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## Australian Open earns strong uplift in 10-year Discovery deal



Telekom Srbija pays over 700-per-cent increase for Premier League rights



Rai's World Cup sales effort hampered by changing world of pay-television



Viacom18 overpowers rivals to secure 2022 Fifa World Cup rights in India



Disney's European football push makes Star+ market leader in LatAm

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## TENNIS

# Australian Open earns strong uplift in 10-year Discovery deal

By Kevin McCullagh

- Discovery thought to pay increase of about 40 per cent in 10-year deal
- Increase reflects deal duration and competition from in-country broadcasters
- Long-term benefits for both parties during uncertain period for media industry

**Media group Discovery is set to increase the average annual value of its deal for Australian Open rights by about 40 per cent in a 10-year renewal announced last month.**

Discovery will pay an average of between €25m (\$29m) and €28m per year over 10 years, from 2022 to 2031. The broadcaster paid an average of between €18m and €20m per year [in its previous five-year deal](#), from 2017 to 2021.

The new deal is understood to escalate in value over the course of the contract: Discovery will pay a strong increase over the first five years of the deal, followed by another step up in value over final five years of the deal.

The deal was agreed between rights-holder Tennis Australia and Discovery Sports, the buyer's newly formed corporate-facing sports entity. It gives Discovery all linear and digital rights to the Grand Slam across Europe. As well as the Australian Open itself, the deal covers exclusive rights to lead-up events including the Adelaide International ATP tournament.

Coverage of the tournament will be on Discovery's Eurosport pay-television channels and subscription streaming service Discovery+.

Tennis Australia has secured some additional digital rights in the new deal, for use on its own platforms. The rights-holder's digital rights in the previous deal were very limited. As part of the agreement around these rights, it is understood Tennis Australia will include in its digital content in Europe promotional pushes and calls to action aimed at nudging viewers towards Discovery's television and streaming coverage.

The deal extends a long relationship between the Australian Open and Eurosport, which first aired the tournament in 1995.

## Sales process

The increase in the rights fee was driven by competition and the duration of the deal.

Tennis Australia sold the rights in-house, as it has since the end of its global rights advisory agreement with the IMG agency in 2017. It chose not to run an open tender but instead held direct discussions with potential buyers.

The sales process began in the first half of 2020 and ran into this year. Discovery had an exclusive negotiation period in which to agree a renewal, but the two sides did not come to an agreement during this period. Tennis Australia then explored the market of other potential buyers, before resuming talks with Discovery.

Tennis Australia is understood to have received several formal and informal offers for the rights, though Discovery is thought to have been the only pan-regional bidder. The rights-holder was prepared to sell market-by-market if necessary.

Tennis Australia initially discussed a shorter-term deal, of five years or less, with Discovery and others. The 10-year term was eventually settled on for several reasons.

For Discovery, there are clear benefits in securing one of its top properties in Europe over such a long period. Such long-term deals have become a hallmark of the media-rights industry in the US, where Discovery is headquartered.

The company has long-term deals for several other sports properties. The most prominent example is its 12-year joint venture with golf's US PGA Tour, from 2019 to 2030, which includes media rights in all territories except the US.

Discovery also has a 10-year deal covering pan-European rights for the [Laver Cup tennis tournament](#) from 2021 to 2030. Eurosport has several smaller properties on 10-year deals, including the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme [Endurance World Championship](#) (2020 to 2029), the Speedway European Championship (2013 to 2022), and [World Snooker Association events](#) (2016 to 2026).

For Tennis Australia, the duration offers security at a time of significant uncertainty. Tennis faces a challenge in that some of its biggest stars are retiring in the next few years, including Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and, a few years further ahead, Novak Djokovic.

Tennis Australia's chief revenue and experiential officer Ben Slack told *SportBusiness* in a recent interview: "It's a real confidence-booster for us as a rights-holder and them as our broadcast partner for the next 10 years because tennis is going through one of those reset moments with its marquee and household names. We've been in this Roger-Rafa-Novak era, and you're seeing a real changing of the guard on the men's side, and on the women's side...Knowing that we're transitioning through that period and we've got our broadcast partner willing to commit for 10 years under those conditions goes to show how important tennis is in Europe."

Uncertainty also exists due to media rights markets in Europe and elsewhere around the world being weakened by the pandemic. There is also ongoing disruption in the pay-television business and the wider media business, amid technological change and evolving audience habits.

The deal is understood to include provisions allowing the parties to review it if conditions change significantly over the 10-year period.

