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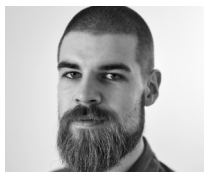
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MOTORSPORT

Eclat to replace Fox Sports Asia with 'lean and localised' SPOTV

By Kevin McCullagh

- Eclat CEO Mitchell Hong speaks exclusively about new pan-regional platform
- Eclat sets out vision for a more 'localised' and digital successor to Fox Sports Asia
- In years ahead, expansion of business beyond pay-TV core is planned

South Korean media company Eclat Media Group's [new pan-Asia-Pacific sports media platform](#) will step into the gap left by Fox Sports Asia with a more 'localised' and digitally-focused service, its chief executive Mitchell Hong has told *SportBusiness Media*.

The service will initially aim to replace the soon-to-close pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports Asia as closely as possible, providing pay-television platforms in Asia-Pacific markets with most of the same sports content that the Disney-owned broadcaster was carrying. [Disney is shutting Fox Sports Asia](#) at the end of this month.

However, Eclat's vision for its pan-regional service, branded as SPOTV, is significantly different from Fox Sports Asia. Eclat intends to create a more 'localised' service with more content produced in local languages. It will also consider acquiring different rights in different markets as opposed to the generally blanket, pan-regional approach taken by Fox.

Hong told *SportBusiness Media*: "The immediate goal is to make a replacement for the Fox Sports service for sports fans in the region ... when it comes to geographical territories, we're going to be very similar to what Fox Sports' coverage was. For the content, we would like to do as similar a line-up as possible."

Rights-holders that previously had deals with Fox [have been in the market in recent months](#) seeking new buyers for their content. Eclat is understood to be in talks to buy several of the other available properties and has already [confirmed deals to acquire rights to MotoGP and WorldSBK](#) over five years, from 2022 to 2026.

Eclat has also been discussing distribution deals with pay-television platforms across the region. These agreements are expected to provide the bulk of the revenue for the new business.

Digital and social media content is expected to play a bigger role for SPOTV than it did for Fox. Fox focused heavily on its traditional, linear pay-television business. Hong says SPOTV will produce a significant amount of local-language digital content in an effort to reach a wider customer base across the Asia-Pacific region.

Eclat is considering expanding the business into sectors in which it has developed successful operations in its home market of South Korea: basic-tier television, non-video digital sports content and sports event promotion.

Hong told *SportBusiness Media* that Eclat aims to run “a lean operation” in order to be profitable. Fox Sports Asia had slid into losses in recent years. Eclat believes savings can be made compared to Fox’s operations in areas including production and rights acquisitions. Hong says that the company is taking a hard look at the Fox content portfolio to decide which properties were working and which were not.

Launch platform

The pan-regional SPOTV was revealed this week when rights deals were announced for the MotoGP and WorldSBK motorcycle racing series, covering 15 markets in Asia-Pacific: South Korea, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

MotoGP rights in Indonesia cover pay-television platforms only. In all other markets, Eclat has acquired exclusive, platform-neutral rights.

Both deals span five years, from 2022 to 2026, and were agreed with Dorna Sports, the organiser and commercial rights-holder of the two series. Agency IMG helped to broker the deals.

One pay-television distribution deal was also revealed this week, [with Malaysia’s Astro](#).

The pan-regional SPOTV will launch on October 1 with two linear pay-television channels, SPOTV and SPOTV2. There will also be a pan-regional, direct-to-consumer OTT platform, SPOTV NOW. The availability of this platform will vary from market to market depending on SPOTV’s agreements with local pay-television platforms.

SPOTV is the same brand used by Eclat for its Korean sports pay-television and digital business, which has been running since 2010.

Distribution was expected to be a significant challenge for any player looking to replace Fox Sports Asia. Some pay-television platforms in the region saw an opportunity to make savings from the Fox shutdown. They hoped to ‘cherry-pick’ the best content from the Fox portfolio and no longer pay for the less attractive content. Some of these platforms were among Eclat’s rivals during the bidding for the rights formerly held by Fox.

Hong said initial talks with the platforms had been challenging: “When we first evaluated this project and when we talked individually with different operators, they were very cautious about it.”

However, the company is confident of securing favourable deals: “We’ve been in the industry for a long time and we have a pretty decent idea about how each market should function. So, overall, discussions have been good. We’ve been in this kind of situation before. So I think it has not been too bad at all.”

Digital plans

In Korea, Eclat has been able to generate significant subscription and advertising revenues from its SPOTV’s OTT platform, with the latter powered by free-to-view content. The company hopes to replicate this success in the new markets.

The exact shape of the OTT service in each market will be influenced by the agreements with local pay-television platforms. SPOTV’s service represents potential competition for its pay-television partners, so its presence in each market must be carefully calibrated and agreed upon by both sides.

Local economic conditions will also play a role in shaping the OTT offering. Some of the markets are low-wage or have poor infrastructure, putting a limit on the size of a subscription-based business.

“How that (the OTT service) will generate revenue is quite different market by market,” Hong said. “The markets are different – the levels of the economies and GDPs are different across the region so we can’t really say we’ll do one model. In some markets a standalone, subscription OTT service will be available. In some markets, our digital offering will be a lot more focused on fan engagement than on generating subscription revenue.”

He continued: “There will be a premium OTT service presented in the region. But, at the same time, there will be a lot of content that will be offered free to fans, as well.”

While the new SPOTV will initially closely resemble Fox Sports Asia, a more expansive business is planned for the years ahead. Hong told SportBusiness Media that Eclat wants to build on its experience in Korea where it has created a successful multi-platform sports media business.

He said: “Starting next year, in our next phase, we are trying to bring what we’re doing in Korea, where our experience covers basic-tier TV, pay-TV, a la carte video content, OTT, social media, we publish the Golf Digest magazine, we have been an event promoter for UFC...

“We cover a lot of ground in Korea when it comes to sports, so we will be trying to expand that throughout the region. Some you’ll see immediately. Some will take a little longer to be out there.”

Content strategy

SPOTV's short-term content focus is on the rights formerly held by Fox. But Hong said it could deviate from this path in future, should the right opportunity present itself.

Fox had in recent years positioned itself as a carrier of high-quality, second-tier international sports properties. With some small exceptions, it no longer competed for the very top-tier properties in Asia-Pacific like the English Premier League, other major European football leagues and Uefa club competitions. It largely ceded this ground to pay-television operators in the individual markets. It also mostly ignored domestic properties and instead aimed to get the best of the remaining international content.

Hong said SPOTV was still forming its long-term content strategy: "Right now, we're focused on replacing Fox; we're trying to fill in the gap. We are in the process of developing our long-term strategy. That's quite difficult because there are many moving parts. For example, rights cycles are all different."

One notable difference from Fox Sports Asia, Hong said, is that SPOTV will be less focused on pan-regional rights acquisitions and is likely to differ on a market-by-market basis: "That gives us a little bit of luxury to look into different markets slightly differently. So if there is a property that is available for a certain market and we think there is a business opportunity, then we'll go for it. Our goal is to try to be as local-centric as possible."

The company expects to benefit from recent softness in Asian media-rights markets. Fees for many properties, particularly premium football properties, have been falling across the region in recent cycles. This followed a decade or more of stellar growth leading into the mid-2010s.

Hong said the market was undergoing a search for "equilibrium" after the big increases of the prior years, which had been driven by "a mixture of economic growth, plus the media expansion, including digital expansion".

The future direction of rights fee values, he said, is "the toughest question for everybody in the industry."

He expects some to continue to grow: "Some rights-holders are doing a better job communicating and delivering exciting content... and the rights fee will definitely go up".

As a buyer, he said: "Our job is to make sure we don't spend money on the wrong content. Our continuous mission is to avoid missing out on opportunities, but also avoid being penalised for investing in the wrong content."

