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RUGBY UNION

Six Nations earns more and retains rights in North America

By Robin Jellis

- Pitch renews Six Nations international rights from 2018 to 2021 for about €6m per year
- Guarantee in the current cycle, from 2014 to 2017, is just under €5m per year
- The Six Nations has chosen to retain its rights in the US and Canada

The Six Nations has increased the value of its international media rights by at least 20 per cent in a renewal with Pitch International, while choosing to retain rights in the US and Canada.

The agency has renewed Six Nations rugby rights globally, excluding the competing nations (England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Wales) and the US and Canada. It will pay a minimum guarantee of about €6m (\$6.6m) per year in its four-year deal, from 2018 to 2021, and share revenues above this.

In Pitch's previous four-year deal, from 2014 to 2017, the agency is understood to have paid a guarantee of slightly less than €5m per year. The Six Nations earned slightly more than €5m per year from the agency with the revenue share factored in. The deal included the US and Canada (*TV Sports Markets* 16:16).

Pitch is also understood to have been awarded in-flight and in-ship Six Nations rights, as in the previous deal. The agency is set to exploit these rights on its own service (*TV Sports Markets* 20:13).

For the new deal, Pitch was awarded Six Nations rights after one round of bidding. The rights were sold by the Six Nations Committee – the tournament organiser and rights-holder – which was advised by Laurence St John's Bridge Television agency.

The Six Nations tendered its rights in mid-March with first-round bids due by April 21. The B4 Capital and Infront Sports & Media agencies both bid. A joint bid was also made by the IMG agency and media company Discovery Communications.

Three different sets of rights were on offer. First, all territories excluding the competing nations. Second, all territories excluding the competing nations, the US and Canada. Third, specific territories the bidder was interested in.

Infront is understood to have offered a minimum guarantee close to what the Six Nations currently earns for rights in all territories, excluding competing nations.

IMG/Discovery are thought to have bid for rights in all territories, excluding the competing nations. However, their bid included Italy even though the territory was excluded from the tender. Discovery held rights in Italy in the previous cycle, from 2014 to 2017, in a deal worth about €2.5m per year. No deal has been agreed in the country for the 2018 to 2021 period (*TV Sports Markets* 17:16).

Had the IMG/Discovery bid been successful, Discovery would have kept rights in Europe for use on its Eurosport channels, and in Asia for use on its Setanta Sports Asia channels and OTT service Rugby Pass, in which it holds a 23.5-per-cent stake. IMG would have sold rights in all other territories (*TV Sports Markets* 20:5).

IMG and Discovery bidding together for these rights is not thought likely to presage a wider agreement between the two. A joint bid enabled them to offer more money than if they had bid separately.

The two felt that bidding for rights in Italy would resolve a potential problem for the Six Nations, with a new deal yet to be struck in the country. Discovery looks to be the only likely bidder for the rights.

The Six Nations is understood to have opted for Pitch for three main reasons. First, it offered the most money. Second, it has been distributing Six Nations international rights for a number of years and knows the market intimately. Third, it has a strong pedigree in rugby, holding international rights of the English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh rugby unions (*TV Sports Markets* 20:19).

US and Canada rights held back

The Six Nations is understood to have retained rights in the US and Canada as it wants to guarantee wider exposure in developmental territories for the sport. The Six Nations is prioritising exposure over revenue in these markets.

Pitch is understood not to have bid for rights in the US or Canada for two reasons. First, the Six Nations requested a certain level of exposure which Pitch, as an agency, could not provide. Second, the decline in interest in rugby union rights in non-core territories from pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports – the incumbent in the US – and Pitch’s highest-paying broadcaster client for Six Nation rights.

BeIN’s deal for rights in the US, from 2014 to 2017, was worth about \$1m per year. For the new cycle, the Six Nations is likely to sell rights in the US and Canada itself in the coming weeks.

It is understood the USA Rugby governing body acquired Six Nations rights in the country from beIN for use on its online subscription service – TheRugbyChannel.tv – as beIN was not airing matches.

The NBC network is considered a likely buyer as it holds English Premiership rights and this week paid a large increase to acquire rights to the 2019 and 2023 Rugby World Cups (see story, page 16).

NBC pays about \$300,000 per season in its five-season deal for Premiership Rugby rights, from 2016-17 to 2020-21 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:12).

Easy to refinance?

Although Pitch has paid a relatively small increase, some independent market sources feel the agency could struggle to make a profit on its new deal.

This is due to two key reasons. First, there is only one likely buyer for Six Nations rights in most territories, limiting competition. Second, beIN's declining interest in rugby union rights in non-core markets (*TV Sports Markets* 21:7).

In sub-Saharan Africa, pay-television broadcaster SuperSport is thought to be the only buyer, as acquisitive sports broadcaster Kwesé Sports is not interested.

Across Asia, Discovery is the likely buyer as it owns rugby-focused Setanta and has a stake in Rugby Pass. As there is little competition for rugby rights in the region, Discovery is understood to be seeking to significantly decrease its fee.

Pay-television broadcaster ESPN is thought to be the only buyer across Latin America and the Caribbean.

In New Zealand, pay-television broadcaster Sky faces little competition for any sports rights.

It is thought beIN is unlikely to want to retain its rights in the Middle East and North Africa, where they appeal mainly to the expatriate community. Pay-television operator OSN could be an alternative buyer, although it would pay a much lower fee than beIN does at present.

Despite these potential difficulties, *TV Sports Markets* understands Pitch is earning a reasonable profit on its current deal with the Six Nations thanks to several lucrative agreements with broadcasters, softening any potential fee decreases in certain markets.

Pitch International's most valuable Six Nations deals, 2014 to 2017

Territory	Broadcaster	Per-year value (\$)
Middle East and North Africa	BeIN Sports	1.5m
Australia	BeIN Sports	1.5m
Pan-Asia	Discovery Communications	1.4m
Sub-Saharan Africa	SuperSport	1.35m
US	BeIN Sports	1m
Spain	Telefónica	540,000

Source: *TV Sports Markets Rights Tracker*

Pitch is thought to earn about \$7.3m per year from its most lucrative deals: Mena, Australia and the US (with beIN); Asia-Pacific (with Discovery); sub-Saharan Africa (with SuperSport); and Spain (with telco Telefónica). The agency's deals in Latin America (with ESPN), New Zealand (with Sky) and in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (with digital media company Perform) are also understood to be quite lucrative. It is thought to earn in the low tens of thousands of dollars per year from most other deals.

Pitch is expected to secure an increase in value from Japan, where interest in rugby union is growing ahead of the country's hosting of the Rugby World Cup in 2019.

The agency is expected to package Six Nations rights with other properties to bolster its value. It holds many other rugby rights, English Football League international rights, and FA Cup rights in Western Europe and Mena.

Remaining Six Nations deals

The Pitch agreement means the Six Nations only has rights to sell in the US, Canada and Italy from 2018 onward.

The fee in a new deal in Italy is likely to fall substantially from the €2.5m per year Discovery pays in the 2014-2017 cycle as there is no competition for the rights. A more realistic value is thought to be about €1m per year.

The value in the US and Canada is expected to at least remain at the same level as in the current beIN deal.

The Six Nations already has deals in place in the UK (with public-service broadcaster the BBC and commercial broadcaster ITV), France (with public-service broadcaster France Télévisions) and Ireland (with commercial broadcaster TV3) (*TV Sports Markets* 19:14; 19:21; 20:6). ◆

TV ITALY

Menken: Eleven approach will work in difficult Italian market

By Frank Dunne

Eleven Sports Network said this week its strategy of targeting second-tier rights in larger markets, and running a ‘lean and mean’ business operation, would succeed in Italy, despite the country’s pay-television market having proved difficult for other players.

Eleven’s parent company, Andrea Radrizzani’s Aser Media, took a majority stake this month in OTT service Sportube, which launched in 2010. The service will be rebranded as Eleven during the summer. If the service proves successful, Aser is expected to take full ownership.