### **Ratings performance**

The Australian Open is understood to have achieved relatively strong audiences in some key European markets in recent years, standing up well against the other three tennis Grand Slams despite a challenging time difference. Particularly strong markets have included Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Poland and Romania.

Daytime sessions at the Australian Open take place during the night in Europe, but the evening sessions are at better times – this year’s women’s and men’s singles finals started at 9:30am Central European Time on a Saturday and Sunday, respectively. The evening sessions generally contain the strongest matches throughout the tournament.

Industry experts say the tournament’s European audiences are also boosted by the fact it takes place during the European wintertime, with people more likely to be indoors watching television than during the summertime.

Slack said Europe accounts for 25 per cent of the tournament’s total global viewership.

Tennis Australia is currently finalising rights deals for 2022 onward in several other major territories, including: Japan (previous rights-holder pay-television broadcaster Wowow); Southeast Asia (previously with Fox Sports Asia); the Americas (previously with ESPN); China (previously with iQiyi, CCTV and several regional linear broadcasters); sub-Saharan Africa (previously with SuperSport); and New Zealand (previously with Sky NZ). ○

## FOOTBALL

# Telekom Srbija pays over 700-per-cent increase for Premier League rights

By Callum McCarthy

- Telekom Srbija will pay about €100m per season for Premier League rights
- EPL value increases by over 700 per cent; current deal worth €12m per season
- Deal represents one of biggest ever cycle-on-cycle increases for a sports media rights

**Fevered competition between Telekom Srbija and United Media Group has sent the value of English Premier League rights soaring in the Balkans, producing one of the biggest cycle-on-cycle increases in the history of the sports media rights business.**

*SportBusiness Media* has confirmed telco Telekom Srbija – which is majority-owned by the Serbian government – will pay a total of about €600m (\$695m) for exclusive rights to the Premier League over the course of a six-season deal, from 2022-23 to 2027-28.

The deal includes rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. Coverage can be provided in any of the native languages in each country including Albanian.

One informed source said the deal – as with all the Premier League’s six-season deals in Europe – is backloaded, with the majority of the €600m being paid in the final three seasons.

Across the six seasons, Telekom Srbija will pay an average of €100m per season, producing a cycle-on-cycle increase of at least 700 per cent compared to the current deals across the same seven territories.

Local sources say the increase was produced by frenzied competition between Telekom Srbija and United Media, which own pay-television broadcasters Arena Sport and Sportklub respectively. Premier League rights in the Balkans were tendered with a bid deadline of June 24. Telekom Srbija’s six-season deal was announced on July 21.

Calculating the exact percentage increase from the current cycle to the new cycle is difficult.

In the current cycle, from 2019-20 to 2021-22, United Media Group pays \$13.5m per season for exclusive rights to the Premier League across the six former Yugoslav countries. The deal does not include rights in Kosovo.

United Media's deal was agreed with agency IMG, which acquired exclusive rights to the Premier League across Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (excluding Albania and Kosovo) over the same three-season period. IMG's deal is worth \$40m per season.

IMG pays its rights fee to the Premier League in US dollars. United Media Group, which sublicensed the rights from IMG across the whole three-season cycle, also pays its rights fee in dollars. Telekom Srbija's rights fee in the new deal will be paid in euros.

In addition, IMG acquired Premier League rights in Albania and Kosovo in a separate three-season deal worth €800,000 per season, from 2019-20 to 2021-22. Telekom Srbija's new deal includes all six former Yugoslav territories as well as Kosovo.

As the value of Premier League rights in Kosovo is nominal compared to the rest of the Balkans, the cycle-on-cycle increase across all seven territories in Telekom Srbija's new deal is understood to be between 720 and 740 per cent – by far the biggest cycle-on-cycle increase for a major sports media rights property in recent memory.

Telekom Srbija will exploit the rights on its pay-television Arena Sport channels across the region.

### **Knockout blows?**

Telekom Srbija's deal for Premier League rights is the latest blow it has landed to bitter rival United Media in the battle for sports media supremacy in the Balkans. It comes after Telekom Srbija paid an increase of 400 per cent to renew exclusive rights to Italy's Serie A over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, in a deal worth about €25m per season.

Other rights-holders to have benefitted from Telekom Srbija's win-at-all-costs mentality include the NBA – which saw the value of its media rights jump over 200 per cent – and Uefa, which saw the value of media rights to its club competitions increase 133 per cent.

Critics– United Media chief among them – say Telekom Srbija's ability to pay huge increases is built on its state ownership, and that this is anticompetitive.

