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FOOTBALL

Bundesliga moves on from past Nordic problems with Nent fee boost

By David Svenson

- Media group Nent to pay about €17.4m per season for 2021-25 cycle
- Fee about 54 per cent more than Bundesliga receives currently
- League took hit in existing deal following collapse of MP & Silva agency

Germany's Bundesliga has secured an increase in the value of its media rights in the Nordics in its renewal with Nordic Entertainment (Nent) Group. This follows the hit it took in the region after the collapse of its previous deal with the now defunct MP & Silva agency.

The new four-season deal, from 2021-22 to 2024-25, is for exclusive rights in the Nordics (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) to all Bundesliga and 2. Bundesliga matches, the annual German Super Cup match, and Bundesliga relegation matches.

SportBusiness Media understands the deal is worth about €17.4m (\$19.2m) per season. This is an increase of about 54 per cent on the approximately €11.3m per season the Bundesliga currently receives from the region.

Nent pays the Bundesliga approximately €11.2m per season in a direct deal with the league, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, for rights in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Rights in Iceland are currently held by free-to-air broadcaster SportTV, in a two-and-a-half-year deal, from January 2019 till the end of the 2020-21 season, worth about €100,000 per season.

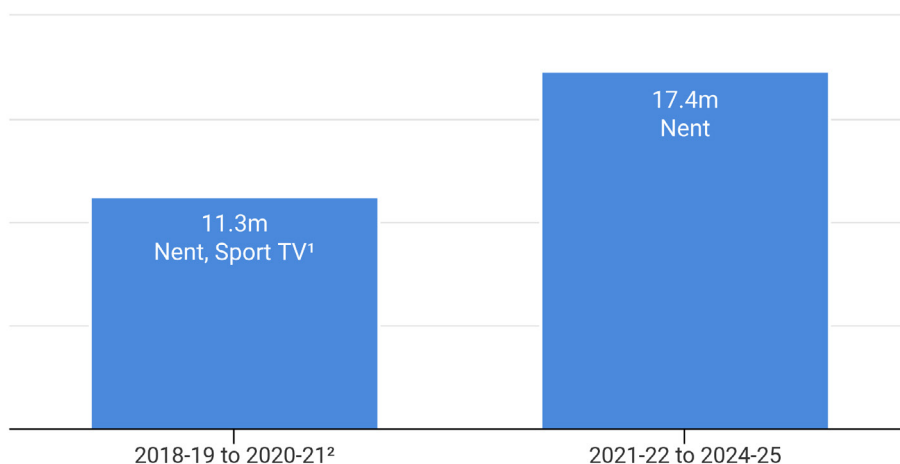
Nent's new deal includes rights in Iceland for the first time as it plans to launch its Viaplay streaming service in the country this year.

The media group has said it will broadcast all matches in each territory on Viaplay, with select matches to be broadcast live on its linear channels.

SportBusiness Media understands that despite the official announcement being made in February, the deal was completed last year following private negotiations. Significantly, the deal was completed before the arrival to the league of young Norwegian player Erling Braut Håland in January. Håland has made a significant impact in the Bundesliga since his arrival, scoring nine goals in his first six matches, and has become a high-profile name in European football.

All Bundesliga international sales are negotiated by Bundesliga International, its international sales and marketing arm.

German Bundesliga rights in the Nordics, 2018 to 2025 (€ per season)



Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

¹ Nent holds rights in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; Sport TV holds rights in Iceland

² Sport TV's deal in Iceland began in January 2019, running till the end of the 2020-21 season

Past problems

The Bundesliga struck a deal with MP & Silva for rights in the Nordics, from 2017-18 to 2020-21, as part of a wider deal that also included the [Balkans, Eastern Europe, Eurasia and Portugal, worth about €36m per season](#).

The league went without major coverage in the Nordics in 2017-18 season, after MP & Silva received low offers from broadcasters. After the start of the season, the agency agreed a deal with Sportradar-owned streaming platform [Laola1.tv until the end of that season](#). Laola did not pay an upfront fee for rights but shared advertising and sponsorship revenue with the agency.

Following the [collapse of MP & Silva](#) in October 2018, the league terminated the deal and took back control of its rights, agreeing new deals directly with broadcasters. It is thought to have suffered a total shortfall of about €18m per season as a result.

When it collapsed, MP & Silva had a deal in place with Nent for Bundesliga rights, along with a host of other football properties, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, [worth about €20m per season](#). Bundesliga rights were thought to account for between €16m and €19m per season. ○

CRICKET

Disney's India-focused Hotstar strategy opened door to Sky-IPL reunion in UK

By Reginald Ajuonuma

- Pay-TV broadcaster Sky pays about \$6m per year for rights from 2020 to 2022
- OTT platform Hotstar exploited Disney-owned Star's IPL rights in UK last year
- Hotstar's IPL marketing was stymied by UK compliance issue

Disney's decision to refocus Star India's Hotstar OTT platform on its domestic market paved the way for the return of Indian Premier League cricket rights in the UK to pay-television broadcaster Sky.