Fox rights bidding

The content previously with Fox has attracted interest from a range of bidders. As well as Eclat, they included international sports and media investor Aser Ventures, Singapore-based

pay-television channel operator Rewind Networks, multi-territory sports broadcaster beIN Sports, Indonesian digital streaming platform Mola, and pay-television broadcasters from individual markets.

As well as MotoGP and WorldSBK, the available rights include Formula One, the four tennis grand slams, the four golf majors, Italian Serie A football, and the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Most of the Fox deals end this year, except for Formula One, which runs to the end of next year.

Aside from the MotoGP rights, only a few other deals have been announced so far.

[BeIN Sports acquired the Serie A rights](#) for the new cycle, 2021-22 to 2023-24, across its 12 Asia-Pacific markets: Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand.

BeIN had the rights in most of these markets in the last cycle, the exceptions being Malaysia and Singapore, where Fox had them.

BeIN is also thought to have secured some of the tennis rights formerly held by Fox.

Indonesian streaming platform Mola TV has acquired non-exclusive rights for the UFC in Singapore and Malaysia. This is understood to be part of broader moves by Mola to expand beyond its home market.

Localisation push

One of the most significant differences between SPOTV and Fox Sports Asia will be an increased focus on localisation by the new service, Hong said. Localised digital and social media content will be an important part of this. The company hopes this will engage a wider group of fans across the region than Fox did and says there will be benefits for rights-holders.

“From a rights-holders’ standpoint, their brand will be communicated to fans in each territory a little bit more directly than it was before,” Hong said. “And for the consumers, we’ll try to deliver as much localised content as possible around these sports rights.”

He continued: “We’re entering the market with pay TV, but we’ll be covering a lot more ground on digital to communicate with fans.”

Local content will be developed both by SPOTV itself and by working with local pay-television platforms.

“Localising the content is something that we’re focusing on in partnerships with the local operators but also in the digital space,” Hong said. “Fans will see a lot more content and stories published between events.”

“That’s something we’ve done very well in Korea, where we have over five million social media followers on different platforms. With our apps and our different content offerings, we constantly communicate with fans about the sports that we represent. So that is something that we would like to do in Southeast Asia.”

SPOTV believes its digital and social media activity will also help its partner pay-television platforms, many of whom, like other pay-television businesses around the world, are facing stagnating or falling subscriber numbers.

“A lot of the operators complain that their pay-TV business is not as good as it was before,” Hong said. “But the fans are still there. There are a lot of other ways of delivering to and communicating with fans. We can cover a lot of ground outside of the television space or live streaming.”

The company also hopes the localised content will generate increased advertising and sponsorship revenue.

Lean operation

Fox Sports Asia is understood to have been making losses in excess of \$10m per year in recent years. This is thought to have hastened Disney’s earlier-than-expected move to close it down.

Eclat intends to run a profitable business partly by cutting costs compared to Fox in the areas of production and content acquisition. “We’ll have a lean operation,” Hong said.

This includes taking a hard look at the Fox content portfolio to narrow down the list of ‘must-have’ properties that it will acquire. Hong said: “We have to be quite smart about what was working and what was not. And if there is any content that didn’t work, we’ll probably move to make some adjustments.”

When it comes to production, Hong said the company will use existing resources in Korea but also create new resources in Southeast Asia.

“I don’t think we could do everything out of Korea. So there will be some type of production presence in Southeast Asia,” he said.

“We’re having a discussion about the best locations. It could be a technical hub, it could be a production hub, or there could be multiple facilities in key markets. But we don’t want to waste facilities. We’ll try to be smart but at the same time, we have to balance it well so we can have a local, distinct flavour to the production, too.”

Southeast Asia-based resources are considered crucial in the push for more localised content.

The company expects to make savings by using digital production methods and other tweaks that will be different to what Fox did, Hong said. Relatively lavish productions, with big-name

presenters and large teams of on-the-ground staff at major overseas sports events, were a hallmark of Fox Sports Asia's content.

Linear endorsement

SPOTV's pan-regional Asia-Pacific service promises a modern take on the pan-regional sports broadcasting business, with a strong focus on localisation and digital content. But the launch also represents an endorsement of pay-television by one of the region's canniest sports media companies. This is at a time when pay-television is facing massive challenges and is considered a sunset industry in some quarters. Disney's shuttering of Fox Sports Asia to focus on its streaming platform Disney+ was considered to be yet another sign of pay-television decline.

Hong told *SportBusiness Media* he was confident that linear pay-television had a major role to play in the future of sports broadcasting in Asia-Pacific: "I don't think pay-TV will go away. I'm a strong believer in pay-TV's role for delivering sports content and also for fans enjoying sports content.

"In each territory, if there's a smart pay-TV operator, I think they'll continue to succeed.

"In some areas, because business is not as good as it used to be, companies have had a tendency to downsize their operations or content. I think that could create a pretty rapid decay of their platform.

"It really depends on the operator's vision and strategy. But I still believe that TV will serve as a great means of delivering sports content, and pay-TV will definitely be our major source of income." ○

FOOTBALL

Sky and SportA both pay more as DFB secures cup rights increase

By Callum McCarthy

- Deutscher Fussball Bund to earn over €72m per season from DFB-Pokal rights, 2022-26
- ARD and ZDF to pay about €57m per season for free-to-air rights, up 19 per cent
- Sky to pay about €15m per season for pay-television rights, up 50 per cent

The value of the DFB-Pokal's domestic media rights will rise by about 23 per cent from next season thanks to improved deals with both free-to-air and pay-television broadcasters.

SportBusiness Media understands the DFB-Pokal – Germany's top-tier domestic football cup competition – will earn over €72m (\$84.8m) per season from its new deals in Germany, Austria and Switzerland over four seasons, from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

The Deutscher Fussball Bund, Germany's football association and the DFB-Pokal's commercial rights-holder, struck new deals in July with pay-television operator Sky Deutschland and agency SportA, which exclusively acquires sports rights on behalf of public-service broadcasters ARD and ZDF.

ARD and ZDF will collectively pay about €57m per season for Packages 'A', 'B' and 'D', comprising live free-to-air rights to 15 first-pick DFB-Pokal matches each season as well as highlights rights to all 63 matches each season.

The new deal with SportA represents an increase of about 19 per cent on the current value of the competition's live free-to-air rights, [worth a combined €48m per season in deals with ARD and sports broadcaster Sport1](#). ARD currently pays about €44m per season for while Sport1 pays about €4m per season in separate three-season deals, from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

Sky will pay about €15m per season for Package 'C': exclusive pay-television rights to all 63 DFB-Pokal matches each season in a deal that spans live, highlights and clips rights.

[Sky's new deal sees the value of the DFB-Pokal's domestic pay-television rights](#) increase by about 50 per cent – a significant uplift compared to previous cycles when Sky was able to pay incrementally more.

Sky currently pays about €10m per season for the equivalent package of rights in a three-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2021-22. It paid €9m per season in the previous three-season cycle, from 2016-17 to 2018-19.

Sky holds firm

Sky held onto its DFB-Pokal pay-television package after a second round of bidding, which sources say was indicative of strong interest in the rights from multi-platform broadcaster DAZN.

Aside from the direct threat of another party bidding for Package C, Sky was also kept honest by the DFB's decision to allow pay-television broadcasters and subscription streaming platforms to bid for Packages 'A' and 'B' in combination with a bid for Package 'C'.

The DFB stipulated that only the opening match, the semi-finals and the final had to be shown free-to-air, creating an option for a pay-television broadcaster to bid for all three live rights packages and secure exclusive rights to 59 of the 63 matches each season. A winning subscription service would have had the obligation of either sublicensing four matches to free-to-air broadcasters or showing matches on a decrypted linear channel.