Vladimir Lučić, chief executive at Telekom Srbija, has maintained that the telco's acquisitions of sports content are pure business decisions that will ultimately yield greater profits and dividends. In addition, he has dismissed accusations that the telco's strategy is part of a wider Serbian government strategy to wield soft power in the Balkans.

"Is it a blow to democracy that in the region from Slovenia to Northern Macedonia, the Premier League or the Spanish League will be broadcast through the Arena's sports channels, and not



through the Sportklub I don't think that has anything to do with that," Lučić told the Belgrade-based Beta News Agency.

United Media will have one last chance to retain marquee football properties in the Balkans when Uefa national team rights hit the market. Uefa is soon expected to tender rights to all qualifiers and tournaments from 2022-23 to 2027-28, including the Uefa European Championships in 2024 and 2028.

In the 2018-19 to 2021-22 cycle, United Media holds first-, second- and third-party rights to Uefa European Qualifiers and the Nations League, as well as rights to Euro 2020, in a deal worth a total of €35m. The value of the rights will almost certainly multiply in the new cycle. [o](#)

## FOOTBALL

# Rai's World Cup sales effort hampered by changing world of pay-television

By Frank Dunne

- Rai will pay €150m-€170m for exclusive 2022 Fifa World Cup rights in Italy
- Rai, like other public-service broadcasters, struggling to monetise its gatekeeper deal
- Fragmented industry and flexible subscriptions hampering sublicensing efforts

**When Italian state broadcaster [Rai bought the rights to the 2022 Fifa World Cup](#) in April, it acquired two things: exclusive rights and a problem.**

Rai agreed to pay between €150m (\$175m) and €170m for exclusive rights in Italy to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The broadcaster does not have a pay-television arm and clearly felt it could earn a good fee – offsetting its overall cost – by sublicensing pay-television rights. It was a reasonable assumption, having done such deals with Sky Italia for 2010 and 2014 World Cups. However, for the 2022 tournament, it has so far failed to do so.

Rai's problem isn't unique. In 2011, Australian public-service broadcaster SBS acquired the rights to the 2018 and 2022 tournaments, securing rights to all 64 games for both free-to-air and pay-television. In 2016, the broadcaster agreed a deal to sell pay-television rights to the 2018 World Cup to telco Optus for all 64 games, with Optus receiving 39 matches on an exclusive basis. The deal was based on an exchange of rights: Optus sublicensed one Premier League match per week to SBS for three seasons.

For the 2022 tournament Qatar, SBS is yet to find a pay-television partner.

Rai and SBS have time on their side, but the market dynamics that are making negotiations tough will not change in the next 14 months. Each could still choose to show all 64 games exclusively, though this would represent a worst-case scenario – many of the games would draw modest audiences and would almost certainly result in a major loss. Sublicensing pay-television rights for far less than they had hoped, while not ideal, is a blow that each can ultimately absorb.

The two situations point to an underlying shift in the way pay-television sports channels operate during a period of such flux. Free-to-air broadcasters acquiring gatekeeper packages of rights to

major tournaments may become a thing of the past due to the pay-television market fragmenting across linear and digital platforms, and many operators now offer low-cost subscriptions that customers can cancel after a month.

Pay-television broadcasters' motivation for investing large amounts in major football tournaments is more limited now than it ever has been.

## Free plus pay

The model of sharing rights to major international football tournaments across free-to-air broadcasters and pay-television platforms has existed for two decades. It started to be the norm in Europe from 2002, when Fifa first broke away from doing exclusive deals with the European Broadcasting Union – the umbrella group of public-service broadcasters. The same model has also been widely adopted in Europe for the Uefa European Championship and the Olympic Games.

Until now it has largely worked for both sides of the equation. Free-to-air operators get to show matches of national importance and maintain their position as the primary broadcaster of the event, all while recouping part of their investment by sublicensing a package of rights to pay-television partners.

For traditional pay-television platforms, major tournaments have helped reduce churn during summer months and always provided excellent marketing material. Though never a massive subscription driver, those customers that did come on board were locked in for a year.

As one pay-television executive put it: “The old strategy for pay television was that you locked them in during the summer and that way you could make your money back. It's subscription revenue and increased arpu [average revenue per user] over 12 months, and it typically takes people 18 months to two years to churn out of a pay-TV contract, so in practice probably longer.