Sky re-acquired the exclusive rights to the Twenty20 tournament in a [three-year deal](#), from 2020 to 2022, after a tender process launched by the global rights-holder, Indian pay-television broadcaster Star, in January.

The deal, which is understood to be worth about \$6m (£5.4m) per year, allows the broadcaster to show all 60 matches per edition.

Sky last held IPL rights in 2018 as part of a [commercial arrangement](#) that was expected to last through to 2022, also thought to have been worth about \$6m per year. However, only a formal one-year contract was actually in place. Star retained an option to extend the deal, but instead chose to end its relationship with Sky in order to use the IPL to [develop its Hotstar platform in the UK](#).

Star holds platform-neutral global IPL rights for the 2018 to 2022 cycle, [which it acquired in 2017 for \\$2.55bn](#) in a deal with the Board of Control for Cricket in India. The five-year deal was worth \$510m per year, with rights in the Indian subcontinent accounting for most of the value.

However, its move to exploit these rights in the UK on Hotstar did not work, particularly against the background of Star owner Disney's decision to pursue a different OTT strategy to previous owner 21st Century Fox. Disney formally acquired Star in March last year, around the same time Star began implementing its IPL strategy for the UK Hotstar service.

One industry source told *SportBusiness Media*: "Their [Disney's] focus is purely on India with Hotstar; they thought it better to go with a partner [in the UK] that could monetise the [IPL] rights better."

Indian Premier League rights value in the UK from 2018 to 2022 (\$ per year)

Buyer	Duration	Value
Sky	2020 to 2022	6m
BT ¹	2019	1m-3m
Sky	2018	6m

Source: *SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker*

¹ Non-exclusive with Star India's Star Gold channel and Hotstar OTT platform

Non-compliance

Hotstar, which is owned by Star subsidiary Novi Digital Entertainment, debuted in India in 2015. It specialises in Indian TV shows, films and sports. The platform expanded into the US and Canada in 2017, and the UK in 2018.

Last year, Hotstar UK showed the IPL non-exclusively with Star's linear channel Star Gold and [telco BT](#). The latter is thought to have paid between \$1m and \$3m for its rights to the 60-match tournament.

SportBusiness Media understands specific issues with the UK service were an additional factor in Disney's decision to return to an exclusive third-party IPL rights arrangement. It is understood that the Hotstar OTT product does not fully comply with legislation in the UK, and that this non-compliance restricted Star's ability to market Hotstar's IPL coverage last year. It is not clear what this non-compliance specifically involved, and Star did not respond to a *SportBusiness Media* request for comment on the matter.

That said, the Hotstar platform still operates in the country. It shows exclusive cricket content from India national team home test matches and the Asia Cup, the biannual Men's One Day International and T20 International cricket tournament.

Star paid INR61.381bn (€785m/\$852m) to [renew Board of Control for Cricket in India global rights](#) for the 2018-23 cycle. At the time of the deal, the rupee-denominated rights fee converted to €765.1m/\$943.4m.

Tender

It is understood Star ended the IPL tender process a few days before the formal January 24 deadline. It had invited all major UK broadcasters to participate, but it is thought only BT joined Sky in submitting a bid.

Industry experts said BT's huge €466m (\$505.9m) per-season outlay on the [Uefa Champions League](#) for the 2021-24 cycle left it in no shape to enter a bidding war with Sky for IPL rights.

Commercial broadcaster ITV is understood to have been uninterested in bidding for the property. ITV was the IPL's exclusive broadcaster [until 2015](#), when Sky first took on the rights.

One industry expert told *SportBusiness Media* that recovering IPL rights made strategic sense for Sky: "[Cricket] is clearly one of Sky's key sports... I suspect [the IPL] reaches a younger audience compared with Test cricket and it also helps reach an Asian demographic."

The 2020 edition of the IPL was due to take place from March 29 to May 24, but has been postponed until April 15 due to the coronavirus pandemic. At December's player auction, a total of 13 England players were either signed or retained by the eight IPL franchises. These include England stars Eoin Morgan (Kolkata Knight Riders), Jason Roy and Chris Woakes (Delhi Capitals), Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Jos Buttler (Rajasthan Royals) and Jonny Bairstow (Sunrisers Hyderabad).

Sky will look to leverage wider public interest in cricket in the wake of England's 2019 Cricket World Cup win.

Star [holds the global rights to International Cricket Council events](#), including the Cricket World Cup, for the 2015-23 cycle. In the UK, these rights were [sold to Sky for a total of \\$200m](#). [o](#)

BASEBALL

Digital Consortium powers KBO growth but its sports ambitions thought limited

By Kevin McCullagh

- Consortium drives 70 per cent rights fee rise but higher production costs dampen KBO real gain
- Telcos using content to push 5G, internet portals seek traffic for sports platforms
- Local experts see the digital consortium deal as one-off

The emergence of a 'digital consortium' to rival the long-standing Korea Pool of free-to-air broadcasters led the Korea Baseball Organisation to record-breaking rights income for its new cycle in the most recently concluded deals. But local industry experts see the digital consortium (DC) deal as a one-off and do not expect it to become a major player in the sports media-rights market.

