

The promotion’s executives hope that, in future, media rights will form a larger part of its income. For now, Sityodtong is happy to cement the promotion’s cultural relevance in the region.

UFC’s Asian strategy

Despite earning far more from its media rights in the region, the Ultimate Fighting Championship – the world’s largest MMA promotion and One’s main rival – has struggled to gain traction in Asia over the past two years. The promotion held no events in Asia in 2016, but will hold two in the region in 2017.

The UFC earned just over \$18m for its media rights across Asia in 2016 – about four times more than One. This includes income from deals in China and Japan.

The UFC’s own pan-regional deal with Fox Sports Asia, from 2015 to 2018, is worth about \$2m per year. This is a decrease of 13 per cent on its previous deal with Fox, from 2012 to 2014, worth about \$2.3m per year. One source said the UFC had “very tough” negotiations with Fox when renewing its deal in 2014.

Both deals gave Fox exclusive rights across Asia, excluding China, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea, where the UFC has exclusive deals with other pay-television broadcasters.

While the UFC earns far more in media-rights income than One, the UFC’s strategy in Asia has been disjointed despite identifying the region as a major target for growth in 2013.

Ultimate Fighting Championship broadcasters in Asia

Territory	Broadcaster	Per-year value
Pan-Asia	Fox Sports Asia	\$2m
China	PPTV	\$7.2m
Philippines	TV5 (Hyper)	\$3.8m
South Korea	SpoTV	\$3.1m
Japan	DAZN	N/A

Source: TV Sports Markets Rights Tracker

When the WME|IMG agency acquired the UFC in July 2016, it reportedly fired about half of its Asia staff. MMA experts say the UFC’s earning potential in Asia is hampered by the lack of local personnel and by its pan-regional media-rights strategy.

Industry experts believe these two factors have had a negative effect on the promotion's brand in Asia, and believe WME|IMG will face a tough battle to increase its popularity in the region. WME|IMG declined to comment when contacted by *TV Sports Markets*.

Sityodtong believes the UFC will have difficulty tailoring its product to an Asian audience due to its lack of staff, lack of free-to-air deals and distinctly American brand identity.

Referring to the UFC's need to satisfy American audiences, Sityodtong said: "Their record has been very good in America, they've been selling Conor McGregor and Jon Jones very well. But the UFC have come at Asia with a one-size-fits-all approach."

He continued: "We're very focused on Asia, martial arts, the different cultures, the customs, the history, the tradition – we're focused on an Asian product. Much in the same way the NFL and the NBA is for Americans, the UFC is packaged for Americans."

The UFC's lack of Asian fighters severely hampers its ability to earn more from its broadcast deals. The promotion's roster of Asian fighters has decreased over the past two years, and it recently released flyweight contender Kyoji Horiguchi and bantamweight contender Takeya Mizugaki – its two best Japanese fighters.

Russian UFC deal

Sports broadcaster Match TV has secured UFC rights for the rest of 2017 in Russia after agreeing a deal with the Telesport agency.

The upfront value of the deal is thought to be less than the \$850,000 per year paid by Telesport in January. Telesport's two-year deal covers 2017 and 2018 (*TV Sports Markets* 21:2).

Match will receive rights to all UFC events, but its main interest was in acquiring rights to UFC 209, which features Russian star Khabib Nurmagomedov. The event takes place on Saturday, March 4.

The UFC was forced to sell its rights to Telesport after direct negotiations with Match broke down. It is thought that, prior to the promotion's sale to WME|IMG, a deal worth \$600,000 for 2017 only was close to being agreed.

The UFC faces similar problems in Russia as it does in Asia – local promotions such as Fight Nights Global, M-1 Global, Absolute Championship Berkut and World Fighting Championship Akhmat dominate the domestic MMA market, and are able to retain almost all top local fighters.

One Russian MMA expert said: "Russian people want to see Russian fighters, and the only UFC fighters they truly care about are Conor [McGregor] and Khabib [Nurmagomedov]. The fact there are lots of Russian promotions that are all broadcast on Match TV means their fighters are much more popular. These promotions are not viewed as regional mixed martial arts products." ♦

TV FRANCE

SFR misses Fiba, wins Diamond League ahead of bigger battles

By Robin Jellis

- Canal Plus signs five-year Fiba deal, from 2017 to 2021, worth about €4m per year
- Previous Canal Plus deal, from 2013 to 2015, worth just over €2m per year
- SFR buys Diamond League international rights from 2017 to 2019 for about €1m per year

SFR Sport lost out to French pay-television rival Canal Plus in a fourth round of bidding for International Basketball Federation (Fiba) events this month, but added the Diamond League to its slow-growing portfolio of sports rights.

Canal Plus's new five-year Fiba deal, from 2017 to 2021, will be worth about €20m (\$21m), or €4m per year. The deal will cover the World Cup in 2019 and EuroBasket in 2017 and 2021, plus qualifying matches for both tournaments.

The pay-television broadcaster's previous three-year deal, from 2013 to 2015, was worth between €6m and €7m, about €2m per year. That deal covered the 2014 World Cup and EuroBasket in 2013 and 2015.

The fee has roughly doubled for two main reasons. First, strong competition between Canal Plus and SFR, which is owned by telco Altice. Second, changes to the Fiba calendar and the creation of qualifier matches, increasing the volume of content available to broadcasters.

Canal Plus struck the deal with Fiba Media, the joint venture between Fiba and the Perform Group. In February 2016, Perform agreed a €500m, 17-year deal to produce and distribute Fiba content from 2017 to 2033 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:3).

Fiba's changes to its calendar include avoiding clashes with the Fifa World Cup, increasing the number of teams competing in basketball's World Cup and spreading qualification matches across the year (*TV Sports Markets* 19:18).

The rights were attractive to both Canal Plus and SFR, not least due to the recent success of the French national team. The men's team is ranked fourth in the world, and performed well in Fiba's 2013-2015 cycle. It won EuroBasket 2013, and finished third at the 2014 World Cup and EuroBasket 2015.

SFR bid aggressively. It was keen on the Fiba package as it felt the rights would complement its domestic basketball coverage. Together with digital-terrestrial broadcaster L'Équipe, SFR holds rights

to the Pro A league and national team friendly matches in a deal worth about €10m per season from 2015-16 to 2019-20 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:15).