Italy becomes Eleven’s seventh market, after launches in the US, Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, Singapore and Taiwan since 2015.

Eleven has taken over an operation which turns a small profit by keeping its costs – in rights, production, personnel, and marketing – under tight control. Continuing to turn a profit while increasing investment across the board will not be easy.

Managing director Danny Menken told *TV Sports Markets* this week the quality of the product could be improved without the company’s cost base being transformed. “We are working lean and mean in every market,” he said. “What other broadcasters do with 200 people, we do with 20 or 25.” In spite of this, he said, the broadcaster was recognised for its quality and had won awards for its programming.

He said the channel was able to act faster than its rivals in many markets because “we don’t have a lot of politics; a lot of layers of people needing to agree”.

He declined to identify which sports properties the channel would target beyond saying they would be second- and third-tier. The takeover of the service comes at a time when many top football rights are either on the market or about to come on the market.

Uefa Champions League and Europa League rights in the country were tendered on May 15, with bids due by June 12. Rights to Italian football’s top two divisions, Serie A and Serie B, will come on the market during the summer.

All of these appear beyond the channel’s budget and immediate ambitions. For the cheapest, Serie B, pay-television broadcaster Sky currently pays about €21.5m (\$23.6m) per season in a three-season deal, from 2015-16 to 2017-18 (*TV Sports Markets* 19:9).

Menken said Eleven did not see itself as being in competition with the leading pay-television broadcasters in the country, Sky and Mediaset Premium. But having only just taken over Sportube he added that Eleven's medium- to long-term ambitions in Italy were still under discussion.

Content and customers

Sportube's most important property is the third-tier domestic football league Lega Pro, formerly known as Serie C. Sportube created a joint venture channel, Lega Pro Channel, with the league in 2014.

The company has renewed its deal with the league for next season, with an option for a further four until the end of the 2021-22 season. The league and Sportube share costs – including two-camera production costs for 1200 matches per season – and split revenues.

The service also has rights to football's Serie D – covering the semi-pro and amateur divisions – as well as local volleyball, water polo, motorsports and fencing.

One local expert said the most valuable aspect of Sportube was its mailing list and user data. Menken said this view underestimated the value of the business and the people who ran it.

“Sportube is an excellent company – successful, profitable, with a loyal following. They have very good people on board,” he said. “Of course, we will bring some people from our side and some leverage of having the other markets as well.”

Marco Pistoni, the former Sky and Infront Sports & Media executive, has been brought in as president of the service. Bruno Stirparo, the current Sportube chief executive, becomes managing director.

Sportube originally launched as a free service funded by advertising. In April 2016, it introduced a registration process to collect more user data before becoming a mainly pay-per-view service in August 2016. Highlights to most of its properties are still available free of charge.

The number of unique users to the free service increased by 23 per cent between 2014-15 and 2015-16 to 4.3m. The total number of page views increased from 30m to 39m over the same period.

Menken said the number of paying customers since the switch to ppv was “significant” but declined to provide figures. He said Eleven would – at least initially – retain Sportube's business model in two areas: distribution and pricing.

“We are committed to being OTT because Sportube has proven it is a successful model for the Italian market,” Menken said. He added, however, that Eleven would “run our numbers” in the coming months to see if it should also launch a linear channel.

Sportube offers a flexible price structure, with separate offerings for each of its main sports, and multiple price points within each property.

For the Lega Pro Channel, for example, subscribers can pay for all matches of a single team (€39.90 per season), all away games of a single team (€23.90 per season), or for a single match (€2.90). Play-off matches for promotion to Serie B are available in a standalone package at €9.90, or €2.90 per match.

Menken said the model worked and there were no plans for “drastic change”.

Difficult market

Eleven is the latest company to enter Italy’s pay-television or sports broadcasting market. The list of those who have either struggled or failed completely includes:

- Mediaset, which is losing several hundred million euros per year and is the subject of a bitterly contested hostile takeover bid by French conglomerate Vivendi
- the Dahlia platform, which closed in January 2011, after failing to refinance an investment in live Serie A rights
- Lega Serie A’s IPTV service, Serie A TIM, launched in 2015 as an app by Telecom Italia, which streams three live matches per week but has had negligible take-up
- the Gioco Calcio platform, co-owned by a group of smaller Serie A clubs, which closed in 2004 after one season
- free-to-air channel Sportitalia, which closed in December 2013 before relaunching in June 2014 under new owners
- the failed attempt in 2010 by adult channel Conto TV to run a ppv football service
- the enforced merger in 2003 of loss-making rival platforms Stream and Telepiù to create Sky Italia
- several failed attempts by Telecom Italia to run OTT sports services.

Menken said Aser was not daunted by the market. “We have shown that with our strategy, with the right people on board, and the right financing, we have been able to create a successful business in every market where we operate. If you follow the right strategy, there are always opportunities.” ♦

FOOTBALL

Uefa gets steady increase from MTG for Champions League

By Robin Jellis

- MTG to pay about €85m per season for Champions League in Denmark, Norway and Sweden
- This is up from just under €73m per season in the current deal, from 2015-16 to 2017-18
- Sweden is the most valuable market in the region as MTG feared strong rival offers

Modern Times Group paid an increase of about 16 per cent to maintain its grip on Uefa Champions League rights across Scandinavia earlier this month.

Media group MTG – which runs free-to-air and pay-television channels across the region – acquired the rights in three-season deals, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, worth a combined total of about €85m (\$93m) per season. MTG had to acquire rights in each territory – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – separately.

MTG's current three-season deals in the same three territories, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, are worth a total of slightly less than €73m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 17:20).

The broadcaster's bids in each territory are understood to have been far ahead of any other offers.

MTG was prepared to pay a decent increase across the region as Uefa is introducing more kick-off slots, enabling more matches to be broadcast live from 2018-19 onward. Matches will be played at 7pm CET and 9pm CET during the group stages, instead of all matches kicking off at 8.45pm CET.

Both the new and current deals were agreed with Uefa, European football's governing body. Uefa is advised on the sale of its club competition rights by the Team Marketing agency.

MTG has held Champions League rights across the region since the inception of the competition in the 1992-93 season. The rights are extremely important to MTG, which has guaranteed its position as the broadcaster of top football rights in the region for the coming years.

It also holds: English Premier League rights in Denmark and Sweden; Spanish LaLiga, Italian Serie A and French Ligue 1 across the region; and the bulk of domestic Danish Superliga rights.

MTG further enhanced its football offering earlier this month by acquiring English FA Cup rights, from 2018-19 to 2023-24, and English League Cup and second-tier English Championship rights from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The deal, agreed with the Pitch International agency, covers Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Sublicensing to TV2

One significant change in the new Champions League deal is that MTG has relinquished full exclusivity of the rights.

It has opted to sublicense some coverage to commercial and pay-television broadcaster TV2 in Norway. This deal covers the same three seasons, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, and is worth about €8m per season.

TV2 will have non-exclusive rights to 30 matches per season and will show all its matches free-to-air. The broadcaster will show one match on Tuesdays and one on Wednesdays during the group stages.

MTG will have the right to show these matches, and will show the other 108 matches per season exclusively in the country. It has retained exclusive rights to all matches in Denmark and Sweden.

MTG's offer to Uefa was contingent on it sublicensing rights to TV2 in Norway.

Champions League bid process

Uefa tendered the rights on April 10 with bids due on May 8. MTG was announced as the winner on May 9. It made the highest offer in each of the three territories in the first round of bidding and was immediately awarded the rights.

Pay-television broadcaster C More, owned by media group Bonnier, bid for rights in Sweden.

TV2 was keen to acquire rights in Norway. It bid aggressively last time the rights were sold, forcing MTG to pay more for rights in the country. This time, TV2 decided to team up with MTG.