The KBO, Korea's professional baseball league, completed its [domestic sales process](#) in February with the sale of free-to-air, cable and IPTV rights to the Korea Pool for the 2020 to 2023 seasons, worth an average of KRW54bn per season. The Korea Pool is composed of KBS, SBS and MBC, the country's three main, nationwide terrestrial free-to-air broadcasters. All three also run basic-tier pay-television channels.

In February 2019, the KBO had struck a digital-rights deal with the digital consortium group consisting of telcos KT, LG Uplus and SK Broadband and South Korea's two biggest internet portals, Naver and Kakao. That deal, which the league referred to as being for 'wired/wireless broadcasting' rights, runs from 2019 to 2023. It is worth an average of KRW22bn (€16.3m, \$18.5m) per season. The actual payments increase year-on-year until the final year, from KRW19bn in 2019 to KRW20bn in 2020, KRW23.6bn in 2021, KRW23.7bn in 2022 and KRW23.7bn in 2023.

The digital and television deals cover the same content, including live coverage of all league matches. The inventory comprises five matches per matchday between March and October, for 720 games per season in total.

Comparing annual average figures in the previous and new deals for the years in which they ran concurrently – 2015-2018 and 2020-2023 – suggests the KBO's media-rights income has risen by 70 per cent, from KRW44.5bn per year to KRW76bn.

However, several local industry sources told *SportBusiness Media* that the KBO's income for the latest cycle will not rise by anywhere near as much as the headline figures suggest, mainly due to a large increase in production fees the league will pay to the Korea Pool for 2020 to 2023.

The value of the production fees is not known. But the Korea Pool is understood to have demanded a larger fee in part because it was producing content for the members of the digital consortium, who are now more direct rivals than in the past. No member of the consortium can produce match coverage itself. The pool has also committed to more production work in the new cycle. It is required to produce pre-season exhibition games for the first time and is helping the league create a video refereeing system, a video archive, and a new online portal for fans to access KBO content.

The new online portal has been a long-held ambition for the league, whose current digital presence is dated. Local media reports say the aim is to offer news, analysis, video, performance stats, and ticket sales on the new platform. At the same time, the league wants to update its presence on social media platforms.

Korea Baseball Organisation domestic rights, 2014 to 2023 (KRW per year)

Duration	Buyer	Platform	Value
2020 to 2023	Korea Pool ¹	FTA, cable, IPTV	54bn
2019 to 2023	Digital Consortium ²	Digital	22bn
2015 to 2019	Korea Pool	FTA	36bn
2014 to 2018	Eclat Entertainment	Cable, IPTV, digital	8bn to 9bn

Source: *SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker*

¹ The Korea Pool is composed of KBS, SBS and MBC, the country's three main, nationwide terrestrial free-to-air broadcasters

² Digital consortium consists of telcos KT, LG Uplus and SK Broadband and South Korea's two biggest internet portals, Naver and Kakao

Digital consortium strategy

Most of the KBO content on the various digital consortium platforms is available for free, including live matches. The telcos are using the content to push their nascent 5G services, while internet portals Naver and Kakao are using it to drive traffic to their sports-content platforms.

To encourage take-up of its 5G services, LG Uplus has viewing options allowing users to select feeds covering the action from different angles. Only users with 5G network connections can enjoy the feeds in full as they require a large amount of data.

Naver and Kakao offer a range of internet-based services, including search, news aggregation, forums, video streaming, instant messaging, mobile apps, ride-hailing, email and gaming. Naver is referred to as 'the Google of Korea'.

Each member of the consortium shows similar KBO content. They have tried to differentiate their offerings by producing original KBO-related shoulder programming, although one industry insider told *SportBusiness Media* this was proving expensive and has had a limited effect in driving audiences.

Local industry experts see the digital consortium deal as a one-off and do not expect it to become a major player in the sports media-rights market.

The KBO rights are unique in that they are the most popular property on the market and contain a large amount of content.

The Korean Football Association failed to elicit strong interest from the digital consortium when it tendered rights last year and again in January for the [domestic K-League](#) and men's national team matches. Football is the second-biggest sport in the country after baseball.

Previous deals

Media rights were split differently in the KBO's previous deals.

The Korea Pool held terrestrial free-to-air rights from 2015 to 2019 in a deal worth an average KRW36bn per season. Media group Eclat Entertainment held rights for cable, IPTV and digital platforms in a deal running from 2014 to 2018, thought to be worth in the range KRW 8bn-9bn per season.

Eclat used the content on its SpoTV pay-television and IPTV service, and sublicensed content to telcos and the Korea Pool's cable-television channels. Eclat's deal with the KBO is thought to have been structured as a minimum guarantee plus a share of sublicensing revenues.

Naver and Kakao also acquired some digital rights directly from the league in the last cycle.

Tenders

The KBO is understood to have tendered the digital rights separately after lobbying from the telcos in the digital consortium, each of which owns a team in the league. The telcos wanted an opportunity to acquire KBO content directly, rather than via sublicensing deals.