For Canal Plus, the renewal comes after a difficult 2016 in which it lost 492,000 subscribers. It now has about 5.2m. Fiba was happy to renew with Canal Plus as it is the body's long-term broadcast partner in France, and was willing to pay a large fee increase.

Canal Plus also holds rights to Fiba's Champions League competition in a three-season deal, from 2016-17 to 2018-19, worth about €700,000 per season. It also covers production costs to French clubs' home matches.

Under French listed-events legislation, the finals of the World Cup and EuroBasket tournaments must be shown free-to-air if a French men's or women's team qualifies. Canal Plus has issued a tender for these rights already. Public-service broadcaster France Télévisions and commercial broadcaster TF1 are considered the likely buyers.

In the 2013-2015 cycle, France Télévisions acquired rights to the semi-finals and finals with French participation directly from Fiba. Payments were contingent on the success of the French teams, but if the men's and women's teams had both reached the final of either the World Cup or EuroBasket, the broadcaster would have paid about €1m in total.

Fiba initially carved these rights out of its tender from 2017, but following strong bidding from Canal Plus and SFR it added them back to the package.

It is unclear exactly how revenue from a sublicensing deal would be shared, but it is understood that not all revenue will go to Canal Plus – a portion will go to Fiba. Fiba will approve any sublicensing agreement.

SFR snatches Diamond League

Despite missing out on Fiba rights, SFR was successful in acquiring rights to 12 Diamond League meetings per year.

Its three-year deal, from 2017 to 2019, will be worth about €1m per year. This is a large increase on the value of the previous four-year deal for the same set of rights, from 2013 to 2016, with pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports. That deal was worth about €600,000 per year.

Both deals were struck with the IMG agency. IMG tendered rights in a new cycle at the end of last year. It is thought beIN bid to renew its rights.

IMG had a five-year deal to distribute Diamond League international rights, from 2010 to 2014, worth a minimum guarantee of about \$7m per year. It has since extended the deal by five years, from 2015 to 2019, for a minimum of close to \$10m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 19:9). Event organisers retain domestic rights to their own events.

SFR will also have rights to the Paris meeting as it is included in its deal with the French athletics federation, the Fédération Française d'Athlétisme. That deal runs from 2017 to 2020. From 2013 to 2016 the rights were held by Canal Plus.

Canal Plus holds rights to the Diamond League meeting in Monaco via a four-year deal, from 2017 to 2020, with the Monegasque athletics federation, the Fédération Monégasque d'Athlétisme.

From 2010 to 2012, Canal Plus paid €300,000 per year for rights to both the Paris and Monaco meetings, while now-defunct pay-television broadcaster Orange Sport paid €600,000 per year for all other meetings (*TV Sports Markets* 13:17).

The 2017 Diamond League season begins on May 5 in Doha.

Bigger battles on the horizon

BeIN, Canal Plus and SFR will all have their eyes on upcoming auctions, with several important properties coming to the market in the coming months.

One local expert said: "By the end of July we will better know the ambition of SFR." Until now, the broadcaster's strategy has been unclear. Its only major property is the English Premier League, which it holds from 2016-17 to 2018-19 in a deal worth €120m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 19:23).

First up is the Coupe de France, for which bids are due today (March 3). Bids were originally due on February 10 but the process was delayed following queries from interested broadcasters.

The rights are being offered for four seasons, from 2018-19 to 2021-22, by the French football federation, the Fédération Française de Football. Coupe de France rights are currently held jointly by France Télévisions and sports broadcaster Eurosport in a four-season deal, from 2014-15 to 2017-18, worth €16.5m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:3).

Uefa is expected to offer its Champions League and Europa League rights to broadcasters in late March or early April.

It is a crucial period for beIN and Canal Plus. The two share Champions League rights in the 2015-16 to 2017-18 cycle in deals worth a combined fee of about €148m per season. BeIN and commercial broadcaster M6 share Europa League rights in the same cycle, for a combined fee close to €25m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:8).

Canal Plus's deal for Formula One expires this year and rights in a new cycle are expected to be offered to broadcasters soon. The pay-television broadcaster's existing five-year contract, from 2013 to 2017, is worth about €29m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 18:1).

Another rights-holder looking to sell is European Professional Club Rugby. Deals for its Champions Cup and Challenge Cup competitions – with beIN and France Télévisions – run from 2014-15 to 2017-18. The rights are worth a total of between €20m and €21m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:19). ◆

FOOTBALL

Uefa close to signing off club deals in China, Japan and the US

By Richard Welbirg

Uefa will imminently finalise its first club competition deal of the 2018-19 to 2020-21 cycle in China, Japan or the US. Tenders for the Champions League and Europa League have closed with clear winners in all three territories, but European football's governing body and its sales agent, Team Marketing, have yet to finalise any agreements.

Agency Desports was the highest bidder when rights in China were on the market last month, but final negotiations are progressing slowly (*TV Sports Markets* 21:2). Uefa and Team are also in exclusive negotiations in Japan with Perform Group-owned OTT platform DAZN.

In the US, media group Turner took the market by surprise, winning English-language rights in the first round with a bid of about \$60m (€57m) per season. Spanish-language rights, sold separately for the first time, were acquired by sports broadcaster Univision for about \$35m per season.

It is the first football property Turner has acquired since the 1990 Fifa World Cup, and it ends Fox Sports's nine-season hold on the rights.

Fox pays just over \$50m per season in its current three-season deal, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, for English- and Spanish-language rights in both the US and the Caribbean (*TV Sports Markets* 17:23).

Fox paid \$27m per season from 2012-13 to 2014-15, and \$11m per season from 2009-10 to 2011-12 for rights in the same territories.

The latest deals mean Uefa has earned an increase of at least 90 per cent on the 2015-16 to 2017-18 cycle. Exactly how much more it has made will be clear when the tender for rights in the Caribbean is finalised. Rights were tendered on February 28 with bids due by March 28.

Rights in the Caribbean are being sold separately for the first time in the 2018-19 to 2020-21 cycle. The governing body felt that increasing competition – between telcos Digicel and Flow – made it likely a significant fee could be extracted independently of the US market.