MTG accepted TV2's offer for two main reasons. First, the fee TV2 offered for non-exclusive coverage was a reasonable one. Second, it enabled MTG to increase the value of its offer in Sweden, where it feared it could face strong competition from either C More or telco Telia. One local source said Telia bid for rights in Sweden.

Media company Discovery Communications – which operates the SBS and Eurosport channels in the region – is not thought to have bid for rights in any territories. It is understood to regard the rights as too expensive relative to their value of attracting new subscribers.

Norway is MTG's most valuable territory in the current cycle, with Denmark second and Sweden third. In the new deal, Sweden has significantly grown in value to become the most valuable territory – Norway is second and Denmark third.

Uefa is understood to be happy with the outcome. It has secured an increase in value from an already high base in a region with a relatively low population. In addition, the sublicensing agreement with TV2 in Norway will provide it with greater free-to-air coverage.

The level of increase in rights fee is roughly the same as the last time Uefa sold its rights. Then, MTG agreed to pay an increase of about 16 per cent to just under €73m per season in the 2015-2018 cycle, up from just under €63m per season in the 2012-13 to 2014-15 cycle.

One expert questioned the timing of Uefa's auction for the new cycle, suggesting the governing body could have earned more had it sold its rights at another time. Broadcasters have recently spent significant amounts on other properties.

He pointed to C More's deal for Swedish Hockey League rights – worth about SEK670m (€69m/\$76m) per season, a 90-per-cent increase on its previous contract – and Discovery's deal for Swedish football league rights which, at about SEK540m per year, represented a 120-per-cent increase (*TV Sports Markets* 20:17; 21:6).

He said that having agreed these expensive deals, both C More and Discovery would have been less able to bid aggressively against MTG for Champions League rights.

MTG/TV2 alliance in Norway?

MTG's vice president of sport and head of Norway Anne Tufte – formerly a sports-rights executive at TV2 – told Norwegian media MTG did not think of the sublicensing deal with TV2 Norway as being part of a wider alliance.

But local experts are sceptical. One said: "I think there is another agreement somewhere down the line. TV2 and MTG have previously been bitter enemies."

He suggested the two may look to bid together or share rights to certain sports in an attempt to keep new entrants, such as Telia, from acquiring premium properties and to help combat an acquisitive Discovery.

Europa League up next

Uefa chose not to sell its Europa League rights at the same time as the Champions League. For rights in the current cycle Uefa tried to sell both properties together, but the Europa League only attracted low offers.

Uefa agreed its Champions League deal with MTG in October 2013. It was not until June 2015 that it sold Europa League rights to Discovery for three seasons, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, for about €10m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 19:11).

Uefa is expected to offer Europa League rights in a new cycle across the region closer to the start of the 2018-19 season. The fee is not expected to increase much in any new deal. ◆

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

UFC chooses to end Televisa joint venture and return to Fox

By Callum McCarthy

- Fox to pay about \$8m per year for UFC rights in Latin America and Mexico from 2019 to 2021
- UFC to cede all Mexican rights revenues to Televisa from now until the end of 2018
- New deal will lead to increase of more than 500 per cent in UFC's earnings from 2019

The Ultimate Fighting Championship has begun a complete overhaul of its media rights in Latin America and Mexico, exiting its joint venture with Televisa in favour of a more traditional deal with former partner Fox Sports.

The new deal with pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports Latin America breaks into two parts.

The first part, covering Latin America, lasts from May 2017 until the end of 2018. This deal is thought to be worth just over \$2m over the next 19 months. It began with UFC 211 on May 13.

The second part of the deal, from 2019 to 2021, covers both Latin America and Mexico, and will be worth a total of about \$8m per year.

The UFC's joint venture with media group Televisa consisted of the creation of the UFC Network, an à la carte pay-television channel dedicated solely to the promotion. Revenues from the channel were split roughly equally.

UFC Network began airing in September 2013, but the joint venture began in May 2013, with events shown on Televisa's free-to-air Canal 5 and Golden channels in Mexico and Latin America respectively. The venture covered Latin America and Mexico, but excluded Brazil. Televisa carried the UFC Network exclusively in Mexico, and distributed the channel to operators across Latin America. The joint venture did not have a specified end date.

In return for the UFC ending its joint venture in Latin America so abruptly, the UFC has granted Televisa its rights in Mexico until the end of 2018. Televisa will continue to operate the channel alongside the UFC, but will keep all revenues in the territory. The channel has been rebranded Fighting Sports Network.

The UFC Network accrued revenue of about \$1.6m in Mexico and about \$1m in Latin America in both 2015 and 2016. Revenue was shared roughly equally between Televisa and the UFC, meaning the UFC earned about \$1.3m for its rights in these territories in both 2015 and 2016.

From May 2017 to the end of 2018, the UFC's media-rights income will increase slightly across Mexico and Latin America.

However, from 2019 to 2021, the new Fox deal will represent an increase of about 515 per cent on the UFC's previous media-rights income from Latin America and Mexico, and an increase of almost 210 per cent on the value of the rights when Televisa's share of revenue is factored in.

One informed source believes the UFC could have earned more for the 2019-2021 period should rights in Mexico have been available earlier. In order for the UFC to have taken rights back earlier, Televisa would have demanded better terms of departure.

The Fox deal was negotiated by IMG Media, a subsidiary of UFC owner WME|IMG. IMG Media receives an annual fee of \$25m as part of an "arm's-length" deal for the agency to represent its media and sponsorship rights (*TV Sports Markets* 20:22).

Everything ventured, little gained

The UFC entered the joint venture with Televisa after deciding against renewing with incumbent Fox, which had a deal across Latin America (excluding Mexico) from September 2010 to September 2013.

The promotion was not happy with offers it had received from broadcasters and felt it would benefit from having greater control over its marketing, promotion and revenue streams.

The success of the UFC's joint venture with media group Globo in Brazil – the two launched pay-television broadcaster Combate in 2002 – inspired then-UFC owner Zuffa to embark on a similar project in Latin America and Mexico. Zuffa executive Lorenzo Fertitta saw similarities between the markets that did not come to bear.

By 2010, Brazil was both an established pay-television and mixed martial arts market, with consumers accustomed to à la carte channels. In Latin America and Mexico, free-to-air channels dominate the market and Mexico's dominant combat sport – boxing – was freely available across many of these.

The UFC Network was the first à la carte sports channel available in the region, and this was a large contributing factor for its slow subscriber growth. The promotion also overestimated Televisa's ability to secure carriage for the UFC Network outside Mexico.

Such is boxing's popularity in Mexico, rival media groups Televisa and Azteca have simulcast the biggest fights, including Floyd Mayweather v. Manny Pacquiao and this month's bout between Mexican fighters Julio César Chávez Jr. and Saúl Álvarez. As a result, experts believe the UFC's ambition to depose boxing as the number one combat sport in the region was premature.

The promotion staged two events in Mexico during the joint venture, including one headlined by Mexican-American star Cain Velasquez. Velasquez's injury-plagued career has been another reason for a lack of growth in Mexico. The UFC is now investing in Mexican fighters Yair Rodríguez and Brandon Moreno to gain traction in the region.

Fox hoping for clean sweep

The UFC is currently in an exclusive negotiation window with Fox in the US, which is thought to last until the beginning of October. Fox's current seven-year deal, from 2012 to 2018, is worth an average of \$129.6m per year. The deal is worth \$154m in 2017 and \$168m in 2018.

The promotion is targeting an increase of between 160 and 180 per cent on the fee it will receive in 2018 – in line with increases paid for UFC rights outside the US since the WME|IMG acquisition. But fears over cord-cutting and declining subscriber income for pay-television broadcasters has cast doubt over these projections.

The UFC forms a key part of Fox's offering in the US – it provides year-round content and produces strong ratings. Local sources believe the promotion is keen to leverage this, along with the addition of events previously shown on pay-per-view to any linear television deal, to help secure a significant fee increase in any new deal.