In the digital-rights tender, the Korea Pool and Eclat bid jointly against the digital consortium. The broadcasters are understood to have been unwilling to bid more than KRW 20bn per year.

Losing out on the digital rights is thought to have encouraged the Korea Pool to bid strongly to secure the linear rights. The KBO is critical content for the three pool broadcasters, given that baseball is South Korea's most popular sport, and it did not want to risk losing the property.

The Korea Pool is not thought to have faced serious competition in the sales process. Entertainment conglomerate CJ ENM and pay-television broadcaster JTBC, two other broadcasters active in the sports rights market, are not thought to have been strongly interested.

The level of Eclat Entertainment's interest during the linear rights bidding is not known. It has been sidelined by the new deals, losing the KBO content it had in the previous cycle.

Tough market

Although the KBO's total income increase may not be as great as headline figures suggest, given the higher production cost commitment, it nevertheless represents a strong result in what is considered a depressed media-rights market.

Major sports properties have experienced falling fees in the market in recent years. Advertising is the main source of revenue for the television business in South Korea, and growth has slowed. The pay-television market is dominated by low-cost cable-television and subscription revenues which represent a relatively small chunk of television industry revenues.

Commenting on the deal, a KBO official told local media: "When we started negotiations, it was widely expected that broadcasting rights would be lowered. The situation has not been good lately, with the advertisement market having been very difficult and the ratings of the KBO league falling."

The big KBO deals may have a dampening effect on prices for other properties, having hoovered up a large amount of media companies' budgets.

Move to platform-neutral

Despite its success in selling the digital rights separately from the linear rights, the league will sell the rights on a platform-neutral basis in the next cycle, beginning 2024. It described the bundling of the IPTV and pay-television rights with the terrestrial free-to-air rights as a 'bridgehead' towards a platform-neutral sale.

Earlier this month, the KBO [launched a tender](#) for the distribution of its media rights in territories outside Korea, covering the 2020 to 2023 seasons. [O](#)

FOOTBALL

Malaysian football rights values come back down to earth as Telekom returns

By Kevin McCullagh

- Malaysian Football League will earn about MYR30m per year from Telekom Malaysia deal in 2020-22 cycle
- Previous deals, nominally worth just under MYR90m per season, both collapsed last season
- New deal considered good result for league given market conditions

The value of the Malaysia Football League's domestic media and sponsorship rights have dropped significantly in the latest deal with Telekom Malaysia after two previous rights rounds of inflated valuations and, ultimately, collapsed deals.

The league's joint media and sponsorship rights deal with telco Telekom Malaysia, [announced in February](#), is thought to be worth about MYR30m (€6.2m/\$7m) per season over the three seasons from 2020 to 2022. The league has also agreed sponsorship deals with bank CIMB and online shopping platform Shopee, each thought to be worth a low single-digit million Malaysian ringgit figure per year.

The league's previous deals, with TM and OTT operator iflix, were together valued at just under MYR90m per season. They began in 2018 and were due to run until 2025 and 2027, respectively. But TM walked out on its deal at the start of last season and iflix and the league decided to cancel their deal at the end of the season. The league is not thought to have earned anywhere near MYR90m in any of the years the deals were active.

TM's new deal covers exclusive broadcast, mobile and online streaming rights for the top-tier Liga Super, the Liga Premier second division, the Piala FA and Piala Malaysia cup competitions and the Piala Sumbangsih season-opening match.

Live coverage of all matches is available on TM's Unifi pay-television platform and via the Unifi PlayTV app, for subscribers to the Unifi TV Ultimate Pack. Those that don't subscribe to the Ultimate Pack can access coverage via the Unifi TV set-top box and PlayTV app on an individual match basis or through monthly or seasonal passes.

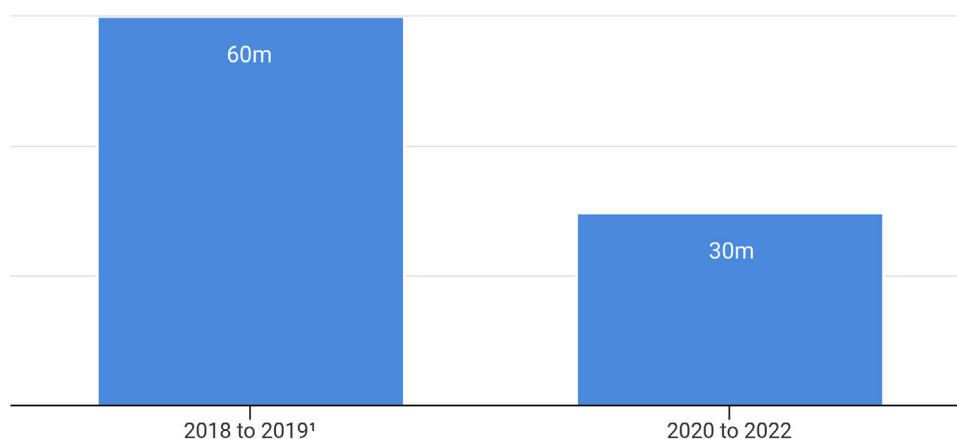
TM's deal also covers title sponsorship of the Piala Malaysia and co-sponsorship of the Liga Super, the Piala FA, the Liga Premier and the Challenge Cup competition. In TM's previous deal, it was also the title sponsor of the Liga Super. In February, CIMB was [announced as the title sponsor of the Liga Super](#) for the 2020 season, with an option to extend for a further year. In the same month, Shopee renewed its sponsorship of the Piala FA cup competition for 2020, a third successive year.