The value of the English Premier League in the region soared 900 per cent when rights to the 2016-17 to 2018-19 cycle were sold in October 2015. Flow is paying \$26m per season for the rights, 10 times the \$2.6m per season paid by pay-television broadcaster SportsMax in the previous cycle (*TV Sports Markets* 20:10).

Turner catches Fox cold

The size of Turner's bid for English-language rights seems to have caught its rivals flat-footed, despite the fact Uefa and Team had been in talks with broadcasters for more than a year.

Fox was expected to try and retain at least English-language rights. In the current cycle it sublicenses some Spanish-language rights to pay-television broadcaster ESPN. But Fox's first-round bid for English-language rights to both competitions was just over half the value of Turner's.

It was at a similar level to the surprise offer from Bamtech, the technology company spun off from MLB Advanced Media and part-owned by Disney. Bamtech's proposal was to create an OTT service for the competitions and show the top matches on ESPN, which is also Disney-owned. It is the first time Bamtech has bid for a major sports property.

There was a fourth bid from the NBC Sports Group division of US media company NBCUniversal. Pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports did not bid.

Turner will show matches across its cable channels TBS, TNT and truTV. As of this month, Nielsen estimates the three channels reach 92m, 91m and 87m cable homes respectively.

The main reason for Turner's dramatic acquisition of the rights is a belief the property can reach a young demographic increasingly turning away from cable channels. Sources close to the company said the popularity of European football on the Turner-owned Bleacher Report sports news website played an important role in the broadcaster's decision.

Sports broadcaster Univision was a likely winner for the Spanish-language rights. It has coveted Uefa rights in the past but was unable to unseat Fox when the English-language and Spanish-language rights were packaged together.

Univision faced rival bids from Bamtech and NBC's Spanish-language broadcaster Telemundo, but was the clear leader and – like Turner – was victorious in the first round of bidding.

Digital players lead the way in Japan

After two rounds of bidding, there is understood to have been clear water between DAZN and two rival bids. Incumbent pay-television operator Sky PerfectTV is thought to have made a joint bid with telco SoftBank, which acquires digital rights to drive its mobile phone business.

There was also a bid from global retail giant Amazon. The company has met with many rights-holders in recent years to explore the possibility of entering the sports-broadcast market. But this is the first time it has bid for a major property.

In the current three-season cycle, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, Sky PerfectTV pays about \$21.5m per season for the Champions League, and about \$5.5m per season for the Europa League (*TV Sports Markets* 19:2). ◆

FOOTBALL

Eleven picks up Bundesliga in Poland; league to sell FTA rights

By Callum McCarthy

- Eleven buys Bundesliga rights in Poland from 2017-18 to 2020-21 for about €7m per season
- Current Eurosport allocation for rights in Poland is just over €4m per season
- Eurosport pays €25m per season for rights in 22 Central and Eastern European territories

Strong competition and Robert Lewandowski's decision to remain with Bayern Munich drove a big increase in the value of Bundesliga pay-television rights in Poland last month.

The Bundesliga will earn an average of about €7m (\$7.4m) per season in a four-season deal, from 2017-18 to 2020-21, with pay-television broadcaster Eleven Sports Network. The deal is for exclusive pay-television rights. It was struck with DFL Sports Enterprises, the commercial arm of the German professional football league, the Deutsche Fußball Liga.

It is thought the league is hoping to earn a total of €10m per season from the country once it has sold free-to-air rights to one match per week. Public-service broadcaster TVP is the favourite to acquire these rights.

The deal with Eleven ensures an increase of at least 60 per cent on the current value of Bundesliga rights in the country. Sports broadcaster Eurosport holds all Bundesliga rights in Poland as part of a two-season deal, covering 2015-16 and 2016-17, across 22 territories in Central and Eastern Europe.

Eurosport pays €25m per season in total, of which just over €4m per season is thought to be allocated to Poland. Some experts believe this allocation to be a slight undervaluation (*TV Sports Markets* 19:16).

The dramatic uplift has been driven by Eurosport's attempt to retain its existing rights. It is thought to have offered about €8.5m per season for exclusive rights across all platforms, but the league declined – choosing to carve out one match per week for free-to-air coverage.

Eurosport was keen to keep hold of the Bundesliga, an important property for the broadcaster. But it was not interested in anything other than total exclusivity.

The Bundesliga's success in achieving its asking price for the rights was helped by the news that Lewandowski signed a new four-year deal at Bayern in December. Lewandowski is enormously popular in his native Poland; such is his influence on the value of the rights that the DFL waited until he renewed his deal to sell them.

One Polish broadcaster source believes the league's media-rights value has increased by about 400 per cent since the player was signed by Borussia Dortmund from Polish club Lech Poznań in 2010.

Lagardère in then out

The Lagardère Sports agency is thought to have agreed a deal in principle for the complete package of Bundesliga rights in Poland last summer, but pulled out of the deal as it did not feel it would be able to make a profit on the rights.

Multiple sources believe Lagardère had a pre-deal in place with a pay-television broadcaster that fell through. Lagardère's deal with the league would have been worth just over €8.5m per season. The Bundesliga is thought to have used this as a benchmark.

Free-to-air rights

Eleven and the Bundesliga believe free-to-air exposure for the league in the country will help them both. Eleven expects a greater number of subscriptions as a result of the league gaining wider exposure. The league wanted free-to-air coverage to gain greater exposure for its brand and its sponsors.

The DFL will sell non-exclusive rights to: the Saturday 6.30pm Bundesliga match; the season-opening Supercup; and relegation playoff matches between the Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga.