The UFC is also understood to be in the process of agreeing a deal in Australia, where rights have been held by pay-television operator Foxtel since 2012.

All deals with Fox are being negotiated separately. Negotiations in the US are being conducted by WME|IMG co-chief executive Ari Emanuel. ◆

RUGBY UNION

NBC buys World Cup as rugby growth trend in the US continues

By Robin Jellis

- NBC to pay a guarantee of \$11m for World Rugby rights from 2017 to 2023
- Deal is an increase of at least 140 per cent on the \$4.5m World Rugby earned previously
- New deal secures greater exposure and revenue for World Rugby in US

Media group NBCUniversal extended its commitment to rugby union in the US this week, buying World Rugby rights for a significantly higher guaranteed fee.

The seven-year deal runs from 2017 to 2023. World Rugby, rugby union's global governing body, will receive a minimum guarantee of about \$11m (€10m), plus a share of pay-per-view revenue. It is the most valuable rugby deal in the US.

NBC Sports Group will hold rights to the men's World Cups in 2019 and 2023, the women's World Cups in 2017 and 2021, the sevens World Cups in 2018 and 2022, and the annual World Rugby U20 Championship. The vast majority of the deal value is in the men's World Cups.

The last time World Rugby sold rights in the US – in June 2010 – it agreed a deal with pay-television broadcaster Universal Sports Network. USN shut down in November 2015, but at the time the deal was struck NBC owned an eight-per-cent stake in the broadcaster.

The deal is thought to have covered all World Rugby rights, but there was only a commitment to show the men's World Cups in 2011 and 2015.

USN paid a minimum guarantee of about £1.1m (€1.3m/\$1.4m) for the two tournaments, split £300,000 for the 2011 tournament in New Zealand and £800,000 for the 2015 tournament in England (*TV Sports Markets* 19:21). USN also shared ppv revenue with World Rugby for the two events, taking the body's total income to between \$4m and \$4.5m in the country.

Two matches from each tournament were shown live and delayed by NBC. Between USN and NBC, all 48 matches of the men's 2011 and 2015 World Cups were shown live.

Global Rugby World Cup media rights are sold by Rugby World Cup Limited, the tournament organisers. RWCL is a wholly-owned subsidiary of World Rugby, which is advised on the sale of all media rights by the IMG agency. IMG's contract runs until the end of the 2019 tournament.

Rights in the US were not tendered, with World Rugby preferring to send broadcasters a document detailing the available rights before holding direct talks.

Initial talks are understood to have been held with: tech giant Amazon, tech company Bantech, the CBS network, the Fox network, OTT streaming platform fuboTV, NBC and media group Turner. Of these, World Rugby had more detailed discussions with Bantech, Fox and NBC.

One of the governing body's key objectives in the new deal was to have a greater level of free-to-air exposure and a lesser reliance on ppv broadcasts.

NBC has committed to show major matches – including the semi-finals and the finals of the men's tournaments – on its free-to-air network. It will show 27 matches on pay-television channel NBCSN.

All other matches will be shown on NBC Sports Gold, NBC's direct-to-consumer ppv platform. Live and delayed coverage of all matches will be available on its website and its TV Everywhere streaming service.

Rugby sevens events will be shown on NBC's linear Olympic channel, which will launch this summer. The channel is being launched as part of NBC's content and distribution partnership with the International Olympic Committee and the United States Olympic Committee. It is understood the new channel will use the infrastructure of the now-defunct USN.

World Rugby chief executive Brett Gosper told media the uplift in value reflected the improved stature of rugby within what is "arguably the most competitive marketplace for sport". NBC Sports Group president of programming Jon Miller said the deal was the culmination of "years of cultivating our rugby portfolio".

The 2019 men's World Cup will be held in Japan. The host of the 2023 men's World Cup will be announced in November. It will be one of France, Ireland or South Africa.

Continued rugby growth in the US

The deal reaffirms the commitment of NBC to rugby union. As well as being the incumbent rights-holder for World Rugby events, it holds English Premiership rights from 2016-17 to 2020-21 (*TV Sports Markets* 20:12).

The broadcaster's willingness to invest more in World Rugby rights is understood to have been driven by three main factors. First, the growing popularity of rugby in the US. Second, the fact the US national team is competitive in rugby sevens. Third, the US has begun to host Premiership matches.

On March 12 last year, London Irish and Saracens played the first Premiership match in the US in New Jersey. The league will host its second match in the country on September 16 this year in Philadelphia, with Newcastle to play Saracens.

One US rights expert added that NBC's sports-rights strategy is to be involved in a few sports and to "super serve" those fans. The broadcaster has all nationwide NHL, English Premier League and Olympics Games rights in the country. It also has lucrative deals in place for NFL and Nascar rights, and a significant cycling and golf rights portfolio.

NBC may also be eyeing up rights to the Pro12 in the coming months. *TV Sports Markets* understands the Celtic rugby union league will be expanded from 12 to 14 teams from the 2018-19 season.

It is currently comprised of four teams from Ireland, four from Wales, and two each from Italy and Scotland. One team from the US and one from South Africa will be added.

The league hopes restructuring in this way will make it more appealing to broadcasters and sponsors – a US investment bank is set to be announced as a sponsor in the coming weeks – enabling it to pay its clubs more. It is understood to be aiming to pay each competing club £3m per year. ♦

FOOTBALL

Eredivisie extends international IMG partnership to 22 seasons

By Callum McCarthy

- IMG to pay about €14m per season for Eredivisie international rights from 2018-19 to 2021-22
- Increase is about 17 per cent on current deal, 2014-15 to 2017-18, worth €12m per season
- Slowdown anticipated in certain markets, but streaming operators could salvage value

The Dutch Eredivisie has earned a steady increase in the value of its international media rights after renewing its long-standing deal with IMG earlier this month.

It is understood IMG will pay a guarantee of about €14m (\$15.4m) per season for international media and betting rights to the top-tier Eredivisie in a four-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2021-22.

This is an increase of about 17 per cent on the value of the league's current four-season deal with IMG, from 2014-15 to 2017-18, worth a minimum of €12m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:6). In both deals, the share of any revenue above the guarantee is weighted in favour of the league.

The previous four-season deal between the two, from 2010-11 to 2013-14, was worth just over €6m per season. The large increase from that cycle to the current 2014-18 cycle was due to rapid inflation in the price of football rights, as well as the inclusion of international betting rights for the first time.

For both the current and the new cycle, IMG acquired the rights during an exclusive negotiation window. It is understood other agencies have shown interest in acquiring the league's rights in the past two cycles.

However, the Eredivisie was satisfied with IMG's offer. The new deal will extend IMG's mandate to sell the league's international rights to 22 consecutive seasons. International media and betting rights account for a significant portion of the league's overall media-rights income.

The league's joint venture with Fox Networks Group for its domestic rights is worth an average of about €80m per season to Eredivisie clubs over 12 seasons, from 2013-14 to 2024-25 (*TV Sports Markets* 16:15). About €70m was distributed to Eredivisie clubs in the 2016-17 season.

As part of the deal, Fox acquired a 51-per-cent stake in pay-television channel Eredivisie Live, since rebranded Fox Sports Eredivisie.

On May 9, Fox announced the channel had surpassed 900,000 subscribers. This is thought to have increased by about 200,000 in the 2016-17 season due to a renegotiated carriage deal between Fox and

Dutch telco KPN, which enabled the latter to reduce the cost of the channel to €7.50 per month.

OTT operators offer opportunities

Sources close to IMG are confident the agency can make a solid return on the deal as it believes the Eredivisie remains in the top 10 domestic leagues in the world.

And the league may benefit from greater competitiveness in future: 2016-17 champions Feyenoord had not won the Eredivisie for 16 years, while Ajax reached this season's Uefa Europa League final. Five points separated second and third place in 2016-17, compared to a 19-point gap last season.