“A World Cup can be a brilliant driver to attract new customers but you then need high quality content to keep them. If you were the dominant national pay-TV operator, you had that. But with everything fragmented and football rights often split across three or four platforms, it becomes more difficult for any single operator to justify the investment in pay-television rights to a World Cup.”

A high-ranking executive at one OTT platform concurred, saying that the thinking of an OTT player on one-off events was tied directly to its wider portfolio. This would explain why in Italy, for example, DAZN is in talks with Rai about the World Cup rights but Discovery, which operates the Discovery+ low-cost OTT service, is not, despite having enjoyed an uplift in both subscriptions and brand awareness this summer by carrying the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

For DAZN it makes sense because it also has the rights to the bulk of Serie A matches. The World Cup would bring a wider audience than that for the league, but many might be tempted to

stay on. Discovery's football portfolio is not strong enough to keep people after a World Cup. Carrying the Olympics made sense for Discovery+ because Eurosport, which is included in the Discovery+ subscription, carries a large volume of Olympic sport.

A senior pay-television executive argued that the fragmentation of the market meant that even the big traditional pay-television platforms now had less incentive to spend heavily on one-off events. He said broadcasters like Sky and Canal Plus had been acquiring rights to major events when they were still trying to grow their base.

They continued: "None of them are growing any more. They have all switched the focus of their budgets to the real must-have properties to keep their existing subscribers. That's the domestic league, the Champions League and maybe F1 or MotoGP. The money available for nice-to-have properties like the World Cup, which they can never get exclusively, has dried up."

Sport is not unique. Content strategies generally are being re-thought in response to new consumer behaviours, especially flexible pricing structures. One industry executive pointed out that major global OTT operators with easy-in/easy-out pricing, like Netflix, Apple and Disney have adapted their content delivery strategies toward trying to secure more value-per-subscriber over a longer period.

"Not long ago, Netflix and others would drop a whole TV series in one go that people could binge on," he said. "They had so much content they could just keep it coming and people wouldn't cancel. But they are all moving back to the old method of releasing episodes weekly. They need to keep customers in for longer. As entertainment content becomes more fragmented, no single platform has that conveyor belt of hits they can keep rolling out. The whole industry is looking for long-term value."

## Potential bidders

Rai won the World Cup rights after an extremely competitive tender process. Fifa made available three packages of rights: one for free-to-air television consisting of 28 games, one for pay-television consisting of 36 games and a gatekeeper package including all rights, with a large degree of flexibility about how they can be exploited. Rai's gatekeeper bid is understood to have been only marginally higher than the second-highest bid.

Rai has spoken to – at least – pay-television operator Sky Italia, e-commerce giant Amazon and multi-platform broadcaster DAZN, all of whom understood to have balked at its initial asking price for pay-television rights to the tournament.

Rai's deal with Fifa gives it flexibility in how it sublicenses the rights, provided it guarantees free-to-air coverage for the key games. Rai will show at least 28 matches on its flagship free-to-air channel Rai 1. Sublicensing options on the table include a package of 36 games on an exclusive basis or all 64 games, with a combination of exclusive and simulcast rights.

The main pay-television broadcaster of the World Cup in Italy since 2006 has been Sky. It paid €40m for the rights to all 64 games for the 2006 tournament, 39 of which were exclusive to Sky. It picked up the rights to the 2010 and 2014 tournaments as part of a [complex rights-sharing deal](#) with Rai, which had paid €340m for the rights to both competitions. To secure rights to all 64 games (39 of which were exclusive), Sky gave Rai 200 hours of free-to-air coverage of the 2010 and 2012 Olympics, for which it had paid €112m, plus a fee of about €125m.

Under the ownership of Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch, Sky Italia invested heavily in rights to Fifa World Cups and Olympics Games. However, its new owners, US media giant Comcast, are said to be unconvinced by the case for the investment required. Sky is also hamstrung by an antitrust ruling preventing it from acquiring digital rights on an exclusive basis until 2022. It would not be able to sign a deal with Rai which included exclusive digital rights until January.

For Amazon, the World Cup would represent the company's first major investment in a one-off football tournament and provide it with a different kind of dataset to those it develops through deals for season-long properties like the Premier League in the UK, the Champions League in Italy and Ligue 1 in France. The tournament falls at a very attractive time for the retail giant: the build-up to the Christmas shopping period, when Amazon sees an uptick in both retail sales and subscriptions to Amazon Prime Video.

Since April, Italian media reports have named Amazon as Rai's preferred sublicensing partner and the strong favourite to acquire the rights. Numerous reports have claimed a deal is already in place. *SportBusiness Media* understands that this is not the case.