These matches will be simulcast by Eleven. The broadcaster has the right to sublicense additional content. ◆

European football leagues in Poland

Property	Broadcaster	Duration	Per-season value
English Premier League	Canal Plus	2010-11 to 2012-13	€13.7m
	NC Plus	2013-14 to 2015-16	€11.7m
	NC Plus	2016-17 to 2018-19	€15m
Spanish LaLiga	Canal Plus	2009-10 to 2011-12	€2.3m
	NC Plus	2012-13 to 2014-15	N/A
	Eleven Sports Network	2015-16 to 2017-18	€10.5m
German Bundesliga	Discovery	2012-13 to 2014-15	N/A
	Discovery	2015-16 to 2016-17	€4.25m
	Eleven Sports Network	2017-18 to 2020-21	€7m
Italian Serie A	Orange	2013-14	€1m
	NC Plus	2014-15	€500,000
	Eleven Sports Network	2015-16 to 2017-18	€1.5m

Source: TV Sports Markets Rights Tracker

FOOTBALL

Uefa earns national team growth from small Icelandic market

By Robin Jellis

- Uefa will earn just under €3.5m for national team rights from 2018-19 to 2021-22 in Iceland
- RÚV will pay about €850,000 for rights to 24 first- and second-party Iceland matches
- 365 will pay €2.6m for Euro 2020, the Nations League and third-party qualifiers

Iceland's unexpected success at Euro 2016 helped Uefa secure an increase in the value of its national team rights in the country for the 2018-19 to 2021-22 cycle.

Uefa, European football's governing body, has agreed deals for four sets of rights with two different broadcasters. Icelandic public-service broadcaster RÚV has acquired first- and second-party European Qualifier rights, while media group 365 has bought: first- and second-party Nations League rights; third-party European Qualifier and Nations League rights; and Euro 2020.

These deals will earn Uefa a total of just under €3.5m (\$3.7m) across the four seasons. All were agreed with Uefa and CAA Eleven, the body's sales agent for its national team competitions.

It is a good outcome for Uefa given Iceland has a population of 330,000.

Uefa tendered all its national team rights simultaneously on August 30, with bids due by September 27. There are thought to have been two rounds of bidding for each set of rights. The deals with 365 are understood to have been agreed in principle but are yet to be officially signed off.

Icelandic overview

The Icelandic sports-rights market is dominated by RÚV and 365. RÚV generally broadcasts events traditionally shown by public-service broadcasters across Europe, such as the Olympic Games and the Fifa World Cup. 365 – which owns the Stöð pay-television channels – has rights to most other sport. It has deals for all top football, golf and Formula One.

Telco Síminn – which runs the Sjónvarp Símans free-to-air and pay-television channels (formerly known as Skjáreinn) – has shown little appetite for sports rights in recent years, although it broadcast Euro 2016 in the country.

Latest Uefa deals

Síminn paid €1.6m for Euro 2016 rights. The 365 deal for Euro 2020 is worth about €1.8m, an increase of about 12.5 per cent. It is understood Síminn was keen to renew but did not want to increase its fee. It felt the performance of the Iceland team, which reached the Euro 2016 quarter-finals, won't be repeated. For 365 and Síminn, a four-week tournament is not the best property to attract subscribers.

RÚV acquired rights to 20 first- and second-party European Qualifier and four friendly matches over the four years for about €850,000.

The public-service broadcaster holds rights to Iceland's European Qualifier matches in the current cycle, from 2014-15 to 2017-18, via its membership of the European Broadcasting Union, the consortium of public-service broadcasters. RÚV is thought to contribute about €550,000 to the EBU deal (*TV Sports Markets* 17:11).

RÚV and 365 bid against each other for rights to Iceland matches in the European Qualifiers and Nations League. 365 will pay about €500,000 for first- and second-party Nations League rights. The package contains 16 matches, 12 of which are guaranteed to be in the Nations League. The other four will either be knockout Nations League matches or friendlies.

The Nations League will replace friendly matches from 2018-19. The Icelandic football federation, the Knattspyrnusamband Íslands, has historically sold Iceland friendly matches to either RÚV or 365. Before Uefa's centralisation, the federation sold qualifier matches to the Sportfive agency.

365 also acquired rights to third-party European Qualifier and Nations League matches over the four years in a deal worth about €300,000 in total. The new deal represents an increase of less than 10 per cent on the circa €275,000 365 pays for third-party European Qualifier matches in the current cycle.

Competition for third-party rights was the weakest among Uefa's national team properties in the country. 365 is understood to have been the only realistic buyer of the rights. The package will complement 365's other European club football coverage.

Other 365 content

Its deal for English Premier League rights is its most valuable club football deal. It pays about \$2.5m per season in a three-season deal, from 2016-17 to 2018-19.

From 2015-16 to 2017-18, 365 also holds rights to the Uefa Champions League and Europa League, and Spain's LaLiga. It also holds English Football League and Football Association rights, and the domestic football and basketball leagues. The media group also holds NBA, NFL and UFC rights.

The parent company of telco Vodafone Iceland, Fjarskipti, is in the final stages of acquiring 365's television and radio business for ISK8bn (€68m/\$73m). The deal has to be approved by the country's competition authority. It is expected to be finalised in the first quarter of 2017. ◆

TV CHINA

Suning steps up to fill LeSports vacuum with AFC and CSL rights

By Richard Welbirg

Chinese retail giant Suning's sporting subsidiaries are filling gaps in the country's media-rights market left by the retreat of streaming operator LeSports.

LeSports's deal for Asian Football Confederation media rights from 2017 to 2020 was terminated by the regional governing body this week. And LeSports has pulled out of its headline deal for Chinese Super League rights before the new season begins today (March 3).

The company's aggressive investment in sports rights came to an abrupt halt last year after parent company LeEco ran into cash-flow problems (*TV Sports Markets* 20:19).

Suning owns LeSports's direct streaming rival PPTV, whose \$700m (€660m) deal for English Premier League rights in China from 2019-20 to 2021-22 saw it become the new figurehead of the country's media-rights explosion (*TV Sports Markets* 20:20).

Suning has also agreed to acquire the China Sports Media agency from its current owner, private equity firm China Media Capital.

CSM distributes broadcast rights for the CSL over five years from 2016 to 2020, and its acquisition paves the way for PPTV to take over from LeSports as the league's primary digital broadcaster.

CSM has picked up the AFC rights removed from LeSports.

Missed payments try AFC patience

LeSports committed to pay \$110m for AFC rights in China across four years, from 2017 to 2020, or \$27.5m per year (*TV Sports Markets* 19:21).

But it missed a second instalment in January, and the deal was cancelled by the confederation when a revised deadline was also missed last month. To secure the rights, CSM has paid the outstanding instalment and committed to the remainder of the contract.