But industry experts believe the large increases being paid by broadcasters for top-tier rights will make Eredivisie sales harder in the coming seasons, and say the modest increase in IMG's fee reflects this.

The agency will face challenges when selling in its most lucrative international territories. These are understood to be in China with online streaming company PPTV, from 2015-16 to 2017-18; in the Middle East and North Africa with pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports, from 2014-15 to 2017-18; and in Latin America and Brazil with pay-television broadcaster ESPN.

In Mena, beIN is focusing its attention on premium sports properties.

The Chinese media-rights market has showed signs of slowing down in the past 12 months, as the government has enforced tighter controls on how its media sector spends money on sports rights.

Competition is still strong in Latin America, but currency depreciation in Brazil has forced broadcasters to rein in spending.

There is, however, potential for growth in other markets – especially those with burgeoning OTT players. IMG is thought to be considering splitting linear and digital rights in these markets.

DAZN – the OTT service operated by digital sports media company Perform – operates in Japan and Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and will soon launch in Canada (*TV Sports Markets* 21:8).

US streaming platform fuboTV is in the process of expansion and is also thought to be interested in the rights.

Sources close to the league say Fox does not have first option on the rights in territories outside the Netherlands, and has to compete to acquire the rights at market value.

Fox currently holds rights across Asia and is expected to renew its deal from 2018-19 onward. The league is currently without a deal in Australia and New Zealand – Fox is active in the former.

The agency's most lucrative deals in Western Europe are thought to be a four-season deal in France with pay-television broadcaster Canal Plus, from 2014-15 to 2017-18, worth about €250,000 per season; and a deal in the UK with pay-television broadcaster Sky, for the same duration, worth about £200,000 (€235,000/\$258,000) per season (*TV Sports Markets* 18:14). ◆

FOOTBALL

Peruvian consortium recoups chunk of league cost from Latina

By Mónica Villar

Two of Peru's major broadcasters have recouped about 15 per cent of their spend on domestic top-tier football rights in a sublicensing deal with Latina.

The Consorcio Fútbol Perú – comprised of pay-television broadcaster Gol TV and Media Networks, the Peruvian brand of telco Telefónica – agreed a five-year sublicensing deal, from 2017 to 2021, with commercial broadcaster Latina worth \$3m (€2.7m) per year. Latina will show up to two matches per week from the Primera División on a non-exclusive basis.

Free-to-air broadcaster América TV had the same set of rights to show up to two matches per week in three single-year deals between 2014 and 2016.

The CFP paid a total of about \$19.3m for all club rights in the 2016 season. Peruvian football clubs sell their media rights individually.

Why the consortium was formed

Telefónica, which trades as Media Networks in Peru, has historically held rights to the majority of first division clubs' home matches.

In 2013, Gol TV entered the Peruvian market and acquired rights to the home matches of seven clubs: José Gálvez, Juan Aurich, León de Huánuco, Pacífico, San Martín, Sporting Cristal and UTC.

Until 2016, Media Networks – which showed matches via pay-television channel Movistar Deportes – held rights to the home matches of: Alianza Lima, Ayacucho, César Vallejo, Cienciano, Melgar, Real Garcilaso, Sport Huancayo and Unión Comercio.

Gol TV also signed a four-year deal with Club Universitario Deportes while it was still under contract with Media Networks. To prevent a dispute over these rights, both Gol TV and Media Networks decided to share rights to all clubs in the league.

The consortium was formed on April 29 last year. Its formation means both Gol TV and Media Networks have access to all Primera División matches via Gol Peru, which is exclusively available through pay-television operator Movistar TV, owned by Telefónica.

The biggest clubs in Peru – Sporting Cristal, Universitario and Alianza Lima – are earning \$3.5m, \$3.6m and \$4m per year respectively from the consortium. The other 13 clubs each receive fees ranging between \$500,000 and \$1.5m per year.

Sebastián Rubio, director & founder of agency ZSports, told *TV Sports Markets* media-rights income made up 45 per cent of Peruvian clubs' revenue in 2015.

Second-tier rights

The deal with Latina is only for the Peruvian top-tier. In Peru, each division is controlled by an independent association rather than being regulated by the Peruvian football federation.

Peru's second division, the Segunda División, has a two-year media-rights and title sponsorship deal with cable TV operator Best Cable, covering 2016 and 2017. The value of the Best Cable deal is about the same as the earnings of a smaller Primera División club each year.

When a top-tier team is relegated to the second division it receives 10 per cent of its previously-agreed rights fee during its first season in the second tier.

Other second-tier clubs don't receive money directly from Best Cable, instead receiving money from the league, the Asociación Deportiva de Fútbol Peruano, Segunda División. Teams promoted to the top tier negotiate directly with the consortium for their rights.

Guillermo Echevarría, the ADFP-SD administrator, this week told *TV Sports Markets* second-tier clubs don't receive money directly from media rights. The association distributes this income to cover travel, food, accommodation and travel insurance for away teams, and an insurance policy to cover accidents at stadiums for home teams.

Recent format change

The Primera underwent a format change in 2017 in order to create more matches, making the rights more valuable to broadcasters.

The Liguilla was this year replaced by the Torneo Verano, which takes place at the start of the season and is followed by the Apertura and the Clausura tournaments, the two main league phases.

In the Liguilla, teams played in a home and away round robin. In the new Torneo Verano, 16 teams are divided evenly into two groups, each consisting of a home and away round robin. The top team in each group contests a final, and the winner is guaranteed a place in the Copa Libertadores qualifying rounds. ◆

FOOTBALL

AFC rights prove tough sell for Lagardère in Indian subcontinent

By David Cook

Asian Football Confederation media rights in the Indian subcontinent are likely to remain steady or fall in value, with no deal in place for the 2017 to 2020 cycle.

Rights from 2017 to 2020 are being sold by the Lagardère Sports agency, which itself is battling to continue in its role as media-rights distributor for AFC events from 2021 onward (*TV Sports Markets* 21:8).

In the previous four-year cycle, from 2013 to 2016, pay-television broadcaster Star India held AFC rights in the Indian subcontinent in a deal worth between \$800,000 (€729,000) and \$900,000 per year. The deal included the AFC Champions League, the AFC Cup and the Asian Cup.

Lagardère has held talks with Star about a renewal. A source close to Star said he expected the value of any potential new deal to remain steady or decline as there is little competition for the rights.

The 2017 AFC Champions League season began in January. The group stage has already concluded. The qualification process for the Asian Cup is nearing completion and India is currently participating in a play-off group.

Live rights to other India national team matches are owned by the All India Football Federation. IMG-Reliance, the joint venture between the IMG agency and Indian conglomerate Reliance, distributes rights to these matches as part of a 15-year deal with the AIFF, from 2010-11 to 2024-25, worth a minimum of INR6.55bn (€93m/\$102m) (*TV Sports Markets* 17:20).

Star this week secured rights to AIFF matches from now until March 2018. The deal includes linear and digital rights – the latter will be exploited on Hotstar, Star's digital platform.

AFC rights in the region are not deemed important enough for Lagardère to stage a tender process, and it is unlikely Star will face competition from media company Sony Pictures Networks India – operator of several sports channels and the other powerful player in the subcontinent.

Lack of interest

Various reasons explain the difficulty in selling AFC rights in the region, including:

- Indian clubs failing to perform well in AFC competitions. No Indian club has qualified for the AFC Champions League competition finals since its inception in 2002. The Indian domestic league, the I-League, is ranked 17th of 46 in the AFC club competition rankings, and the Indian national team has not participated in the Asian Cup since 1984. However, Indian club Bengaluru last year reached the final of the AFC Cup, Asia's second-tier continental club competition.
- A reassessment of football's popularity in the region, after the value of Star's English Premier League deal fell by one third to \$33.3m per season for the 2016-17 to 2018-19 cycle compared with the 2013-14 to 2015-16 cycle (*TV Sports Markets* 20:2).
- Broadcaster preference to acquire top-tier European, rather than Asian, football.