Local sources say Sky was particularly concerned about losing its DFB-Pokal rights to DAZN amid carriage negotiations between the two. In late May, DAZN agreed a carriage deal with Sky that saw the launch of two linear DAZN channels on the Sky Deutschland pay-television platform, as well as DAZN acquiring co-exclusive rights to the Uefa Champions League in Austria.

The carriage deal with DAZN comes after the recent dilution of Sky's football portfolio in Germany. In December 2019, [Sky lost its bulk package of rights to the Uefa Champions League](#) to DAZN for the current three-season cycle, while Amazon acquired rights to the first-pick Champions League match on Tuesdays.

Days after the announcement of Sky's new deal, the broadcaster sublicensed pay-per-view rights to both the DFB-Pokal and the second-tier 2. Bundesliga to digital platform OneFootball in a [one-season deal covering 2021-22](#).

[Sky also acquired rights to the women's domestic cup](#): the DFB-Pokal der Frauen. Sky acquired exclusive rights to one match per round, as well as the final, in a five-season deal from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

Free-to-air, clips

In contrast, ARD and ZDF are understood to have faced minimal competition for their packages of free-to-air and highlights rights. Sources close to the process said commercial broadcaster RTL was not able to bid aggressively due to its ongoing merger with publishing company Gruner and Jahr, as well as the associated upheaval across its board of directors.

The DFB secured an uplift for free-to-air rights thanks to increasing the number of matches available – 15 matches in the upcoming cycle, up from 13 matches – as well as the spectre of competition from pay-television broadcasters seeking greater exclusivity. In addition, matches will be staggered across a greater number of kick-off slots and a greater number of days across the weekend.

Sources say ARD and ZDF will pay roughly equal amounts toward the overall fee of about €57m per season, though this is expected to fluctuate slightly depending on how the broadcasters decide to split the coverage.

Sport1 acquired Package 'E', containing platform-neutral highlights rights to up to six minutes per match from all 63 matches per season. The rights can be exploited from 6am the following day. Only free-to-air broadcasters were able to bid for this package.

DAZN acquired Package 'F', comprising digital highlights rights to the same six minute package from all 63 matches each season. The rights can be exploited from midnight on the same day as the match. This package was made available to both free-to-air and subscription broadcasters.

Tender details

[DFB-Pokal rights were offered to the market on April 26](#) in seven separate packages. All deals were to be completed over four seasons, from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

- **Package A (available to free-to-air or pay-television broadcasters):** Live rights to eight 'Top' matches in 2022-23 and 2024-25 (including the final) and seven 'Top' matches in 2023-24 and 2025-26; 'Own Match' highlights, same-day highlights (limited to three minutes per match) and clips rights;
- **Package B (available to free-to-air or pay-television broadcasters):** Live rights to seven 'Top' matches in 2022-23 and 2024-25 and eight 'Top' matches in 2023-24 and 2025-26 (including the final); 'Own Match' highlights, same-day highlights (limited to three minutes per match) and clips rights;
- **Package C (available to pay-television broadcasters only):** Live rights to up to 63 matches per season and all simultaneous 'Konferenz' broadcasts; 'Own Match' highlights, same-day highlights (limited to three minutes per match) and clips rights;
- **Package D (available to free-to-air broadcasters only):** Highlights rights of up to 12 minutes per match from all 63 matches per season; linear exploitation after end of match; and clips rights;
- **Package E (available to free-to-air broadcasters only):** Highlights rights of up to six minutes per match from all 63 matches per season; linear exploitation from 6am the following day; and clips rights;

Package F (available to free-to-air and pay-television broadcasters): Clips rights of up to six minutes per match; non-linear exploitation from midnight the same day as match;

Package G: Digital out-of-home clips rights of up to one minute per match for all 63 matches per season; non-linear exploitation from 6am the day after each match. [o](#)

MULTI-SPORT

Mediapro fights back after Ligue 1, Serie A setbacks and Covid

By Frank Dunne

- Founder Roures says pre-Covid bid for Ligue 1 media rights was ‘very realistic’
- Problems with Ligue 1 and Serie A were not ‘associated with guarantees’
- IPO ruled out for the ‘medium term’

Jaume Roures is a busy man. September sees the founder of the Mediapro agency and production house deep in press interviews and glad-handing to promote two Mediapro-produced films: *Official Competition*, starring Antonio Banderas and Penélope Cruz, and *The Good Boss*, with Javier Bardem.

The glitzy film festivals at Venice and San Sebastian make a sharp contrast with the august neoclassical National Assembly in Paris, the lower house of the French parliament, where today (Thursday) Roures had to squeeze in a different kind of interview – with a [parliamentary commission](#) looking into last year’s failed deal between Mediapro and France’s top football league, Ligue 1.

Multiple Spanish media outlets this month have reported that Roures is also embroiled in more pressing conversations, where the company’s future – not just its reputation – might be at stake. According to several reports, the company has severe liquidity issues and a major shake-up of the shareholder structure is imminent as part of a refinancing package. Some reports say majority shareholder, Orient Hontai Capital, will raise its stake from just under 54 per cent to 85 per cent.

The failed rights deal in France followed the collapse of the company’s deal to acquire the rights to Italy’s Serie A in 2019, raising questions in the sports industry about the reliability of Mediapro as a partner for major rights-holders.

Via written answers to *SportBusiness* just ahead of the Assembly hearing, Roures was unrepentant about the company’s role in the two failed football deals, arguing that neither situation had anything to do with the solidity of the agency’s financial guarantees.

He said Mediapro would “continue working with the same reliability as always” in a sector where “private and short-term interests” often prevented the development of “winning medium and long-term projects”.

Roures added that Orient Hontai had “demonstrated their willingness to make the necessary contributions” to the Mediapro business and ruled out an initial public offering for the agency for the medium term.

The Barcelona-born Roures, a passionate Catalan nationalist and former Trotskyite, who spent time in prison during General Franco’s dictatorship for his trade union activities, holds a 12-per-cent stake in Mediapro. This may, according to reports, be reduced to eight per cent in the restructure.

Mediapro football deals covering selected territories

	Property	Cycle
Confederations	Concacaf Gold Cup	2020-2023
	Concacaf Nations League	2018-2022
	Conmebol American Qualifiers	2018-2022
	FIFA World Cup	2019-2022
	US Soccer SheBelieves Cup	2021
Federations	Bolivian national team	2018-2022
	Canadian national team	2019-2028
	Chilean national team	2018-2022
	Paraguayan national team	2018-2022
Leagues	Canadian Premier League	2019-2028
	Chinese Super League	2021-2023
	Spanish LaLiga	2019-2024
	Mexican Liga MX	2020-2022
Clubs	CD Guadalajara	2019-2023
	CF Monterrey	2019-2023
	Club América	2019-2023
	Club de Fútbol Tigres	2019-2023
	Club León	2019-2023
	Club Necaxa	2019-2023
	Cruz Azul	2019-2023

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

Despite the insistent rumours of deeper structural problems, on the surface the numbers look encouraging. In July the company registered an increase in half-yearly revenues of 67.7 per cent to €669m (\$787m/£570m), with an ebitda of €115m. This followed a Covid-related revenue hit of €702m in 2020 and a negative ebitda of €215m. Roures put the bounceback down to “significant sectorial and geographic implementation”.

He said: “In March 2020, Covid-19 forced us to interrupt filming on 56 projects between series, movies, etc. Football was paralysed for months and in some areas, such as the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, it still hasn’t returned to normal. As we have been able to resume activities, the positive results didn’t take long to come about, but we’re not uncorking the champagne just yet, as the pandemic has yet to disappear – if it ever does disappear.”

On the reports of a liquidity crunch and a potential restructure, Roures said: “The pandemic affected the world economy as a whole, and naturally it also had an impact on the group’s activities. We have overcome the impact and have returned to 120 per cent activity across all business units. Currently, we are in the process of restructuring our debt following the standard steps to be taken in a process of this kind.