AFC rights were sold by the Lagardère Sports agency in October 2015. Lagardère distributes the confederation's media and marketing rights globally over the eight years from 2013 to 2020. It guarantees a minimum income of \$600m over the period (*TV Sports Markets* 19:7).

The decision to terminate the LeSports deal in China is thought to have been made by the AFC rather than Lagardère. LeEco holds a 20-per-cent stake in the agency's Asia division as the result of a \$75m deal agreed at the same time the AFC rights were sold (*TV Sports Markets* 20:22).

PPTV set to take on Super League

PPTV has stepped in as the primary digital broadcaster of the CSL, assuming the remainder of LeSports's deal.

CSM's deal with the league valued the rights at CNY1bn (\$145m/€137m) per year in 2016 and 2017, and CNY2bn per year in 2018, 2019 and 2020 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:19).

Its biggest sublicensing deal was with LeSports, for exclusive rights to nine of 10 matches per week. LeSports paid CNY2.7bn for rights in 2016 and 2017, or CNY1.35bn per year.

The deal included rights in mainland China, as well as Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan; the US and Canada, and selected Southeast Asian territories.

It is understood LeSports still owes CNY300m for 2016.

Rights-holders & agencies promised money

LeEco is thought to have stabilised its business thanks to a January investment worth CNY15.04bn from property developer Sunac China Holdings. But little of the parent company's funding is thought to be reaching LeSports, which has cut about 10 per cent of its staff.

TV Sports Markets understands the company has told rights-holders it has secured \$100m in direct funding, which is held offshore and will be used to meet its obligations from March 13. It also claims it is still on target to break even in 2018. ◆

TENNIS

French Open renewal par for the course in sub-Saharan Africa

By Callum McCarthy

SuperSport's latest deal for French Open media rights in sub-Saharan Africa has illustrated the lack of competition for tennis rights in the region, despite the entrance of new players.

The Fédération Française de Tennis, the governing body of tennis in France and the French Open's commercial rights-holder, earned a steady increase in the value of its English-language rights in a new four-year deal with pay-television broadcaster SuperSport, from 2018 to 2021.

The FFT will earn just under \$750,000 (€706,500) per year from its new deal, an increase of about 15 per cent on its current five-year deal with SuperSport, from 2013 to 2017, worth about \$650,000 per year. SuperSport holds rights to all four grand slams as well as ATP 1000, 500 and 250 events across the continent.

Despite the modest increase, the new deal makes the French Open the second-most valuable in the region behind Wimbledon. This is mainly because the tournament is held in a more favourable time-zone for African viewers than the Australian and US Open tournaments.

SuperSport's current five-year deal for Wimbledon rights, from 2013 to 2017, is worth about \$950,000 per year. Its new five-year deal, from 2018 to 2022, will be worth \$1.1m per year – an increase of about 15 per cent.

Both Wimbledon deals were signed off by commercial rights-holder the All England Lawn Tennis Club but negotiated with the IMG agency, which advises the AELTC on the sale of its media and marketing rights. Wimbledon is considered the most prestigious grand slam in sub-Saharan Africa, and is also hosted in a favourable time-zone.

SuperSport's five-year deal for Australian Open rights, from 2014 to 2018, is worth about \$700,000 per year. SuperSport is understood to have agreed a four-year deal for US Open rights, from 2017 to 2020, worth about \$600,000 per year. The deal was agreed in direct talks with the IMG agency.

The pay-television broadcaster faces no competition for tennis rights due to limited interest in the sport outside South Africa – SuperSport's primary market.

Sports broadcaster Kwesé Sports has thus far shown no ambition to acquire any tennis properties as it is currently not active in South Africa. This could change in the future as Kwesé is interested in acquiring a free-to-air licence in South Africa. ♦

FOOTBALL

Lagardère and Mediapro add to agency trend in Latin America

By Richard Welbirg

Two recent deals illustrate the inroads international agencies continue to make in the Latin American sports-rights market.

The Lagardère Sports agency last week struck a two-year deal for international rights to Chilean club football. And in Uruguay, Mediapro was brought in by the Uruguayan football federation (AUF) to consult on its national-team properties.

Lagardère's deal with the Chilean Football Association (ANFP) will run for the remainder of 2017, and could be extended to cover 2018 depending upon the fate of Canal del Fútbol, the pay-television broadcaster via which the ANFP and its clubs exploit their domestic rights.

In 2017, Lagardère is paying a minimum guarantee in the hundreds of thousands of dollars – but less than half a million – with a revenue share above this. The agreement covers broadcast and betting rights to the top-tier Primera División, the Copa Chile and Supercopa de Chile competitions in all countries outside Chile.

There is some value in the broadcast rights in nearby Latin American countries, as well as in Australia, Scandinavia and the US, where there are significant Chilean immigrant populations.

But the real value for Lagardère is thought to lie in staking a claim in Latin America at a time international agencies are increasingly focused on the region.

Chilean football's unique model

The ANFP operates the top-tier Primera División and second-tier Primera B, and exploits its rights through pay-television broadcaster Canal del Fútbol, of which it owns 80 per cent. The remaining 20 per cent is held by channel operator Gestión de Televisión (GTV), owned by businessman Jorge Claro.

CdF splits its coverage over two channels, one basic-tier and one premium. GTV agrees carriage deal for the CdF channels with domestic pay-television operators.

Money earned by CdF is distributed to the clubs. The broadcaster has three revenue streams:

- Domestic carriage deals struck by GTV for the two CdF channels. These revenues are split 80:20 in favour of CdF. CdF earned \$65m profit in 2015 and is thought to have reached \$70m in 2016.

- Selling domestic highlights rights to a free-to-air broadcaster.
- Selling international rights.

An ANFP representative held talks with agencies about the league's international rights at the Sportel trade fair in Monaco last year. At the time, the ANFP was offering the rights in a five-year cycle.

But the ANFP announced in November it was seeking a multi-territory broadcaster to buy CdF. A tender has been scheduled for March. A similar attempt to sell the channel in 2015 failed.

Lagardère's international deal appears to be shorter than planned, and partly conditional, so that CdF can be sold with all the league's rights included.