Industry insiders say the new deal is a positive result for rights-holder the Malaysian Football League even if it means the league and clubs will have to tighten their belts in the coming years. The deal rekindles the league's relationship with TM, one of the market's most important media platforms and sports sponsors.

The league will hope the new deal draws a curtain on several years of turmoil in its commercial partnerships.

Winnie Chan, the MFL's chief commercial officer, declined to disclose or comment on the values of the new or previous deals, but told *SportBusiness Media*: "I think it's positive because we've got TM involved both as broadcast platform as well as a sponsor. It is a good deal in the sense that fans can watch on both pay-TV and on OTT... Also, TM's mobile, broadband and TV businesses will activate their sponsorships in ways that will help enhance the fans' experience on and off match days."

Telekom Malaysia domestic commercial rights to Malaysian Football League properties, 2018 to 2022 (MYR per year)



Source: *SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker*

¹ Deal originally due to run until 2025, but cancelled at start of 2019 season.

No competition

TM did not face any competition for the rights. Chan said the league spoke to all the players in the market and that TM made the best offer.

"As with many other countries, it's slim pickings [in the market at present]," she said. "We've got FTA, we've got pay-TV. We've got some OTT players as well. It's the usual suspects. Whilst most

broadcasters expect Malaysian sports to be free, we are grateful to have some who understand the real value and that the rights fee paid will help the participating clubs financially too.”

Malaysia’s leading sports broadcaster, pay-television operator Astro, for a long time the league’s broadcast partner, is not unwilling to spend money on the rights. The broadcaster’s business has been squeezed by cord-cutting and piracy, and its once-close relationship with the league broke down when it was sidelined in the last two rights cycles.

However, the league has again agreed a one-year deal with public-service broadcaster RTM to show one live match per week from the Liga Super. The league has traditionally agreed one-year deals with RTM, as the broadcaster’s budget is determined by the government on an annual basis. The agreement is a three-way deal between RTM, the MFL and TM.

Chan said TM is open to sublicensing deals and “other opportunities” with other free-to-air broadcasters in the market.

Failed deals

TM’s previous eight-year deal, due to run [until 2025](#), was worth about MYR60m per year. [TM walked away from the deal in April last year](#), early in the season, saying the two parties “were unable to agree on several fundamental commercial terms necessary for the intended collaboration”. Market insiders said the deal was considered overpriced and TM, which is a ‘government-linked company’, may have experienced political pressure to cancel it. Government-linked companies are an official category in Malaysia, as companies owned by state investment funds.

The cancellation soured the relationship between TM and the MFL, and each took legal action against the other in the aftermath.

The iflix deal was for 10 years, from 2018 to 2027, and was worth an average of about MYR30m per year. The deal was cancelled at the end of the 2019 season. Market insiders say iflix struggled with the cost.

Iflix was streaming coverage for free to registered users via its mobile and internet-connected television apps. Its rights included all matches from the Liga Super, the Liga Premier and the Piala FA.

Before these two deals, the now defunct MP & Silva agency had struck a deal with the Football Association of Malaysia – then the rights-holder – to pay a minimum guarantee of MYR70m per year for its media and marketing rights for six years from 2016 to 2021. The [deal collapsed](#) in 2017 after MP & Silva struggled to generate revenue from the rights.

Rift healed

The new deal marks a healing of the relationship between TM and the MFL.

Chan said: “Both parties decided to relook at the situation and make football the centre of their attention. A lot of things have changed in terms of the people that are managing the project and the contracts.”

Both organisations have had changes of leadership in the last year. In September, Hamidin Mohd Amin, the president of the Football Association of Malaysia, also became president of the MFL. In June, TM appointed a new chief executive – Noor Kamarul Anuar Nuruddin replaced Datuk Seri Mohammed Shazalli Ramly, who was in charge when the previous MFL deal was agreed but left the company in 2018.

Chan said another reason TM returned to domestic football was that the sport remains important to the company’s marketing strategy. The company is a current sponsor of the FAM and English Premier League team Manchester United. TM has already started activating its sponsorship rights – for the first match of the season it ran a competition for a “money can’t buy” match experience for fans involving local influencers and a tour of leading club Johor Darul Ta’zim’s new stadium.

Sports broadcasting in Malaysia – particularly of football, the country’s most popular sport – is a political business, and one well-placed market insider said this week that TM is likely to have also been encouraged by political figures to support the league by doing a new deal.