“It is public knowledge that there have been movements between certain lenders to capitalise part of their debt. It also appears to be in the public domain that Orient Hontai, the group’s majority shareholder, has submitted a capitalisation proposal. These two proposals illustrate the confidence that exists in the future of the company and guarantee that the business model is solid, and forecasts very positive. In any case, we prefer not to comment publicly on the details of these negotiations.”

Failed deals

Since Mediapro was founded in 1994, it has made over 50 films, picking up Oscars, Golden Globes, Baftas and more. It currently has nearly 70 television productions under way, many of which will be distributed in over 150 countries.

The company’s strength as a football operator in Spain is beyond question, based on a long relationship with LaLiga, for whom the company has been a domestic broadcaster, a distributor of international rights and a match producer. The company also deals with football governing bodies like Fifa, Concacaf and Conmebol, national federations including those of Paraguay and Bolivia, and national leagues, such as Mexico’s Liga MX (see table).

It was the company’s strength in these verticals of production and distribution across multiple genres, from comedy to top football, which encouraged Chinese investment company Orient Hontai to buy 53.5 per cent of Mediapro in June 2018 for €1.019bn.

With such a track record of success, it might seem unfair that just two deals gone bad could put Mediapro under a very unwelcome kind of spotlight. Yet the scale of the flameouts with two of Europe’s top five football leagues made this scrutiny inevitable.

Mediapro had agreed to pay the French league €780m per season for the rights to eight Ligue 1 fixtures per match-week, for the 2020-21 to 2023-24 seasons. It also bought rights to Ligue 2 for €34m per season. Both deals were terminated by the league after Mediapro missed two fee instalments worth a total of €344m.

The agency had held back the payments to try to force a renegotiation of the deal due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many in the industry believed its bid – which accounted for the bulk of a 60-per-cent increase on the previous value of the league’s domestic rights – represented a massive overpayment.

Roures told SportBusiness: “Our original offer of €780m [per season] was very realistic, pre-Covid-19. Given the new situation, we asked the Ligue for a discount of €7m for each Ligue 1 club and €3m for each Ligue 2 club, for each season in which Covid-19 is active and which would imply difficulties in the development of the competition.”

Since the deal fell through, the league has been embroiled in a [series of legal claims and counter-claims](#) involving the league and its two existing rights partners, pay-television operators beIN Media Group and Canal Plus. Regardless of how the issues end up being resolved, the league looks certain to end up earning a lot less than it would have done with Mediapro, leaving many French clubs in a perilous economic position.

Roures, added: “I think that what took place in the aftermath demonstrates that we were right in our approach. The result has been worse for French football.”

Serie A

In Italy, Mediapro won the rights to Serie A in February 2018. It initially offered just over the reserve price of €1.05bn per season for the rights for the seasons 2018-19 to 2020-21. It had even got as far as tendering the rights on the domestic market. Following a ruling by a Milan court, in response to a complaint from incumbent rights-holder Sky, the league scrapped the contract. Mediapro still has an outstanding legal claim against Serie A for the return of its €64m deposit.

In October 2020, the ratings house Moody’s downgraded Mediapro’s parent company, Joye Media, and talked of the “reputational damage to the sport rights management division which can limit the company’s ability to secure future sport rights”. Some experts said prospective partners would – at the very least – insist on watertight bank guarantees from the agency in future.

Roures said this week: “Guarantees in the sports-rights market is not an issue that solely concerns Mediapro. In France and Italy, operators that had presented guarantees have not paid what these leagues demanded. Furthermore, the issues we had in both countries were not issues associated with guarantees.”

Roures appeared to apportion a large amount of the blame in Italy on former league president Gaetano Micchiché, who resigned in 2019 following claims of irregularities in his election the year before.

“We presented the necessary financial guarantees there, which were not accepted by the president of the Serie A at that time. The same president who had to abandon his position due to an incorrect election,” he said.

This view arguably invests too much power in the league president. Had the majority of the clubs been strongly committed to the deal, they would have forced it through, with or without presidential backing. The decision to scrap the deal was approved unanimously by the league’s 20 clubs.

Home comforts

Having failed to expand into Italian and French football, Mediapro will be looking to consolidate its position at home, where LaLiga will tender its domestic media rights in the next two to three months.

In the current LaLiga rights cycle, from 2019-20 to 2021-22, Mediapro holds five packages of domestic rights to the first and second division, paying a total of about €160m per season. It sells the international rights to the league through to 2024 in a deal worth €897m per season.

Mediapro is also LaLiga’s main production partner, producing the coverage of all 380 games per season in the top division and 468 games in the second division. The company is known for pushing the envelope with the latest technological developments from spider cams to the use of drones.

Roures said that in the new cycle, Mediapro would “attempt to be active in all segments, both with LaLiga and with the operators present.”

When asked whether the problems in France and Italy would have a negative impact in Spain, he said: “Absolutely not. Everyone knows us very well here.”

League president Javier Tebas this summer expressed concern that the rate of growth in the league’s media rights will slow, in line with the kind of problems experienced by all major rights-holders in what has become a bear market. The league is expected to look at ways to draw Amazon into the fight with incumbents Mediapro and telco Telefónica’s Movistar platform.

Roures predicted that Movistar would remain a key player but said technological developments would “shake things up a bit with new proposals offering greater added value”. Amazon could be a player, he said, but pointed out the tech and retail giant “normally develops its operations based on its interests in the market of each country and the development in that country of its Prime offering. I am not in possession of all the elements to be able to know what its implementation in Spain is at present.”

He shared Tebas's view that this is not a seller's market, even for the strongest brands, and this had been compounded by Covid.

"In general, all across the world, the value of rights were somewhat at the limit. Logically, the pandemic, and the ensuing economic crisis it has generated, sparked a rethinking of those prices and of the priorities for these competitions. As long as these effects persist, with more or less acuteness, the tendency to reconsider the value of these rights will also persist – although it will depend greatly on the countries, operators and products being negotiated."

Like many in the industry, Roures believes the regulatory restrictions on deal lengths for premium rights need to be challenged, especially in light of the pandemic.

"Contracts with four and five-year terms are necessary to provide stability to football, which, like everything else, has been greatly affected by the pandemic. Three-year contracts involve short-term risks that prevent operators from making significant investment and this means that football cannot draw up medium-term business plans to bolster itself."

Super League 'dead and buried'

Despite his professional and personal closeness to FC Barcelona, one of the clubs behind the failed breakaway Super League plan – and one of the three, along with Real Madrid and Juventus to insist it is not dead – Roures was withering about the project.

"The Super League 'project' is dead and buried for the next 20 years at least", he said. "It was a 'project' that was not based on any reality. There was no agreement with TV operators, no agreements with sponsors, only loans that sooner or later the clubs would have had to repay. In addition, I believe that any super league would be impossible without English, German, Spanish and French clubs."

Barcelona and Real Madrid were also among four clubs who refused to be part of the deal LaLiga has agreed with private equity house CVC Capital Partners, forcing a renegotiation of the deal from an initial €2.7bn for a 10-per-cent stake in LaLiga to €2.1bn.

Roures said that he had no knowledge of the CVC deal beyond what had been published but, on that basis, he thought it provided a "good example". LaLiga, he said, was trying to ensure the sustained development "looking for new formulas to strengthen the clubs".

New formulas. New investors in the league. New bidders for rights. New technologies. And Mediapro will be looking for ways to capitalise on all of these changes.

Roures, no doubt, will be familiar with Leon Trotsky's maxim: the only thing in this world which endures is change. ○

FOOTBALL

Infront secures huge Serie A increase with Telekom Srbija

By Nick Roumpis

- Telekom Srbija to pay about €25m per season for exclusive Serie A rights, from 2021-24
- New deal is about 400 per cent up on previous deal worth €5m per season, from 2018-21
- Telekom Srbija also close to EHF rights extension worth about €3m per season, from 2024-30

Infront has secured a monstrous increase for Italian Serie A rights in the Balkans, leveraging fierce competition and its European Handball Federation joint-venture deal with DAZN to increase the value by about 400 per cent.