Mediapro's unusual agreement

Mediapro's agreement with the AUF is not a media-rights deal; the agency is to give the federation a valuation of its national team media and sponsorship rights. National team media rights are currently held by agencies Tenfield (domestic) and Full Play (international).

Unlike its counterparts elsewhere in the world, the South American Football Confederation (Conmebol) has not centralised the rights to Fifa World Cup qualifying matches. Each member federation sells the rights to its national team's home matches separately.

Historically, Full Play cornered the Conmebol qualifier market by acquiring international rights to federations' first-party qualifiers, and selling the rights to second- and third-party qualifiers to the federation.

Full Play paid \$6m for the right to sell on Uruguay's first-party qualifier matches ahead of the 2018 Fifa World Cup in all territories outside Uruguay. As part of the deal, Full Play also gave the AUF rights in Uruguay to second- and third-party Conmebol qualifiers. The AUF then sold these second- and third-party rights with first-party Uruguayan national team matches to Tenfield for about \$12m.

For the 2014 World Cup qualifiers, Full Play paid the AUF \$3.5m and Tenfield paid \$7m for the aforementioned rights. For the 2010 World Cup qualifiers the fees were \$3m and \$2m respectively (*TV Sports Markets* 15:4).

Argentina sale stalled again

The Argentine Football Association last Friday delayed by another week the conclusion of its tender for rights to the top-tier Primera División.

The three bidders – Mediapro, international sports broadcaster ESPN, and a joint bid from pay-television broadcasters Fox and Turner – were asked to provide further information to the AFA this week, and submit clarified offers by 3pm local time on Friday, March 3. ◆

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MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

FEBRUARY 16 TO MARCH 1

FOOTBALL

- ◆ International sports broadcaster Eleven Sports Network acquired rights in Poland for the Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga, the top two divisions of German club football (page 19).
- ◆ The Lagardère Sports agency signed a deal with Chilean sports television network Canal del Fútbol to sell the international broadcast rights of Chilean club football (page 26).
- ◆ Major League Soccer franchise Atlanta United signed a regional rights deal with channels operated by the Fox Sports division of US network Fox. The multi-year deal grants Fox Sports South and Fox Sports Southeast exclusive rights to matches not broadcast nationally.
- ◆ The Mediapro agency agreed a production deal with the Liga de Fútbol Profesional Boliviana, the top division of club football in Bolivia. Mediapro will produce all league matches.
- ◆ German pay-television broadcaster Sportdigital acquired rights to the Chinese Super League. Sportdigital will show live coverage of matches from the start of the 2017 season on March 3.
- ◆ Agency MP & Silva signed a 14-year contract, from 2017 to 2030, to advise the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation on commercial rights deals.
- ◆ Spain's LaLiga reached an agreement to live-stream Friday-night matches from the Primera División free of charge via social media platform Facebook in Spain. The long-term agreement began with Granada's 4-1 win over Real Betis on February 17.

- ◆ China Sports Media acquired rights in the country for Asian Football Confederation events after the governing body terminated an agreement with LeSports (page 23).

- ◆ Spanish public-service broadcaster TVE acquired rights to the remaining 2018 Fifa World Cup qualifiers of the South American Football Confederation (Conmebol).

OTHER SPORTS

- ◆ **American Football:** The IMG agency signed a four-season extension to its in-flight rights deal with the NFL, from 2017 to 2020.

- ◆ **Athletics:** The USA Track & Field national governing body signed a four-year deal, from 2017 to 2020, with the Penn Relays event. USATF's media partner, US sports broadcaster NBCSN, will expand its coverage of the event to include a live Friday-night show. USATF.tv will also live-stream the Penn Relays worldwide.

- ◆ **Badminton:** UK public-service broadcaster the BBC acquired rights for the 2017 Badminton World Championships, from August 21-27. The BBC will live-stream the event and show an hour-long highlights programme on its linear channels after the final.

- ◆ **Baseball:** Eleven signed a multi-year deal in Taiwan for home games of the Lamigo Monkeys Chinese Professional Baseball League team.

- ◆ **Basketball:** French pay-television broadcaster SFR Sport acquired rights to the Europe Cup club competition, which is operated by the International Basketball Federation.

MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

FEBRUARY 16 TO MARCH 1

- ◆ **Cricket:** Willow TV, a cricket-dedicated broadcaster in the United States, acquired exclusive rights to the 2017 season of the Indian Premier League Twenty20 competition.
- ◆ **Esports:** UK pay-television broadcaster BT Sport acquired rights to the Fifa Ultimate Team Championship Series. BT Sport will broadcast four Fifa 17 events across April and May.
- ◆ **Mixed Martial Arts:** Russian sports broadcaster Match TV acquired rights to the Ultimate Fighting Championship. The contract begins with the UFC 209 event on March 4 and runs for the remainder of 2017 (page 11).
- ◆ **Motorcycling:** French digital-terrestrial channel L'Équipe acquired rights to the 2017 International Motorcycling Federation's (FIM) Endurance World Championship.
- ◆ **Motorcycling:** Servus TV, the commercial broadcaster owned by Red Bull Media House, acquired rights to the 2017 FIM Superbike World Championship. The deal covers Germany, Austria and Switzerland.
- ◆ **Motorcycling:** The MP & Silva agency reached an agreement with the FIM to continue distributing rights to the Superbike World Championship in Latin America and the Caribbean for a further two years. Its five-year deal, due to end in 2018, will now run until 2020.
- ◆ **Motorcycling:** MP & Silva signed a deal with Caribbean pay-television channel Flow Sports for Superbike World Championship rights across the region. The deal begins with the 2017 season.
- ◆ **Motorsport:** Bell-owned Canadian sports broadcasters TSN and RDS signed multi-year extensions to deals with North American stock car-racing series NASCAR.
- ◆ **Motorsport:** Japanese pay-television broadcaster J Sports acquired rights to the 2017 World Touring Car Championship series.
- ◆ **Motorsport:** Spanish public-service broadcaster TVE signed a one-season extension to its sublicensing deal with telco Telefónica for Formula One rights. TVE's La 1 channel will broadcast the race and qualifying session of the Spanish Grand Prix in Barcelona on May 13-14.
- ◆ **Rugby Union:** International sports broadcaster Eurosport acquired pay-television rights in France to this year's women's World Cup. Eurosport will show 14 live matches from the tournament, which will take place in Ireland from August 9-27.
- ◆ **Rugby Union:** French public-service broadcaster France Télévisions acquired free-to-air rights for this year's women's World Cup. France Télévisions will broadcast live coverage of all matches involving France, plus the final.
- ◆ **Tennis:** TVE acquired live rights to the May 4 Tie Break Tens event in Madrid.
- ◆ **Tennis:** SuperSport, the pay-television broadcaster that operates in sub-Saharan Africa, struck a deal with Tennis Australia for the Laver Cup. The deal will cover at least the inaugural edition of the team event, which runs from September 22-24.

MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

FEBRUARY 16 TO MARCH 1

MEDIA RIGHTS NEGOTIATIONS

- ◆ The CAA Eleven agency launched tenders for rights to Uefa national team football properties in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia in Europe; and the Philippines, Thailand, Laos & Cambodia, Indonesia and Timor-Leste in Asia. The tenders include European Qualifiers from 2018-19 to 2021-22, the 2018-19 and 2020-21 Nations League competitions, and some friendly matches. A second package covers Euro 2020.
- ◆ South African public-service broadcaster SABC hit out at the growing cost of sports rights after failing to agree a deal for the national cricket team's tour of New Zealand. SABC said many rights-holders were "demanding a 100-per-cent increase on rights fees which the public-service broadcaster cannot afford".
- ◆ UK commercial broadcaster Channel 4 is considering bidding for live rights to the Uefa Champions League football tournament, according to the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. Channel 4 is interested in free-to-air rights for one match per week in the next cycle, which will run from 2018-19 to 2020-21.
- ◆ Social media platform Facebook is in "advanced talks" over rights to stream one live Major League Baseball game each week of the 2017 season, according to Reuters.
- ◆ New Indian pay-television channel DSport is set to compete in the forthcoming tender process for rights to Twenty20 cricket competition the Indian Premier League after broadcast executive RC Venkatesh, who helped launch the channel, said he would advise it to bid.
- ◆ Orange chief executive Stéphane Richard said the telco would be interested in working with French pay-television broadcaster Canal Plus to acquire sports rights. Richard told the BFM Business radio station Orange was not interested in pursuing a takeover of Canal Plus, following reports of talks between Orange and the broadcaster's parent company, Vivendi.
- ◆ Univision Deportes has agreed a one-year extension to its rights deal with Mexican Liga MX football club Deportivo Guadalajara, according to the US pay-television broadcaster's president, Juan Carlos Rodríguez.
- ◆ Spanish-language broadcaster Univision and US media group Turner are close to acquiring rights in the US to Uefa's Champions League and Europa League. The rights will cover three seasons, from 2018-19 to 2020-21 (page 17).

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- ◆ The English Football League, which operates the three divisions below the top-tier Premier League, appointed Oliver & Ohlbaum Associates and consultant Phil Lines to advise on the sale of its domestic broadcast rights (page 3).
- ◆ Shareholders of US media company Time Warner voted to approve its sale to telco AT&T in a deal valued at \$85.4bn (€79.6bn). Shareholders voted to adopt the merger on February 16. Of the shares voted, 99 per cent were cast in favour. The company expects the transaction to close before the end of 2017. AT&T initially agreed the deal in October and still faces a number of hurdles before completion.
- ◆ US telco Verizon and internet firm Yahoo agreed revised terms on the purchase of the latter's operating business. In a statement released on February 21, Verizon and Yahoo said they had agreed to reduce the price Verizon will pay by \$350m (€326.2m). The \$4.83bn transaction has been delayed by the disclosure of two high-profile cyber breaches that exposed information from more than a billion Yahoo accounts.
- ◆ Indian pay-television operator Zee Entertainment Enterprises said the first phase of the sale of its sports business, Ten Sports, to media group Sony Pictures Networks India had been completed.
- ◆ North American stock car-racing series Nascar launched an app in association with digital media company DeskSite. The Nascar DeskSite app serves as a hub for video content, including interviews with drivers, post-race recaps, in-depth coverage, driver spotlights and breaking news.
- ◆ MLBAM, the digital media arm of Major League Baseball, signed a multi-year partnership with technology and social media platform 15 Seconds of Fame. The 15SOF app will deliver moments where a fan is captured on screen during broadcasts in high definition video directly to their smartphones following the conclusion of each game.
- ◆ Ginx TV, which operates the Ginx eSports TV channel, agreed a deal with Canadian pay-television broadcaster Super Channel to launch a new 24-hour esports channel in the country. It will replace one of Super Channel's four channels later this year.
- ◆ Ginx TV expanded the reach of Ginx eSports TV into Israel via a partnership with mobile operator Partner.
- ◆ English Premier League football club Manchester United launched a subscription-based app carrying content from its in-house television channel, MUTV. The app will be available in 165 countries via the Apple and Google Play stores for a monthly subscription fee that varies by country. It will be priced at \$5.99 (€5.50) per month in the US.
- ◆ Three UK suppliers of pre-loaded IPTV boxes – Football for Pubs, Pub Entertainment Systems, and Neosat – were ordered by the High Court to cease the sale of the illegal devices and pay a combined £267,000 (€310,000/\$332,000) in costs.
- ◆ German Bundesliga football club Bayern Munich launched its linear television channel, FC Bayern.tv, on February 27, in collaboration with telco Deutsche Telekom.