TM’s exit from the MFL deal last year was considered by some market insiders as part of a wider retreat from sport. The company was under heavy scrutiny from the then newly-elected Malaysian government over its poor financial performance. It’s not yet clear if the company’s ambitions in sport now extend beyond the MFL rights. [o](#)

MULTI-SPORT

Česká Televize raises Olympic hours, digital scope in new Discovery deal

By David Svenson

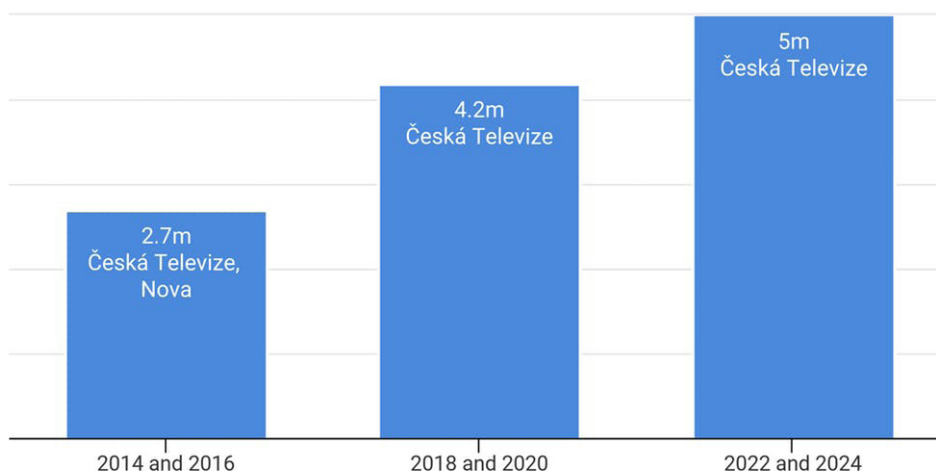
- Public-service broadcaster to pay about €5m for 2022 and 2024 Games
- Paid about €4.2m for rights to 2018 and 2020 Games
- Increases hours available for winter Games; approval for digital Olympic channel

Česká Televize will pay more to continue to sublicense Olympic rights from US media group Discovery but will gain more winter Games hours and an additional digital broadcast option.

The Czech public-service broadcaster's new deal with Discovery, for rights to the Beijing winter Games in 2022 and Paris summer Games in 2024, is thought to be worth a total of about €5m (\$5.7m). This is an increase in value of about 19 per cent on its sublicensing agreement with Discovery for the 2018 and 2020 Games, which is [worth a total of about €4.2m](#).

Discovery holds exclusive rights to the Olympic Games, from 2018 to 2024, across 50 European territories in [a deal worth €1.3bn](#). The media group has retained pay-television rights in the Czech Republic to showcase the action across its Eurosport 1 and Eurosport 2 linear television channels, along with subscription OTT platform Eurosport Player.

Olympic Games rights in the Czech Republic, 2014 to 2024 (€)



Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

It is required to make at least 100 hours of the winter Games and 200 hours of the summer Games available on free-to-air television in each territory.

In Česká Televize's 2018-20 deal, the broadcaster managed to persuade Discovery to sell the rights to air 200 hours from the winter Games and 300 hours from the summer Games. In the 2022-24 deal, the number of hours Česká Televize can air for the winter Games will increase, while summer hours remain the same.

Another notable change in the new deal is that Česká Televize will be allowed to open an online Olympic channel as well as covering the Games on its CT Sport channel. In the 2018-20 deal, it only had approval to broadcast events on one linear channel.

Česká Televize was proactive in changing this situation. It was a problem for the broadcaster during the 2018 Games when there was an issue with overlapping events, in particular when the men's Czech Republic ice hockey team played Canada at the same time as Czech athlete Ester Ledecká won gold in the Super-G Alpine skiing.

Another factor that helped Discovery increase the value of the sublicensing deal was the location of the 2024 Games; Paris is in a much more favourable time-zone for the Czech audience than Pyeongchang (2018), Toyko (2020) and Beijing (2022).

In the new deal, Česká Televize will continue to promote Eurosport's coverage of the Games. [O](#)

FOOTBALL

Streamlined Copa del Rey rights process tempts ESPN Brasil into three-year deal

By Alex Taylor

- Pay-TV broadcaster to pay total of about \$1m in 2019-22 cycle
- Package also includes full rights to Copa de la Reina, women's Supercopa
- ESPN, DAZN were only interested parties

With Copa del Rey rights now available in one package, ESPN Brasil was comfortable agreeing a three-season deal for a competition that has historically been a tough sell in the territory.

SportBusiness Media understands ESPN Brasil will pay the Spanish football federation (RFEF), the Copa del Rey rights-holder, a total of about \$1m (€914,300) for exclusive linear, digital and highlights rights to the men's [Copa del Rey](#) knockout competition, the women's Copa de la Reina and the Supercopa tournaments from 2019-20 to 2021-22. The bulk of the fee is allocated to the men's Copa del Rey.