SportBusiness Media understands that state-owned telco Telekom Srbija will pay in the region of €25m per year for exclusive rights to Serie A over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, eclipsing the telco's [€5m-per-season fee in the previous three-season cycle](#) for the same rights.

The deal, [completed in June](#), gave Infront the perfect start to its Serie A sales process. Infront secured global media rights to Serie A – excluding rights in the US and Mena – [in April](#) after agreeing to pay €139m per season over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

Telekom Srbija will exploit the rights on its pay-television broadcaster Arena Sport. The deal covers exclusive rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, as well as non-exclusive rights in Kosovo.

Alongside the new Serie A deal, *SportBusiness Media* understands that Telekom Srbija is also close to renewing exclusive rights to all European Handball Federation competitions in a six-season extension, from 2024-25 to 2029-30, worth about €3m per season. The new deal represents an increase of just over 60 per cent on the current deal.

[Telekom Srbija currently pays about €1.75m per season for exclusive rights to EHF competitions](#), from 2020-21 to 2023-24. Both the current deal and the new deal contain rights to all EHF competitions, including the men's and women's EHF Champions League and the men's and women's European Championships.

Favourable conditions

Infront was able to secure such a large increase in the Balkans due to fierce competition and its ability to combine Serie A and EHF rights into the same negotiation.

The primary reason for the increase, however, is the competition between Telekom Srbija and media group United Media. United Media owns pay-television broadcaster Sportklub, Arena's main rival in the Balkans.

Telekom Srbija and United Media have been aggressively bidding against one another for high-profile properties in the region for the past couple of years, however this summer has seen Telekom Srbija increase its aggression to another level.

Multiple sources in the region say Telekom Srbija has massively increased the value of English Premier League rights in the Balkans in its new six-season deal, from 2022-23 to 2027-28, taking the rights away from United Media in the process. [United Media currently pays about €12.5m per season for exclusive Premier League rights](#) across the region in a three-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

SN1 Consulting, the agency owned by Sascha Kojic, is also thought to have expressed interest in acquiring Serie A rights across the region with the intention of selling on to one of the region's two main players. However, Infront was keen to secure a direct sale in the Balkans, seeing the opportunity to make a strong margin on more than one property.

[Infront's 10-season joint-venture deal with DAZN for exclusive, global media and marketing rights to all European Handball Federation properties](#), from 2020-21 to 2029-30, created further opportunities for Infront to drive up the price of Serie A rights.

Alongside a lucrative Serie A renewal, Infront offered Telekom Srbija an early opportunity to extend its EHF deal over the long term and at a relatively modest increase compared to other deals struck in recent months. Infront was able to sweeten the pot for Telekom Srbija and secure a blockbuster deal for Serie A.

Arena Sport has held Serie A rights in the Balkans since 2010-11, paying steady increases in subsequent deals. It paid about €4.5m per season in a three-season deal from 2015-16 to 2017-18, a slight increase on the €4m per season it paid from 2012-13 to 2014-15. ○

FOOTBALL

Thai FA domestic rights value drops following collapse of Zense deal

By Kevin McCullagh

- Thai FA deals for club and national team football rights valued at THB800m in 2021-22
- Market experts believe cash value of deals to be much lower
- Deals replace collapsed THB1.2bn-per-year agreement with Zense

The value of domestic rights to the Thai League 1 and men's national team matches has dropped substantially in a series of deals agreed last month to replace a collapsed agreement with local media company Zense Entertainment.

The Football Association of Thailand, the commercial rights-holder of all club and national team football in the country, [has agreed domestic media rights deals](#) for the 2021-22 season with telco AIS and linear free-to-air broadcasters Channel Five, PPTV and GMM25. Talks are underway for deals with one or two more linear broadcasters.

The total value of the new deals is understood to be around THB800m (\$24.3m) in 2020-21. However, cash only accounts for a part of this, with the figure also including airtime given by the broadcasters to the FAT, as well as marketing and promotional spend by the broadcasters.

Most local industry experts spoken to SportBusiness Media believe the cash component to be less than 50 per cent of the overall value. AIS is thought to be the biggest contributor in terms of cash – the free-to-air broadcasters' deals are understood to include only small cash components with most of the value deriving from airtime.

The FAT is managing and paying for the production of matches and supporting content, which is expected to cost around THB200m this season.

The new deals represent a large fall in the value of the FAT's media rights, compared to previous deals. Thai television production company Zense [was scheduled to pay THB1.2bn per season](#) for domestic and international rights to all FAT competitions, as well as an additional THB300m per season in production costs, under a now-terminated deal that would have run from 2021 to 2028. It was to be Zense's first step into sports broadcasting – the company's traditional focus has been in producing television entertainment shows.

The Thai club season has historically been run within a calendar year, but last year moved to straddling two calendar years, similar to European football seasons.

In the FAT's previous full cycle, covering 2017 to 2020, it earned a similar figure: about THB1.19bn per season from its domestic and international rights. This came from deals with local pay-television platform TrueVisions and Thai advertising and sports marketing company Plan B Media.

Both the Zense and TrueVisions/Plan B deals are thought to have been mostly, if not entirely, cash deals.

The FAT's international rights from 2021-22 to 2027-28 [have been acquired by the Sportfive agency](#). The agency also had the rights in the 2017-20 cycle. Plan B brokered both the new and previous international rights deals.

New deals

AIS has acquired streaming rights to all domestic football competitions. The most valuable elements of the package are the top division of the men's domestic league, Thai League 1, and home men's senior national team matches. The rights also include the second and third-tier men's leagues, cup competitions, women's football, youth football and futsal national team matches.

AIS is carrying the FAT's content on its AIS Play streaming service. Subscribers to AIS's mobile network and home broadband services can watch all FAT content for no extra cost. Non-subscribers can watch a limited amount of content via AIS Play apps.

AIS will have little exclusivity over the Thai League 1 content this season. The free-to-air broadcasters will each show between one and two live Thai League 1 matches per week and each broadcaster will show different matches. This means that the majority of Thai League 1 matches will be shown live on free-to-air television.

However, AIS will have a significant say in the allocation of the live matches between the broadcasters. This will be done via agreement between the rights-holding media companies and the FAT. AIS, being the main domestic rights partner, is understood to have the strongest voice during these allocation talks.

AIS's deal covers the 2021-22 season only, but the telco and the FAT are understood to envision a longer-term partnership, possibly as long as eight years. This was the duration of the collapsed Zense deal. AIS has a right of first refusal over the rights for next season, meaning the league must offer the telco a renewal before taking the rights to market.

Plan B helped the FAT broker the deals. Plan B also manages the FAT's sponsorship rights.

Deal genesis

The FAT's deal with Zense collapsed in June, giving the FAT just two months to secure new deals for domestic television coverage ahead of the planned start of the new Thai League 1 season.

The 2021-22 season was supposed to start at the end of July, although due to the pandemic this was ultimately [delayed until the start of September](#).

As well as AIS, the FAT also had talks with TrueVisions about acquiring rights for the new cycle. TrueVisions was the federation's long-time domestic rights partner prior to the Zense deal.

When the 2020 Thai domestic club season was suspended due to Covid and ran over into 2021, TrueVisions refused to extend its contract beyond the original end-date in order to cover it. The FAT ended up [agreeing a patchwork of deals](#) with Zense, Aser Ventures-owned international sports broadcaster Eleven Sports and Thai free-to-air broadcasters to cover the end of the 2020-21 season.

The full story behind the collapse of the Zense deal is unclear. What is known is that the FAT and Zense held talks in the first half of this year about renegotiating the terms of the deal. They are thought to have discussed adjusting the value and the timing of rights payments.