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- ◆ The UK's 'crown jewels' list, which reserves certain sporting events for free-to-air coverage, is to be protected by changes to the legislation. The Digital Economy Bill will reportedly be used to give ministers the power to amend the qualifying criteria for the list.
- ◆ In the UK, representatives of rights-holders and internet search engines agreed to collaborate on a voluntary code of practice which will allow the parties to demote links to websites dedicated to infringing content.
- ◆ Agency Infront Sports & Media will close its office in the Netherlands in order to consolidate its winter sports operations. As of July, all projects of Infront Netherlands will be managed and operated from Infront's Switzerland headquarters and its subsidiary in Austria.
- ◆ Telco Portugal Telecom confirmed the acquisition of a 25-per-cent stake in domestic pay-television broadcaster Sport TV. The other three Sport TV shareholders – telcos Vodafone Portugal and Nos, and the Olivedesportos agency – will hold 25 per cent each.
- ◆ Fox Sports launched a channel dedicated to the top division of rugby league in Australia, the NRL, exclusively on pay-television operator Foxtel. The Fox Sports 502 channel became Fox League on February 20, with programming beginning on February 27.
- ◆ The German football league entered into a strategic partnership with Baidu, under which the top-tier Bundesliga competition will have an official presence on the network of the Chinese web services company.
- ◆ New Zealand's Commerce Commission blocked the proposed merger of pay-television broadcaster Sky New Zealand and telco Vodafone New Zealand. In an October letter, commission chair Mark Berry outlined the regulator's concerns about the likely impact on competition in the broadband and broadcast markets. The commission said subsequent submissions had not resolved the concerns.
- ◆ US media company NBCUniversal agreed distribution deals for its Golf Channel network with Japanese OTT platform AbemaTV and pay-television broadcaster Wowow.
- ◆ DAZN chief executive James Rushton apologised for the failings of the OTT sports subscription service during the opening round of the J-League football season in Japan. Its first broadcasts on February 25 were affected by constant buffering and other technical problems.
- ◆ Eleven will launch cable-television and IPTV channels in Taiwan in March. The Eleven and Eleven Sports channels will be available on the CNS, TBC and TOP platforms.
- ◆ The Argentinian Football Association and the government agreed terms on the termination of the Fútbol para Todos contract. Key officials from clubs and the AFA agreed on the offer of ARS530m (€31.6m/\$33.9m) made on January 26 as compensation for dissolving the government-backed programme, which ensured free-to-air coverage of the top-tier Primera División.
- ◆ The NBA and technology company NextVR broadcast the league's All-Star Saturday Night contest and NBA All-Star Game on February

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18-19 in virtual reality through the NBA League Pass subscription service. Coverage was available worldwide outside Canada, China and the US.

◆ The International Olympic Committee's Olympic Channel is now available in six additional languages: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese and Latin American Spanish.

◆ Sports media and technology company Minute Media closed a \$15m (€14.1m) investment round. The round was led by Qumra Capital, an Israeli late-stage venture fund, and included existing investors Battery Ventures, Dawn Capital and ProSieben.

◆ The European division of media company Liberty Global posted an 18.1-per-cent increase in operating income to \$2.482bn (€2.33bn) on the back of a 24.5-per-cent rise in subscribers to 946,100 in the 2016 financial year. Liberty said there had been a "turnaround" in the Netherlands, with 51,000 subscribers added in the fourth quarter of 2016, driven by "product investments" in platforms such as Ziggo Sport.

◆ Social media platform Facebook said it would launch a video app for televisions. The new app will launch in the coming weeks and will initially be available in app stores for Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV and Samsung Smart TV.

◆ European pay-television broadcaster Sky is reportedly in advanced talks with Mediaset to acquire the Italian media group's Premium pay-television service.

◆ Esports company ESL and virtual-reality entertainment platform Sliver.tv launched what it claimed was the first virtual esports stadium experience at the 2017 Intel Extreme Masters World Championship event in Katowice, Poland, on February 25-26.

◆ North American stock car-racing series Nascar launched Nascar TrackPass, its first digital subscription product developed specifically for the international market. The product will provide all 38 Monster Energy Cup Series and 33 Xfinity Series events during the 2017 season and will initially be available in 120 territories.

◆ The season-opening event on the Symetra tour will become the first live women's golf event to be shown on Facebook. The final round of the Florida's Natural Charity Classic on March 12 will be available through the Facebook Live service via the Ladies Professional Golf Association's official page.

◆ Media company Discovery Communications acquired a 20-per-cent stake in digital sports-media company Play Sports Group. Discovery will take a seat on the Play Sports Group board.

◆ The Formula One motor-racing series issued its teams fresh guidelines on sharing video content via social media platforms. Teams were told they could now "shoot short-form video for use on the team's own social channels" from inside the paddock.

◆ ITN Productions was appointed as the host broadcaster for the International Association of Athletics Federations' World Relays 2017 two-day event in Nassau, the Bahamas, from April 22-23.

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- ◆ The Olympic Channel agreed content deals with the Federation of International Bandy, World DanceSport Federation, International Committee of Sports for the Deaf, International Orienteering Federation, Union Internationale Motonautique, International Racquetball Federation, International School Sport Federation and World Underwater Federation.
- ◆ Discovery and its international sports broadcaster, Eurosport, unveiled a partnership opportunity for mobile operators to deliver content from the Olympic Games. Providers can become the 'official mobile broadcaster' and will be able to offer their customers access to coverage before, during and after the Games, including real-time highlights and on-demand content. The service can be customised with an operator-branded channel.
- ◆ Video-sharing website YouTube announced plans to launch a new service carrying a range of major television channels. Starting this spring, for \$35 (€33) per month, subscribers in the US will be able to watch more than 40 channels, including sports channels, through YouTube TV. The four major US networks and about 35 of their affiliates will be available, including sports channels such as ESPN, ESPN 2, ESPN 3, ESPN U, ESPN News, Golf Channel, SEC Network, Fox Sports, FS1, FS2, Comcast Sportsnet and NBCSN. Fox Soccer Plus will be available as an add-on.
- ◆ English Premier League football club Manchester United hired senior Yahoo executive Phil Lynch as its new chief executive of media. Lynch will oversee United's digital media strategy, as well as the management and operations of its in-house television channel, MUTV, and its new subscription app.
- ◆ MLBAM, the interactive media and internet division of North America's Major League Baseball, appointed Michael Paull as the new chief executive of its Bamtech video technology division. Paull will replace Bob Bowman, MLB's president for business and media, in the role.
- ◆ The NFL appointed Mary Ann Turcke, a former executive at Canadian telco Bell Media, as president of digital media and the NFL Network.
- ◆ German media company Constantin Medien extended the contract of its chief executive, Fred Kogel, until December 31, 2018.

INDUSTRY MOVES

- ◆ Ingrid Deltenre said she would resign as director-general of the European Broadcasting Union consortium of public-service broadcasters in the summer.