One media rights executive said striking a lucrative deal with Amazon would not be easy. "Amazon does not pay a premium for rights. They pick up rights where they can get value, either where there's a fire sale or just a lack of competition. Prime's key selling period is October-December, so they will look at it, but their modus operandi would suggest that they'll wait till Rai brings the price right down."

For DAZN, Italy is a key market and the biggest threat to its subscriber base is people churning when Serie A stops. In a year in which the platform is likely to be put on the market via an initial public offering, shoring up numbers in Italy could prove a powerful motivation.

Next year, pay-television broadcasters will have to cope with two fallow periods: the summer and the winter. The World Cup finals in Qatar will take place between November 21 and December 18. All other football competitions will come to a halt in that period, leaving pay-television broadcasters with a massive hole in their schedules.

## Italy value bounces back

[Fifa tendered the rights in January](#) with an initial bid deadline of February 16. The tender also included the rights to the 2023 Women's World Cup which were unsold.

The fee paid by Rai is more than double the €70m paid by commercial broadcaster [Mediaset](#) for the rights to the 2018 World Cup in Russia. However, rights to the last tournament in Italy were massively devalued by Italy's failure to qualify.

Mediaset showed all 64 matches from the 2018 tournament on its free-to-air channels and is thought to have sold between €105m and €110m's worth of advertising inventory attached to the tournament.

More meaningful benchmarks include the 2014 World Cup – for which Rai paid €175m – and the MP & Silva agency's original deal for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups. This was worth a total of €380m, of which €195m was earmarked for 2022. [It was later cancelled.](#)

Rai's fee for the 2022 World Cup is lower than in both these deals. However, local media experts say the fee is a fair reflection of current market dynamics.

Italy are currently top of Group C after six matches and are the favourites to win the group, which would secure automatic qualification for Qatar. [o](#)

## FOOTBALL

# Viacom18 overpowers rivals to secure 2022 Fifa World Cup rights in India

By Imran Yusuf

- Viacom18 to pay about \$60m for rights to 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar
- Reliance-owned broadcaster bid significantly more than rivals, pays strong increase
- Helpful time zone and linear sports channel ambition drives strong offer

**Viacom18's deal for media rights to the 2022 Fifa World Cup is by far its biggest sports rights acquisition to date and the strongest signal yet that its majority owner, Reliance Industries, intends to launch a sports-centric channel in the Indian subcontinent.**

Media group Viacom18 – the joint venture between Reliance and US media giant ViacomCBS – will pay about \$60m (€51m) for exclusive rights to the 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar. The deal covers rights across the Indian subcontinent.

It is understood that the deal, which has not yet been officially announced, also covers the 2022 Fifa U-20 Women's World Cup in Costa Rica and the U-17 2022 Women's World Cup in India.

On a per-tournament basis, Viacom18's deal is worth 20 per cent more than the previous deal in the region, when pay-television broadcaster Sony Pictures Networks paid about [\\$90m for the rights to the 2014 and 2018](#) World Cups in a two-tournament deal, split \$40m for 2014 and \$50m for 2018.

Sony's deal also included the 2017 Under-17 World Cup though this was of negligible value, despite India hosting the tournament.

Sony's deal was with Football Media Services, a joint venture between the Infront and Dentsu agencies that sold Fifa's media rights in Asia from 2007 to 2014. The agreement for both World Cups was an anomaly as it spanned two rights cycles. Sony, before bidding for 2014 rights, requested the rights for the 2018 tournament as well and subsequently secured them with special dispensation from Fifa.

Infront holds exclusive rights to almost all Fifa events over two quadrennial cycles, from 2015 to 2022, in a deal [spanning 26 Asian countries](#). Infront's deal, signed in 2011, is worth a minimum of \$600m.

Rights to the 2010 tournament in the Indian subcontinent were held by pay-television broadcaster ESPN Star Sports (now Star India) in a [deal worth about \\$42m](#).

### **Reliance pay premium**

Viacom18's winning bid – 50 per cent higher than the nearest competitor – has raised eyebrows among Indian sports executives.

Over the course of the summer, Viacom18 has secured rights to [LaLiga](#), [Serie A](#) and [Ligue 1](#) but the World Cup acquisition is on a different scale.

Sony, sources say, was unwilling to pay over \$40m having evaluated the property through first-hand experience of broadcasting the past two World Cups.

Disney-owned Star, its pay-television rival, was never likely to match Sony's offer, let alone offer close to the \$60m winning bid.