One of the reasons behind the talks was the impact of the pandemic as the deal had been struck just before it began. [Speaking to SportBusiness Media in November 2020](#), Zense founder and chief executive Varavuth Jentanukul acknowledged that the pandemic would make the deal challenging but said he was confident of the deal being a success over its eight-year duration.

The FAT has also said Zense missed a rights fee payment deadline earlier this year and failed to secure bank guarantees for the deal.

[Zense said publicly](#) it was ready to provide a guarantee but had not done so as it was waiting for the FAT's response to a request to alter the contract due to the impact of the pandemic.

The company said it was ready to honour its side of the deal: "We have invested a lot and have prepared all aspects of the broadcast... we hope we are treated according to the contract. We are ready to find a way out for all parties for the benefit of Thai football."

Ultimately, the FAT and Zense were unable to reach an agreement during this year's talks and the federation eventually terminated the deal.

The termination is thought to have come at some cost for Zense. The company had already made significant investments as a result of the relationship with FAT, including production costs during the extended 2020-21 club season. It had also agreed a partnership [with Chinese digital media giant Tencent](#) to create an app for Thai football content.

Deal impact

The large drop in value for the rights can largely be attributed to the pandemic, which continues to cause major disruption in Thailand and has had a huge impact on the economy. The short period of time the FAT had to negotiate new deals was another contributing factor.

There have been knock-on effects for the FAT and Thai clubs. Among these, the FA has halted a funding programme that would have seen each club get THB5m for spending on infrastructure and player development facilities.

The Sportfive deal and continued support from sponsors are understood to be helping the federation weather the storm. Football is the biggest sport in Thailand with a large audience that remains attractive to sponsors. FAT sponsors include carmaker Toyota, beer brand Chang and energy drinks brand M-150.

The general secretary of the FAT, Joe Patit Suphaphongs, told SportBusiness Media: "This is a very difficult moment for Thai football, and for all sports. The important thing is that we have been able to resume the league and make sure football returns."

The 2021-22 Thai League 1 season kicked off on September 3. Matches are being played behind closed doors in most provinces, due to Covid restrictions. [o](#)

FOOTBALL

Women's football continues upward trend with ITV deal for England internationals

By Imran Yusuf

- ITV to pay £2.5m-£3m per season for rights to England women's internationals
- BBC unable to match ITV's bid in competitive process
- England women's football internationals sold in a separate process for the first time

UK commercial broadcaster ITV's four-season deal for exclusive media rights to the England women's football team's home matches is a further demonstration of the rising value of the women's game.

The deal with England's Football Association covers the team's home tournament qualifying matches and friendlies for four seasons, from 2021-22 to 2024-25. The deal will be worth between £2.5m (€2.92/\$3.45m) and £3m per season, depending on the quantity and quality of England's friendly matches.

As with previous cycles, rights to the women's national team's away matches are not included in the deal. It is expected that ITV and the FA will look to acquire rights to England's away qualifiers and friendlies from other national football associations throughout the four-season term.

The deal spans a period that includes qualifiers for the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup and the 2025 Uefa European Championship. The matches are expected to be split between commercial channels ITV and ITV4, with higher-profile matches shown on ITV. Matches will also be shown on streaming platform ITV Hub.

Previously, the rights were jointly held by public-service broadcaster the BBC and telco BT in a three-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2020-21. The rights were sold as part of the same package as English FA Cup rights. The joint deal was worth a total of about £65m (€76m/\$90m) per season. Experts say the value England women's internationals would have represented a small fraction of this value and that the new deal with ITV almost certainly represents an increase in value.

ITV's deal follows two other notable deals for women's football this year: pay-television broadcaster [Sky's £7m-per-season deal](#) for UK rights to the Women's Super League, with

additional fees paid by the BBC for their coverage; and streaming platform DAZN's €7m-[per-season](#) deal for global rights to the Uefa Women's Champions League.

These followed Uefa's 2019 sales for rights to the Women's Euro 2022 tournament for a record-breaking €10m-€12m in [the UK](#) and €13m in [France](#).

Free-to-air prioritised

Media rights to England women's internationals are sold by English football's governing body, the Football Association, which was keen for a free-to-air broadcaster to acquire the rights. The FA wanted to maximise exposure for the women's game, which still has significant growth potential.

It is understood the FA is keen to prioritise free-to-air exposure where possible and informed sources say it has become more willing accepting the lower rights fees that can accompany such a strategy. The FA Cup, for example, has in previous cycles been shared between free-to-air and pay-television broadcasters, such as in the last cycle with the BBC and BT. From 2021-22 to 2024-25, however, the [FA Cup is completely on free-to-air](#) in the UK.

The BBC, having picked up WSL rights along with Sky, also sought to acquire the women's national team matches and extend its coverage of women's football. The BBC exclusively showed the 2019 Women's World Cup and has [exclusive rights to the rescheduled Women's Euros 2022](#), which will be staged in England.

However, sources say the BBC was unable to match ITV's bid, with one describing the public broadcaster as "somewhat cash-strapped" when it comes to acquisitions outside its standard remit of mainstay properties such as [Wimbledon](#). Last week the BBC's deal for highlights rights to the US Open final was scrapped following an agreement [between Channel 4 and Amazon](#).

BBC Wales, however, has secured rights from the Football Association of Wales for the Wales women's team's qualifiers for the 2023 World Cup.

Process highlights growth

In the 2018-19 to 2020-21 cycle, the FA sold rights for the FA Cup, the WSL and England's women's internationals to the BBC and BT in the same process, with the FA Cup taking up the vast majority of the value and focus of the deals.

The rights, though, were distinct from each other in order for the FA to allocate the fees it received to the appropriate bodies. Governance structures for the three properties are separate, with different board approval processes and revenue streams. For the internationals, all revenue goes to the FA rather than clubs and is then distributed by the governing body into the wider game.

The women's internationals were, in effect, a bolt-on to the process. This time, though, the market dictated that there would be a distinct women's football tender process that included the WSL.

ITV had been monitoring the upward trajectory of audience figures and is understood to have expressed such a strong interest in acquiring rights to England women's internationals that it was clear there would be separate buyers for the WSL and the internationals.

In contrast to the internationals, Sky was considered an ideal fit for the WSL, for which it would leverage its promotional might to boost the property into a major product. The BBC, with its multiple outlets beyond its channels such as its website, would also help grow the league.

The FA's approach to the internationals was more focused on a uniform free-to-air proposition.

Meanwhile, ITV were confident in the commercial appeal of the women's team and in their ability to receive significant advertising revenue. ITV holds rights for the [England men's national team's matches till 2022](#) and was also keen to be thought of as the 'home' of England football.

The FA has also announced [the launch of a new annual international women's football tournament](#) from 2022, in collaboration with the Pitch International agency. The four-team invitational competition will involve the England women's national team in each edition, alongside three other national sides which will be selected by the FA. ○

FOOTBALL

Uefa more than doubles club competition fees in Ukraine

By Nick Roumpis

- Megogo will pay €10m per season for exclusive Uefa club competition rights, from 2021-24
- Sharp price increase driven by strong competition between several players
- Megogo further enhances its sports offering, which already includes Serie A and LaLiga

The value of Uefa club competition rights has bounced back in Ukraine thanks to a lucrative deal with streaming platform Megogo, which has further expanded its European football portfolio.

SportBusiness Media understands Megogo will pay about €10m (\$11.8m) per season for exclusive rights to the Uefa Champions League, Uefa Europa League and Uefa Europa Conference League over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

The new deal represents an increase in value of about 150 per cent on the €4m per season paid by Media Group Ukraine and telco Volia in the previous three-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

The new deal also represents an increase of more than 25 per cent increase on the high watermark for Uefa club competition rights in Ukraine: just under €8m per season in a deal with Media Group Ukraine, from 2015-16 to 2017-18.