No such problems in Asia

In contrast, Lagardère has secured a significant increase in the value of AFC rights across Asia in a four-year deal with channel syndicator Fox Networks Group, from 2017 to 2020, worth about \$7.5m per year. This is an increase of at least 200 per cent on the \$2m to \$2.5m per year Fox paid for the same rights in the 2013-16 cycle.

Fox is believed to have been prepared to more than treble the value of its previous deal as its football portfolio in Asia is weak. The deal bolsters its portfolio in the region while also giving it leverage in carriage negotiations with local platforms.

The rights are also valuable to Fox as AFC Champions League matches take place midweek and are played in primetime.

Global AFC rights on the market

Lagardère has distributed AFC media rights since 1993 – it holds the rights through its World Sport Group subsidiary. In its current eight-year deal, from 2013 to 2020, the agency pays a minimum guarantee of \$75m per year.

Thus far, all its AFC deals have been agreed directly with the confederation, with no tender process. Earlier this month the AFC confirmed its rights from 2021 onward would be put to tender. ♦

BASKETBALL

Euroleague to test product in tricky French and Italian markets

By Callum McCarthy

The Euroleague will face a litmus test for its new product this summer as it takes its media rights to market in France and Italy – two markets from which the competition is desperate to earn greater revenue.

Euroleague Ventures, the 10-season joint venture between the Euroleague – European basketball's top-tier competition – and the IMG agency, is seeking huge increases for its media rights on the back of establishing a more broadcaster-friendly competition format (*TV Sports Markets* 19:21).

It will also centralise the media rights of its second-tier competition, the Eurocup, from 2017-18. This is thought to be an important factor in securing an increase in both territories.

Rights to Eurocup games are currently sold by the home team, while Eurosport holds non-exclusive rights to the top two games each match week across Europe.

Italy has one 'A-Licence' club in the Euroleague – Olimpia Milano – which is all but guaranteed to be included in the competition until the end of the 2025-26 season. Four Italian clubs played in the 2016-17 Eurocup, making it a key market for the rights.

It is understood IMG is currently in talks to renew its multi-territory deal with pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports, set to cover Italy and the Netherlands, but only if the broadcaster roughly doubles its rights fee for the two territories.

Fox's four-season deal, from 2013-14 to 2016-17, covered Italy, Poland, sub-Saharan Africa and the Netherlands, and was worth a combined total of €1.3m (\$1.4m) per season.

Rights in Italy were worth about €980,000 per season, €200,000 per season in Poland, €100,000 per season across sub-Saharan Africa, and about €20,000 per season in the Netherlands.

Fox handed back Euroleague rights in Poland after its plans to launch a channel in the country failed (*TV Sports Markets* 18:20). Rights in sub-Saharan Africa will be sold separately from 2017-18 onward.

Italian increase likely, struggle ahead in France

Italian rights experts are confident of a large fee increase in the country, despite Italy's wider economic problems and a slowdown in its pay-television sector. However, IMG will face a difficult task in France,

which as of this season has no clubs in either the Euroleague or the Eurocup.

The only European competition French clubs currently compete in is the Fiba Champions League – a competition operated by Fiba, basketball’s global governing body, that was intended to rival the Euroleague. This competition is considered to be the third tier of European club basketball.

According to Euroleague president Jordi Bertomeu, Euroleague Ventures has made it a top priority to “recover” French clubs, with a view to positioning one or more in next season’s Eurocup.

“Entry is of course based on sports rankings, but let’s also say strategic markets will be taken into account when we choose teams for the Eurocup,” Bertomeu said. “This is a competition where the main role is to prepare teams which, at a certain point, want to be part of the league.”

He continued: “We have been working with some clubs in France in the last year so we know that there are clubs with this ambition.”

Rights in France are currently held by pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports in a four-season deal, from 2013-14 to 2016-17, worth an average of about €1m per season (*TV Sports Markets* 17:18). However, this deal was struck at a time when two French teams featured in the Euroleague each season.

In order to prevent a decrease in rights fee, IMG and Euroleague must either lure French clubs from the Fiba Champions League to the Eurocup and bundle these rights with the Euroleague, or rely on the Euroleague’s new broadcaster-friendly format.

From the 2016-17 season onward, the Euroleague regular-season is comprised of 16 teams playing a 30-game round robin. This compares favourably to clubs only being guaranteed to play a minimum of 10 regular-season games per season. ◆

FOOTBALL

Nacional and Peñarol extend deals with Tenfield until 2025

By Mónica Villar

Uruguay's top two clubs have signed a contract extension with long-term rights-holder Tenfield until 2025, after a two-year holdout.

Nacional and Peñarol will each receive \$3.25m (€3m) per year from agency Tenfield for rights to their league matches. The other 14 clubs in the Uruguayan Primera División will each earn between \$300,000 and \$400,000 per year.

Under the guidelines of the Uruguayan football federation, the Asociación Uruguaya de Fútbol, media rights must be sold collectively. When an offer is made, all top-tier and second-tier clubs must vote on whether or not to accept it.

In August 2015, during the AUF's general assembly, clubs voted in favour of an extension with Tenfield until 2025. Neither Nacional nor Peñarol attended the meeting. All other clubs in Uruguay's top two divisions voted: three voted against the deal, one club abstained but all other clubs voted in favour.

Most clubs, especially smaller ones, tend to vote in favour of new media-rights deals regardless of the terms. The AUF does not let clubs register for the league if they are in debt – media-rights income is essential for the survival of smaller clubs.

Tenfield is the long-term holder of Uruguayan club rights. The original deal between Tenfield and the AUF was signed in 1998. Since then, there have been several extensions (in 2000, 2003 and 2007). In 2012, a new contract to be paid in pesos was agreed until 2021, and has been extended to 2025.

From 1998 to 2012, Tenfield paid the AUF in dollars. However, during negotiations to extend its deal until 2021, it was decided by the clubs – fearing the value of the dollar would drop – to have an additional, concurrent contract in Uruguayan pesos. That contract – signed in 2012, originally until 2021 and now extended until 2025 – increases incrementally each year according to the level of inflation in the country, measured by the consumer price index.

The new Tenfield deal in pesos means the AUF will receive an extra \$2m per year from Tenfield for all club rights. The AUF will receive \$11.8m for all club rights in 2017 factoring in inflation, plus the additional \$2m per year from the Tenfield extension.

Under the new Tenfield deal, Nacional and Peñarol will each earn 18 per cent more than in their previous deals. All other first division teams will each earn 73 per cent more, while second division teams will each earn nine per cent more.

Before the new deal, Nacional and Peñarol each received just under 15 per cent of the league's total. The other 14 Primera División clubs shared 54 per cent of the total, while the 15 Segunda División clubs split the remaining 16 per cent.

The distribution of media-rights revenue is hugely uneven in Uruguay as Nacional and Peñarol account for roughly 80 per cent of the country's club football fan base. Peñarol and Nacional are the oldest clubs in the country – they were founded in 1891 and 1899 respectively. ♦



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DEALS ROUNDUP

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FOOTBALL

- ◆ French pay-television broadcaster SFR Sport acquired exclusive rights to the Uefa Champions League and Europa League club competitions in a three-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, worth €350m per season. The deal was reported in *TV Sports Markets* 21:8.
- ◆ Modern Times Group, the multi-territory commercial and pay-television broadcaster, extended its exclusive rights deals for English FA Cup and Football League rights across the Nordics (page 10).
- ◆ The IMG agency renewed its deal for international rights to the Eredivisie, from 2018-19 to 2021-22 (page 19).
- ◆ The Infront Sports & Media agency will distribute international media rights to this summer's Audi Cup pre-season tournament. The agency will also manage broadcaster servicing for the event.
- ◆ Belgian pay-television broadcaster Proximus struck a three-season deal for the Pro League, the top division of Belgian domestic football, from 2017-18 to 2019-20. Proximus acquired rights for live television coverage and near-live coverage and clips. Both sets of rights will be non-exclusive.
- ◆ North America's Major League Soccer agreed a deal with Indian pay-television broadcaster DSport for rights to five regular-season matches per week, selected MLS Cup playoff matches and the MLS Cup.