ESPN Brasil will pay only \$250,000 for the 2019-20 season as its coverage began from the quarterfinals – the contract was signed in early February. It will then pay about \$375,000 per season in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The inventory includes the nine matches from the 2019-20 Copa del Rey season's quarter-final stage onwards as well as all 117 Copa del Rey matches for each of the two following seasons. There is no minimum requirement on the number of matches to broadcast. ESPN is free to choose which matches it broadcasts, with only the semi-final and final matches being mandatory. All matches will be available both live and on-demand. The deal inventory also includes 13 Copa de la Reina matches and three women's Supercopa matches each season.

ESPN Brasil will exploit some of the rights on its linear channels, though the bulk of Copa del Rey matches will be shown on its OTT platform, ESPN+.

The RFEF oversees match production, with ESPN required to pay €1,500 per match to access the international feed.

Though the inventory includes rights to the 10-match Copa del Rey preliminary stage, ESPN Brasil has no plans to broadcast the preliminary rounds at any point over the deal's lifespan.

ESPN will show Copa de la Reina and women's Supercopa matches on ESPN+.

Sales restructure

The 2019-20 to 2021-22 cycle is the first time that the RFEF has sold the rights as a complete package. The RFEF previously sold only the rights to the final, while LaLiga, the governing body of Spain's top two divisions of professional football, sold the rights to all rounds preceding the final.

Sources close to past sales in the country say the inability for broadcasters to acquire the competition as a single package historically depressed interest in the earlier stages of the cup.

For the 2018-19 Copa del Rey, the semi-final was the only stage before the final itself whose rights were picked up in Brazil. ESPN Brasil paid about €100,000 for rights to both two-legged semi-finals, as one of them involved a Clásico between Barcelona and Real Madrid.

ESPN Brasil Spanish football properties

Property	Duration
Copa del Rey	2019-20 to 2021-22
Copa de la Reina	2019-20 to 2021-22
Women's Supercopa	2019-20 to 2021-22
LaLiga	2015-16 to 2019-20

Source: *SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker*

Tender

The Copa del Rey rights were sold in a tender process in which the RFEF offered both media and betting rights. The betting rights remain unsold.

ESPN Brasil acquired the media rights in the first round of bidding. The broadcaster faced only limited competition from OTT platform DAZN for the media rights. DAZN launched in Brazil [last May](#).

Rights to the Copa de la Reina and women's Supercopa were added to the deal in private negotiations after the tender was concluded.

The RFEF was keen to ensure exposure for the two competitions and was happy to accept a nominal fee for their rights.

Market experts told *SportBusiness Media* that most Brazilian broadcasters that could have provided further competition, pay-television broadcaster Globo among them, decided the rights would be too expensive and would not fit their model.

The Sportradar agency advised the RFEF on its global Copa del Rey rights sales outside Europe. The agency also advised the RFEF on the sale of the 2018-19 final in Europe, the US and Brazil. [○](#)

ATHLETICS

ERT puts athletics at heart of sporting output with sprawling EBU deal

By Alex Taylor

- Public broadcaster to pay about €260,000 per year for 38 EBU events
- Deal runs from 2020 to 2024
- ERT pivots to prioritise athletics alongside football, basketball in future deals

Greek public broadcaster ERT's determination to make athletics central to its sporting output drove the broadcaster to join the European Broadcasting Union's pool for a host of European and World Championship events.

ERT will contribute about €260,000 (\$294,354) per year over a five-year period, from [2020 until the end of 2024](#), for exclusive linear, clips and streaming rights to 38 events across track & field, swimming, water polo, rowing, gymnastics, cycling and golf.

Broadcasters usually make their commitments to the EBU pool before the consortium of the continent's public-service broadcasters approaches rights-holders. But due to funding cuts, ERT was unable to commit to a contribution when originally approached.

ERT is understood to have approached the EBU in mid-January to acquire the rights after a new five-year budget had been agreed by its board.

Its strategy over that term is to place athletics at the heart of its sporting content, alongside football and basketball.

EBU events rights in Greece, 2015 to 2024, (€ per year)¹

Broadcaster	Duration	Value
ERT	2020 to 2024	260,000
ERT	2015 to 2019	250,000

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

¹The number of events in the latest cycle is 38. It was 35 in the previous cycle.

The deal was agreed in late February following private negotiations.

ERT's contribution is thought to be a slight increase on the last cycle, which covered 35 events and saw ERT pay about €250,000 per year from 2016 to 2019. ERT approached the EBU in that cycle in the same manner it did for the latest deal.

The deal again includes rights to the [Paralympic Games](#), but only for [the 2020 edition](#). The International Paralympic Committee has yet to sell rights in Europe to the 2024 edition.

New additions to the inventory include three European Championships in golf, cycling and triathlon, all of which take place in 2022.

Rights-holders for the events acquired by the EBU include swimming's [Ligue Européenne de Natation](#), the [International Rowing Federation](#) and [European Athletics](#).

The broadcaster will exploit the linear rights on its flagship ERT1 channel and the online rights on its ERT WebTV OTT platform.