Sources noted that the entrance of new players in Ukraine – including Megogo and pay-television broadcaster Setanta – resulted in the fee significantly increasing.

Megogo's deal is a significant victory for the platform as it takes Uefa club competitions away from Media Group Ukraine, which has shown the Champions League and Europa League for the past three cycles across its pay-television channels Futbol 1, Futbol 2 and Futbol 3 its streaming platform OLL.tv.

The new deal was struck with Team Marketing, Uefa's exclusive sales agent for its club competitions. Team issued a tender in October last year. Megogo announced it had been selected as Uefa's preferred bidder in January.

Megogo will broadcast matches from all three Uefa competitions on its streaming platform, for which a sport subscription costs HRV200 (€6.37) per month. A full subscription to Megogo's sports and entertainment content costs HRV300 per month.

It is understood that Megogo has no plan to show matches on free-to-air television in Ukraine.

Local interest in Uefa club competitions in Ukraine is strong as several domestic teams participate across the three competitions. In the current 2021-22 season, Shakhtar Donetsk and Dynamo Kyiv qualified for the Champions League group stage.

After announcing its deal for Uefa competitions, [Megogo struck a carriage deal](#) with Volia under which the telco's customers can access Megogo's football rights content for HRV199 per month. Megogo does not have a linear broadcasting licence in Ukraine and is only permitted to distribute content via digital platforms.

Megogo v Setanta

Megogo, which operates in 15 territories in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, broke into the Ukrainian market in 2017 with the acquisition of exclusive rights to Italy's Serie A, France's Ligue 1 and the German Bundesliga. [The package deal with agency MP & Silva](#) was worth around €500,000 and included rights to Serie A and Ligue 1 for the remainder of 2017-18, as well as Bundesliga rights from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Megogo recently renewed its Serie A deal for three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

Megogo also holds exclusive rights to Spain's LaLiga until 2022-23, in a deal that started in 2018 and was worth around €750,000 per season.

Megogo also held rights to the German Bundesliga between 2017 and 2021 but newcomer Setanta, [which launched in Ukraine in 2019](#), acquired the league's rights late last year in a four-season deal, from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

Setanta has become an important sizeable player in the Ukraine since its entry into Ukraine in 2019. Its sports rights portfolio includes the English Premier League, NBA, NHL, UFC and ATP Tour. ○

BASKETBALL

Euroleague secures increase from Saran in tough Turkish market

By Callum McCarthy

- Saran Media will pay about €6m per season for exclusive EuroLeague rights, from 2022-25
- New deal represents increase of about 18 per cent on the current deal with beIN
- BeIN currently pays average of €5.1m per season in three-season deal, from 2019-22

Euroleague Basketball has secured an increase in value for its media rights in a tough Turkish market, agreeing a new three-season deal with Saran Media from 2022-23 onward.

Agency and pay-television broadcaster Saran will pay about €6m (\$7.1m) per season for exclusive rights in Turkey to the EuroLeague over three seasons, from 2022-23 to 2024-25. It has also acquired rights to the second-tier EuroCup over four seasons, from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The new deal represents an increase of about 18 per cent on [Euroleague Basketball's current exclusive media rights deal with the beIN Media Group](#), worth an average of €5.1m per season over three seasons, from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

The deal was completed with Euroleague Ventures, the joint venture between Euroleague Basketball and agency IMG that holds the competition's commercial rights for a minimum of 10 seasons, [from 2016-17 to 2025-26, worth a minimum of €630m](#).

The positive financial result is indicative of the competition's continued popularity in Turkey, where the lira's continued depreciation against the dollar and the euro has made achieving increases difficult for rights-holders over the past five years.

Turkish teams have performed strongly in the competition over recent years, keeping interest and media rights fees growing. Turkish teams have featured in the competition's Final Four in every season since 2014-15; have been finalists in each the past four seasons; and have won the EuroLeague in two of the past four seasons.

As such, local sources say beIN bid to renew its rights while telco Türk Telekom, which holds linear rights to Turkey's domestic basketball league, is also thought to have made an offer.

Ultimately, the continued success of Fenerbahçe and Anadolu Efes fuelled Saran's decision to pay an increase to acquire the property for its own platforms. It is understood that chief executive Alan Saran's personal interest in basketball was also a factor in the deal.

Saran will exploit the rights on its pay-television channel S Sport and its streaming platform S Sport Plus. SportBusiness Media understands that Saran will be under pressure to make the matches of Turkish teams available for free, either by decrypting its pay-television channels or sublicensing to a free-to-air broadcaster. Should Saran decide to sublicense rights, the company will have to seek permission from Euroleague Ventures to do so.

Sources close to the league said the outcome – with the rights moving from beIN to Saran – was solely driven by commercial incentives. [Fenerbahçe's football club has been in a rolling dispute with beIN](#) over a number of perceived infractions during the latter's tenure as the exclusive broadcaster of the Turkish Süper Lig, Turkey's top-tier football league.

EuroLeague clubs have the ability to influence the outcome of media rights sales processes in their domestic territories and sometimes intervene to advise Euroleague and IMG of their preferred broadcast partner. However, it is understood the new deal with Saran – which saw Fenerbahçe matches move away from beIN's channels – was agreed purely due to Saran offering the best financial package and not as any continuation of the feud.

BeIN is understood to be keeping the majority of its powder dry to renew a deal for exclusive Turkish Süper Lig rights from 2022-23 onward. The broadcaster did not bid to renew its rights to the Uefa Champions League in Turkey – [a decision that saw the property's value decrease by about 40 per cent](#) – but acquired English Premier League rights over the next three seasons, from 2022-23 to 2024-25. ○

FOOTBALL

Sony renews Uefa club competitions rights in India at reduced rate

By Imran Yusuf

- Sony renews Uefa club competition rights for about \$1.5m per season, from 2021-24
- Deal represents significant drop from \$7m per season paid in previous cycle, from 2018-21
- Lack of competition and depressed football market drives price downward

Sony Pictures Networks' three-season renewal of media rights to Uefa club competitions is another demonstration of sharply falling values for European football properties in India.

Sony's deal for rights to the Uefa Champions League, Uefa Europa League and Uefa Europa Conference League, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, is thought to be worth about \$1.5m (€1.27m) per season. The deal is for rights across the Indian subcontinent.

The fee in the new deal is significantly below the amount [Sony paid](#) in the previous cycle, from 2018-19 to 2020-21. For the 2015-16 to 2017-18 cycle, pan-regional pay-television broadcaster Ten Sports – acquired by Sony in 2017 – [secured a deal valued at about \\$13.2m per season](#).

In the new cycle, Sony was the only broadcaster to express a serious interest in the rights. It is understood that other potential broadcasters such as Disney-owned Star India evaluated the property and decided against a bid early on in the process.

Star has historically not been interested in the Champions League and considers the English Premier League – to which it currently [holds](#) rights in a three-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2021-22 – to be sufficient to maintain subscriptions of football fans in India.

In February this year, Uefa's exclusive club competitions sales agent Team Marketing [issued concurrent invitations to submit offers](#) for Champions League, Europa League and Europa Conference League rights in India.

As is customary, the Champions League and the Uefa Super Cup were tendered together, while the Europa League and Europa Conference League were tendered as a separate package of rights. A first-round bid deadline for March 16 was initially set, but this was extended to April 6.

Sony's initial bid fell short of Uefa's target, but after the market failed to turn up a rival bid, Sony secured the rights at a price well below the previous cycle.

It is understood that Uefa did not initially insist on a linear broadcaster acquiring the rights, but OTT players in the market such as FanCode, Amazon and Facebook were not interested in the rights. Uefa Champions League matches kick off at 10:30pm and 12:30am in India, which one source described as "a killer" for audience figures. After clocks go back one hour in Europe during October, the matches kick off at 11.30pm and 1.30am.