- ◆ UK pay-television broadcaster Sky acquired rights to the 2017, 2019 and 2021 Uefa European U-21 Championship national team tournaments.
- ◆ Canadian pay-television broadcaster TSN signed a multi-year deal with the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (Concacaf). From 2018, TSN will hold exclusive rights to the Gold Cup national team tournament and the Champions League club competition.
- ◆ Media company R-Media acquired rights in Honduras for live coverage of one regular-season MLS match per week, the All-Star game, the MLS Cup playoffs and the MLS Cup.
- ◆ New Zealand public-service broadcaster TVNZ acquired rights to at least one live regular-season MLS match per week as well as the All-Star game, selected MLS Cup playoffs and the MLS Cup.
- ◆ The All India Football Federation agreed a deal with pay-television broadcaster Star Sports.

OTHER SPORTS

- ◆ **American Football:** The NFL signed a global multi-year deal with social media platform Twitter. The league will produce a 30-minute live digital show that will air on Twitter five days per week during the season. The NFL will also use Periscope and Twitter as platforms for live pre-game content and highlights.
- ◆ **Aussie Rules:** Chinese state broadcaster CCTV and commercial broadcasters Shanghai TV and Guangzhou TV showed live coverage of the Australian Football League match between the

DEALS ROUNDUP

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Gold Coast Suns and Port Adelaide on May 14. The match was played in Shanghai.

◆ **Baseball:** Social media platform Facebook signed an agreement with MLB to live-stream one game per week on Fridays during the 2017 season, in the US only.

◆ **Boxing:** UK pay-television broadcaster Sky acquired rights for the light-heavyweight world title rematch between Andre Ward and Sergey Kovalev on June 17.

◆ **Canoeing:** The European Broadcasting Union consortium of public-service broadcasters extended its global rights deal for International Canoe Federation World Championship events for three years, from 2017 to 2019.

◆ **Cricket:** Fijian commercial broadcaster FBC acquired rights to the 2017 International Cricket Council Champions Trophy national team competition. FBC will broadcast highlights of each match.

◆ **Esports:** The ESL organisation agreed a deal for its events to be shown on flights operated by the Emirates airline. On-demand content will be available on every Emirates flight until June 2018.

◆ **Esports:** German sports broadcaster Sport1 agreed a deal with video game developer EA Sports to stream live coverage of the Fifa 17 Ultimate Team Championship Series competition. Live coverage of the final will be streamed on Sport1.de, and via Facebook and YouTube. Highlights will be shown on Sport1's free-to-air channels.

◆ **Esports:** Facebook will stream all Intel Extreme Masters and ESL One events in up to six languages, with additional coverage of other national championships and online leagues.

◆ **Handball:** Norwegian commercial and pay-television broadcaster TV2 signed a five-season deal with the Norwegian handball federation, from 2017-18 to 2021-22. TV2 will hold rights to all Norwegian club and national-team handball, excluding games in the European Championships, World Championships and summer Olympic Games.

◆ **Horse Racing:** Ascot Racecourse signed an exclusive deal with digital media company Sina Sports covering the 2017 edition of Royal Ascot, from June 20-24. The last three days will be shown live on all Sina platforms.

◆ **Ice Hockey:** The NHL Network, the NHL's cable and satellite television channel, acquired rights to the International Ice Hockey Federation's World Championships in a three-year deal, from 2018 to 2020. The deal covers the US, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands.

◆ **Ice Hockey:** Latvian telco Lattelecom and public-service broadcaster LTV acquired rights to the IIHF World Championships in a six-year deal, from 2018 to 2023. Free-to-air television channel LTV 7, pay-television channel 360TV and a special ice hockey pop-up channel will show matches.

◆ **Ice Hockey:** Lattelecom acquired rights to the Champions Hockey League club competition in a six-season deal, from 2017-18 to 2022-23. Lattelecom also acquired rights to the 2017 Spengler Cup.

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- ◆ **Ice Hockey:** Slovenian public-service broadcaster RTV acquired exclusive rights for the IIHF World Championships from 2018 to 2023, the Champions Hockey League from 2017-18 to 2022-23 and the 2017 Spengler Cup.
- ◆ **Ice Hockey:** Pay-television broadcaster Arena Sport acquired rights in the Balkans to the IIHF World Championships in a six-year deal, from 2018 to 2023; the Champions Hockey League in a six-season deal, from 2017-18 to 2022-23; and the 2017 Spengler Cup. The deal covers Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.
- ◆ **Ice Hockey:** The Mediapro agency acquired rights to the NHL in Spain. The agreement began with the Eastern and Western Conference Finals of the 2016-17 playoffs.
- ◆ **Ice Hockey:** Regional sports broadcaster Root Sports was named as the official broadcaster of newly-formed NHL team the Vegas Golden Knights through an agreement between the club and the AT&T Sports Network division of US telco AT&T. Root Sports Rocky Mountain will hold exclusive regional rights to regular-season games from the 2017-18 season.
- ◆ **Mixed Martial Arts:** The Ultimate Fighting Championship agreed a deal with pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports Latin America (page 13).
- ◆ **Motorsport:** The World Rally Championship agreed a linear television deal in the US with international sports broadcaster Eleven Sports Network, covering the remainder of the 2017 season.
- ◆ **Motorsport:** International sports broadcaster ESPN agreed a digital rights deal with the WRC. It will show live coverage and highlights on ESPN3.
- ◆ **Motorsport:** French public-service broadcaster France Télévisions agreed a four-year deal for the 24 Hours of Le Mans endurance event, from 2017 to 2020.
- ◆ **Olympic Games:** Media group Discovery Communications sublicensed exclusive free-to-air rights to public-service broadcaster Armenian Public TV for the Pyeongchang 2018 winter Games and the Tokyo 2020 summer Games.
- ◆ **Olympic Games:** Discovery sublicensed exclusive free-to-air rights for Pyeongchang 2018 and Tokyo 2020 to public-service broadcaster Radio Televizioni i Kosovës in Kosovo.
- ◆ **Poker:** ESPN extended its deal in the US with the World Series of Poker for four years, from 2017 to 2020.
- ◆ **Poker:** Eleven acquired rights in Belgium and Luxembourg to the World Poker Tour.
- ◆ **Rugby League:** Australian commercial broadcaster Seven acquired rights to the 2017 women's World Cup. The tournament is being hosted in Australia.
- ◆ **Rugby League:** Pay-television broadcaster Sky New Zealand acquired rights to the 2017 women's World Cup, which runs from November 16 to December.
- ◆ **Rugby League:** Papua New Guinea-based commercial station EMTV acquired rights to this year's women's World Cup.