ERT had traditionally shown sports on its dedicated ERT Sports channel. It [announced in January](#) that top-tier sports events would now sit on ERT1 alongside similar entertainment content. ERT Sports is being downgraded to standard definition and will house lower-priority content in the future

Market position

Sources told *SportBusiness Media* that ERT's primary motivation in the deal was to position athletics as one of its three core sports, alongside football and basketball.

Football and basketball properties that ERT currently holds rights to include the [Uefa Champions and Europa League](#) tournaments (until 2021) and several International Basketball Federation competitions, including the Champions League (until the end of [the 2019-20 season](#)) and national team competitions ([until 2021](#)).

It is understood that ERT executives considered the athletics events acquired by the EBU to be heavyweight enough to ensure the broadcaster is seen as the home of athletics in Greece.

The public broadcaster has been fighting to secure its long-term future with its spending on sports rights under scrutiny from the government following last July's general election. The New Democracy party has imposed much greater financial constraints on ERT's funding than the ousted Syriza government, under which ERT had agreed several deals.

Consequently, deals it previously held for several football clubs' home matches in the top-tier Greek Super League One were either [renegotiated or cancelled](#), while it slashed its outlay on the exclusive rights to the Super League 2 in the [2019-20 season](#) by 60 per cent. ○

FOOTBALL

Pitch sees clear path to WSL football international rights deal

By Reginald Ajuonuma

- Agency signs revenue-share deal with FA for 2019-22 cycle
- IMG, Infront did not take part in tender
- Pitch looks to capitalise on women's sport 'bull market'

Agency Pitch International did not face serious competition in the English FA's tender for international Women's Super League media rights, *SportBusiness Media* understands.

The tender, [which took place late last year](#), covered exclusive global rights to the WSL, excluding the UK and Republic of Ireland, from 2019-20 to 2021-22. The inventory comprises live, on-demand, highlights and digital rights.

It is understood the FA was open to proposals as to how it would work with the successful bidder. In the event, Pitch will sell the rights on a revenue-share basis.

In the months prior to the tender, the agency had already negotiated the WSL's [first set of overseas live-rights deals](#), which covered the same three seasons. It sold rights in the Nordics to the Nordic Entertainment (Nent) Group and the rights in Mexico, Central America and the Dominican Republic to pay-television broadcaster Sky Mexico. The FA said the two deals would generate a "six-figure revenue" for the organisation. The third deal was in Australia with telco Optus.

The IMG and Infront agencies did not participate in the global rights tender. It is understood that IMG, at least, did not view the property as a priority. In addition, interest was dampened by the fact the 13 territories accounted for by Pitch's three prior deals were necessarily excluded, thus reducing the potential scope to monetise the property. The fact the tender took place after the 2019-20 season had already commenced was another complicating factor.

Pitch and IMG already have strong relations with the FA. The two agencies [hold the international distribution rights](#) to the FA's main property, the FA Cup domestic knockout tournament, from 2018-19 to 2023-24. Pitch's rights cover western Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, while IMG's cover the rest of the world. Total revenue from the deals is understood to be about \$1.01bn (€910m), or just over \$168m per season. Of this, IMG is thought to be paying about

\$730m and Pitch about \$280m. Pitch also sold international rights to the FA Cup in selected regions during the previous six-season cycle.

Riding the wave?

Women's sport has seen an explosion of interest in the past year. The aftermath of the hugely successful Women's football World Cup saw Uefa sell rights to the Women's Euro 2021 tournament for a record-breaking €10m-€12m (\$11.3m-\$13.5m) in [the UK](#) and €13m in [France](#).

Pitch has leveraged this interest by launching a women's sport division. Last year, the agency [became the distribution partner to the W-Series](#), the all-female motorsport series, and distributed the rights to over 110 territories in the first year.

But it is debatable how much bearing the current popularity of women's international football will have on the agency's ability to monetise the rights to a club competition like the WSL.

One industry expert told *SportBusiness Media*: "If there is a bull market in the women's game now, it is limited to the national teams. Domestically, the WSL has quite a bit of headroom to grow. If it generates proper money [from UK broadcasters], it could bring in foreign players – that always stimulates interest – but then beyond that, it could become a direct-to-consumer product."

The FA already has a direct-to-consumer OTT platform, focused specifically on women's football, called The FA Player, [which it launched last year](#). This season, it is livestreaming for free every WSL match as well as one match each match-week from the second-tier Women's Championship.

It is understood the FA Player will not necessarily be geo-blocked in countries where Pitch secures WSL deals, with the platform's status dependent on the market. However, coverage is geo-blocked in the territories covered by the Sky Mexico, Nent and Optus deals.

In the UK, the FA Player is available in addition to the coverage provided by public service broadcaster the BBC and telco BT. It simulcasts matches shown live on the BBC, while an audio feed is available on the platform for matches shown on BT Sport. The BBC and BT jointly hold domestic WSL rights from 2018-19 to 2020-21 [as part of a wider FA deal](#) worth about £65m (€75.3m/\$82.4m) per season. ○