The inconvenient time zone effectively renders the Champions League – one of football's biggest properties – as something of a niche property in India, the world's second-most populous country.

Experts told *SportBusiness Media* that the property had previously been overpriced in relation to its revenue generating potential, and represented brand value to broadcasters rather than pure commercial benefit. According to one local executive: "The days of getting crazy money for things like the Champions League are over."

The majority of revenue for televised sport in India still comes from advertising. Given the late kick-off times, sources say the Champions League has always struggled in this regard. ○

FOOTBALL

Viacom 18 snaps up Serie A, Ligue 1 amid absence of competition

By Imran Yusuf

- Viacom18 buys Serie A rights for about \$500,000 per season
- Ligue 1 rights acquired for about \$350,000 per season
- Lack of competition for the rights led to last-minute deals

Indian media group Viacom18's acquisitions of rights to Italy's Serie A and France's Ligue 1 signify the growing presence of tech, media and industrial giant Reliance in the Indian sports broadcasting landscape.

Viacom18, a joint venture between Reliance-owned Network18 and US media giant ViacomCBS, is understood to be paying around \$500,000 (€423,000) per season for exclusive rights to Serie A and around \$350,000 per season for exclusive rights to Ligue 1. Both deals are for three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, and span the entire Indian subcontinent.

Some local sources suggested to *SportBusiness Media* that the Serie A fee could be slightly higher, at around \$750,000 per season.

Previously, during the 2018-19 to 2020-21 cycle, the IMG agency sold Serie A rights in India to pay-television broadcaster Sony Pictures Network in a package deal that included rights to the FA Cup. The total value of the rights totalled about \$850,000 per year.

Ligue 1 has not had a broadcast partner in India since 2018-19. From 2015-16 to 2017-18, Sony held Ligue 1 rights in a deal worth about \$600,000 per season. Prior to this, pay-television broadcaster Zee Entertainment paid about \$400,000 per season in a three-season deal, from 2012-13 to 2014-15.

No other takers for Serie A

It is understood that Sony did not believe there were strong returns to be made from Serie A in India and felt that its focus should be on potential deals for Indian cricket properties. Sony was also unwilling to invest in promoting the league in the territory. No other broadcaster expressed an interest in the property, leading to Viacom18 securing the rights for a relatively low fee.

The Infront agency [sells international media rights to the Italian Serie A](#) in a three-season deal, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, that excludes the US and Mena. Infront is paying €139m per season for the rights.

Serie A matches will be available in India across Viacom18's linear channels, its Voot streaming platform and across the platforms of telco Jio.

BeIN sought higher price

The beIN Media Group [holds Ligue 1 international rights](#) in a six-season deal from 2018-19 to 2023-24, worth an average of €80m per season. The deal was agreed in 2014.

It is understood that beIN offered Indian broadcasters rights to Ligue 1 league for about \$300,000 per season at the start of 2021 but there was no interest from any party.

Following the signing of global star Lionel Messi by Ligue 1 club Paris Saint-Germain in the summer, beIN returned to Indian broadcasters in an attempt to secure an agreement of around \$800,000 per season. However, beIN were again unsuccessful.

One expert told *SportBusiness Media* that Messi's presence in the league would not be sufficient to make a deal of \$800,000 commercially viable in India.

Eventually, with no other broadcasters willing to secure the rights, sources said beIN settled for its original price with Viacom18.

Reliance's plans

Experts say that Reliance is gearing up to launch its own specialist sports channel and is acquiring European football properties to populate this future channel with live content. The company continues to steadily grow its presence in Indian sport and recently secured rights to the [2022 Fifa World Cup](#) through Viacom18.

Excitement is building among Indian sports executives about whether these acquisitions might be laying the foundation for a bid for rights to the Indian Premier League. Pay-television broadcaster Star's [deal for the IPL](#) expires after the 2022 edition. Cricket is by far the most watched sport in India, followed by the trio of football, professional wrestling and [kabaddi](#). All other sports are niche prospects at best for broadcasters and rights-holders.

Reliance is far from a newcomer to Indian sport. It owns Rise Worldwide, the sports marketing organisation formerly run in collaboration with IMG under the brand IMG-Reliance. The company also owns IPL team the Mumbai Indians and Football Sports Development Limited, the company that operates the Indian Super League, India's top football league. Reliance also owns Jio, India's biggest mobile network, which has previously bid for IPL rights.

However, the company's activities this summer in acquiring the rights to major European leagues have signalled a new direction toward media rights acquisitions. Earlier this summer, Viacom 18 secured a three-season deal for exclusive [rights to Spain's La Liga](#).

Network18 holds a 51% stake in Viacom18, with ViacomCBS holding 49%. While ViacomCBS has also recently been investing in [football rights in the US](#) and [Australia](#) to drive rollouts of its Paramount+ streaming platform, the Indian deals for European football leagues are understood to be Reliance-driven.

More competition expected for EPL

While European football leagues have seen a deflationary trajectory in India, experts say that the highest-valued league in India, the English Premier League, could buck this trend.

Indian pay-television broadcaster Star [holds rights for the Premier League](#) in a three-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2021-22, worth \$28.3m per season.

Nita Ambani, a Reliance board member and the wife of chairman Mukesh Ambani, has previously said that the company could bid for [the Premier League](#). Experts say the strategic importance of the Premier League make a Reliance bid likely, but also that Star – and perhaps other broadcasters such as Sony – will also compete for the rights. ○

OLYMPIC GAMES

TVR nears Olympic Games rights renewal in Romania

By Nick Roumpis

- TVR set to pay about €2.5m for free-to-air rights to 2022 and 2024 Olympic Games
- Fee represents an increase of around 14 per cent from previous deal for 2018 and 2020 Games
- Deal expected to be finalised and announced later this year

Romanian public-service broadcaster TVR is set to renew its deal for rights to the 2022 and 2024 Olympic Games in the country after agreeing to pay a slightly increased fee.

SportBusiness Media understands TVR has agreed to pay around €2.5m (\$2.95m) for free-to-air rights to the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing and the 2024 Summer Games in Paris. The broadcaster is thought to have a deal in principle with media group Discovery, which holds exclusive rights to the Olympic Games across Europe in a deal worth €1.3bn, from 2018 to 2024.

TVR paid about €2.2m for free-to-air rights to the 2018 and 2020 Games, while this figure is understood to have eventually increased to €2.5m due to additional technical costs. The public broadcaster paid €2m for rights to the 2014 and 2016 Games in a deal with agency Sportfive.

TVR did not face strong competition for the rights. Sources said that commercial broadcaster Prima TV considered bidding for the rights but was not willing to outspend TVR.

Under the new sublicensing agreement with Discovery, TVR has acquired rights to show 100 hours of live coverage from the 2022 Winter Games and 250-300 live hours of the 2024 Summer Games.

The new deal only includes linear free-to-air rights – TVR will not be able to exploit the rights via its website or digital platforms. However, the broadcaster will be able to show coverage on across multiple linear channels.

Discovery will retain pay-television rights for its Eurosport channels in Romania, as well as digital rights for its Eurosport Player and Discovery+ streaming services.

The 2024 Games held in Paris will have far greater value for European broadcasters – including Discovery – after the last two games (2018 and 2020 in Pyeongchang and Tokyo respectively) and the upcoming 2022 Winter Games in Beijing all fall outside of prime viewing hours in Europe.

Discovery's deal for rights across Europe is thought to be backloaded for this reason. [It is understood to have paid](#) €500m over the 2018-20 cycle and €800m for 2022-24.

The deal between TVR and Discovery for the 2022 and 2024 Games has not yet been finalised and an official announcement is not expected this month.

The deal will come as a relief to TVR, which has faced financial difficulties in previous years, after failing to pay debts totalling around €14.5m to the European Broadcasting Union in 2016. This resulted in TVR [losing access to EBU member services](#), such as the right to broadcast certain sporting events. ○