DEALS ROUNDUP

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- ◆ **Rugby Union:** UK public-service broadcaster the BBC acquired rights to England's two-Test series against Argentina. The two matches, on June 10 and 17, will be shown on BBC Two.
- ◆ **Rugby Union:** The NBC Sports Group division of US media company NBCUniversal agreed a seven-year deal with World Rugby, the sport's global governing body (page 16).
- ◆ **Rugby Union:** The Pitch International agency extended its international rights deal with the Six Nations tournament (page 3).
- ◆ **Rugby Union:** FBC acquired rights in Fiji to the Top 14, the top division of club rugby in France.
- ◆ **Sailing:** Spanish public-service broadcaster TVE acquired rights to the 2017 America's Cup. TVE will broadcast live and delayed coverage of each race day across its free-to-air channels.
- ◆ **Sailing:** In-flight and in-ship channel Sport 24 acquired rights to the 2017 America's Cup.
- ◆ **Skateboarding:** The Street League Skateboarding series agreed a deal with ESPN in the US. The broadcaster will show exclusive coverage of the finals of the 2017 SLS Nike SB World Tour on its ESPN2 channel.
- ◆ **Skateboarding:** SLS agreed a deal with US network ABC. ABC will show highlights from the Tour during its coverage of the X Games action sports series.
- ◆ **Skateboarding:** SLS agreed a global rights deal with new digital subscription service ETN. The service's freely-available coverage began with the SLS Pro Open on May 20 and 21.
- ◆ **Speedway:** Eleven secured rights in Poland for the 2017 Individual Speedway Junior World Championship. Eleven will broadcast live and exclusive coverage of the final round of the competition, from July 23 to 29.
- ◆ **Triathlon:** Arena Sport acquired rights in the Balkans to the International Triathlon Union's World Triathlon Series until 2020.
- ◆ **US College Sport:** The IMG College division of the IMG agency signed a wide-ranging commercial rights deal with the Abilene Christian University. The nine-season deal will run from 2017-18 to 2025-26.
- ◆ **US College Sport:** The CBS Sports division of US network CBS retained rights to the annual American football game between the US Military Academy and US Naval Academy for 10 years, from 2019 to 2028.
- ◆ **Volleyball:** Arena Sport acquired rights in the Balkans to the European Volleyball Confederation's (CEV) European Championships until 2021, and various CEV beach volleyball events until 2021.
- ◆ **Volleyball:** Lattelecom and LTV signed deals for the 2017 and 2021 CEV Beach Volleyball Championships, and the 2020 CEV Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Finals.
- ◆ **Winter Sport:** Arena Sport acquired rights in the Balkans for the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation's World Cup and World Championships until the end of 2017-18, as well as the World Curling Championships and the European Curling Championships until 2018.

DEALS ROUNDUP

MAY 11 TO 24

◆ **Wrestling:** Turkish media group Saran Media acquired rights to events operated by WWE. The multi-year deal grants Saran Media rights to WWE's flagship *Raw* and *Smackdown* programmes, which will be shown via the S Sport pay-television channel.

◆ The Russian Premier League, the top division of domestic football, opened talks over extending its deal with Match TV.

MEDIA RIGHTS NEGOTIATIONS

◆ The England and Wales Cricket Board launched its domestic media-rights tender for the five-year period from 2020 to 2024. It has engaged law firm CMS as its adviser.

◆ Gazprom-Media chief executive Dmitry Chernyshenko said Russian broadcasters had put forward a "unified proposal" to Fifa for rights to the 2018 World Cup. Gazprom-Media owns sports broadcaster Match TV, which is involved in negotiations for rights to the 2018 World Cup and the 2017 Confederations Cup.

◆ European football's governing body Uefa launched a tender process for rights to its Champions League and Europa League club competitions in Italy, Slovenia and Spain, from 2018-19 to 2020-21. The tender includes the Uefa Super Cup in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

◆ The Board of Control for Cricket in India will launch a new tender for the next cycle of media rights for the Indian Premier League Twenty20 competition on July 17, according to various reports. The rights will cover five editions of the IPL, from 2018 to 2022.

◆ Turner is assessing a return to broadcasting the NFL, according to the US media company's executive vice-president of property marketing and corporate partnerships, Will Funk.

INDUSTRY NEWS IN BRIEF

MAY 11 TO 24

- ◆ Sports predictions app WinView raised \$12m (€11m) in a Series B funding round. Participants included international media company Discovery Communications, Graham Holdings Company, LionTree Partners and Ted Leonsis, founder of Monumental Sports & Entertainment.
- ◆ Telco BT, owner of pay-television broadcaster BT Sport, reported a 19-per-cent fall in its annual pre-tax profits, saying 2016 was a “challenging year” due to problems with its Italian division. Pre-tax profit fell to £2.354bn (€2.79bn/\$3.04bn). BT’s full-year sales were £24.062bn, up 27 per cent following the £12.5bn takeover of mobile operator EE. BT said its BT Sport service added 11,000 new customers during the quarter, taking its base to 1.7m. BT Sport’s average annual audience figures increased 12 per cent, excluding the Showcase and digital channels.
- ◆ BT Sport agreed to provide free coverage of this year’s Uefa Champions League and Europa League finals on video-sharing website YouTube.
- ◆ Tech giant Amazon will start offering live television channels via its Prime Video subscription service in the UK for an extra fee. Prime Video had previously offered on-demand films and television programmes in the UK, but people will now be able to subscribe to channels without paying for a bundle.
- ◆ Spanish police arrested Sandro Rosell, former president of LaLiga football club Barcelona, in connection with an investigation regarding his business activities in Brazil. The detentions are reported to be part of a money-laundering probe related to acquiring television rights for past matches of the Brazilian national football team.
- ◆ International sports broadcaster Eurosport agreed a partnership with software and solutions provider CA Technologies that led to the introduction of an app to enhance its cycling coverage. Eurosport used CA Technologies’ tools to offer a live interactive map with rider data for the Giro d’Italia – the technology will be used for other key races throughout the season.
- ◆ The Italian communications regulator, Agcom, approved the rules for the sale of the next cycle of domestic rights to Serie A, the top division of football in the country. The rights will cover three seasons, from 2018-19 to 2020-21.
- ◆ New Zealand Rugby partnered with telco Vodafone to launch an app centred on the national team. The app was created in conjunction with pay-television broadcaster Sky New Zealand and will provide fans with an enhanced stadium experience featuring replays, highlights and alternative live footage from New Zealand’s series against the British and Irish Lions, which begins next month.
- ◆ The World Baseball Softball Confederation appointed Canadian marketing and consulting firm deFrias Management Group to expand its media-rights distribution and global commercial rights income.
- ◆ Public-service broadcaster Namibian Broadcasting Corporation launched a sports channel, NBC6, in partnership with pay-television broadcaster Kwesé Sports.
- ◆ The International Surfing Association launched an app ahead of the World Surfing Games, which runs from May 20 to 28. The app

INDUSTRY NEWS IN BRIEF

MAY 11 TO 24

will stream coverage of the event to fans worldwide, and will feature news, statistics, results, photos and videos.

◆ UK production company Sunset+Vine was named as the host-broadcast producer for this year's edition of the Caribbean Premier League Twenty20 cricket tournament. Sunset+Vine will produce the world feed for the competition and will also be responsible for all pre- and post-match programming, as well as a weekly magazine show featuring highlights and behind-the-scenes footage.

◆ Las Vegas-based media platform Poker Central launched a new online subscription service entitled PokerGo. The service will feature live broadcasts of events including the Super High Roller Bowl and the World Series of Poker, as well as on-demand original programming.

◆ Telco Altice elected to rebrand a number of the businesses it has acquired, including telcos SFR, Portugal Telecom and US cable television operators Cablevision and Suddenlink. All operations will be rebranded Altice.

◆ The International Paralympic Committee appointed the IMG agency as its exclusive worldwide archive rights partner. The agreement will run for four years, covering the 2018 winter Games and the 2020 summer Games.

◆ Sports media and technology company deltatre hired Google executive Claude London to lead what it said will be a major expansion into the Americas. London will serve as deltatre's president for the Americas.

◆ The Formula One motor-racing series appointed Frank Arthofer as its global head of digital and new business. Arthofer will take up the role on June 12.

◆ Twitter hired Todd Swidler to the new position of global head of live business.

INDUSTRY MOVES

◆ Suhyeon Cho is to step down as chief commercial officer of the MP & Silva agency in June. Cho was appointed to the role four months ago and cited personal reasons for his decision to resign.