Historically, Sony have also tended to be more keen than Star on marquee events and in recent years have had success in monetising global sports events such as the [Uefa European Championships](#) and [the Olympic Games](#).

Viacom18 has recently [hired Anil Jayaraj](#), formerly head of sales at Star Sports and executive vice-president at Star India, to ramp up its revenue collection from sports properties.

The relatively convenient time difference between Qatar and India would have helped endear the property to Viacom18. Indian Standard Time is 2.5 hours ahead of Qatar.

### **Tender and bidders**

Infront sent ITT documents to Indian broadcasters in March 2020, with a bid deadline in May, but the process was derailed by the Covid-19 pandemic with only Sony making a 'placeholder' bid.

Infront returned with the same ITT this year, which attracted four bidders.

Aside from Viacom18, Sony, Star and pay-television channel 1Sports, owned by Lex Sportel Vision, [previously partner with media giant Discovery](#) in pay-television channel DSport, also bid for exclusive rights to the 2022 World Cup in the Indian Subcontinent.

Sony's new bid was about \$40m, Star's was between \$28m and \$30m, while 1Sports offered significantly less..

Streaming platforms such as Dream11-owned FanCode did not bid as the tender made it clear Fifa favoured wide broadcast exposure and distribution. Streaming platforms would have been obliged to sublicense World Cup rights to linear channels across the region.



## Synergy with ViacomCBS

Viacom18's acquisitions of football properties tallies with recent activity by its minority shareholder, ViacomCBS, which holds a 49-per-cent share in the company. Reliance-owned media group Network18 holds the majority share at 51 per cent.

ViacomCBS has recently invested in football rights to drive rollouts of its Paramount+ streaming platform, including in the US, where it has done multiple deals for football properties such as the [Uefa Champions League](#) and [Serie A](#), and in Australia, where it has secured [A-League](#) and [Football Australia](#) rights.

ViacomCBS is strategically aligned with Reliance on football acquisitions, though the latter, experts say, is also highly motivated to set up a new sports channel under the Viacom18 umbrella, particularly now after the acquisition of the 2022 World Cup.

As one executive told *SportBusiness Media*, "You can't keep buying sports rights and not have a sports channel."

Indian sports executives believe Reliance will bid for rights to cricket's Indian Premier League, for which Star pays about [\\$510m per season for global rights](#) over five years, from 2018 to 2022.

Reliance is far from a newcomer to Indian sport. It owns Rise Worldwide, the sports marketing organisation formerly run in collaboration with the [IMG agency under the brand IMG-Reliance](#). IMG had been involved in running the IPL from its inception in 2007 [until earlier this year](#).

Reliance owns IPL team the Mumbai Indians and Football Sports Development Limited, the company that operates the Indian Super League, India's top-tier football league. Reliance also owns telco Jio, India's biggest mobile network, which has previously bid for IPL rights.

For the Fifa World Cup, Reliance would be able to leverage its OTT platforms such as Jio TV and Viacom18's VOOT. However, given the linear-dominated landscape of Indian sports media, a linear sports channel – or two – is considered an essential accompaniment to acquiring these rights.

Local experts also expect Reliance to bid for media rights to the English Premier League, to which Star currently [holds rights](#) in a three-season deal, from 2019-20 to 2021-22, worth \$28.3m per season. Nita Ambani, a Reliance board member whose husband Mukesh is the group's chairman and controlling shareholder, said in 2019 that the [company could target Premier League](#) rights.

## Wider subcontinent

Sony struck sublicensing deals for the 2018 World Cup across the subcontinent. Were Viacom18 to attempt to secure similar deals, sources said it could expect to earn back about \$5m.

Bangladesh, in which satellite broadcaster Nagorik TV secured the rights in 2018, is considered the territory with the most potential value. ○

## FOOTBALL

# Disney's European football push makes Star+ market leader in LatAm

By Callum McCarthy

- New European league deals make Disney's Star+ dominant football platform in LatAm
- Buy-in-bulk strategy blocks rival media giants from using football to enter region
- Ligue 1, Serie A fees remain flat; Bundesliga enjoys increase in South America

**Disney is hoping its decision to dominate the football rights market in Latin America will drive a strong influx of subscribers to its Star+ streaming platform, which launched across the region on August 31.**

Over the summer, the media giant struck deals for rights to three European football leagues across the region: Italy's Serie A, France's Ligue 1 and Germany's Bundesliga. The deals have given Disney near-total supremacy over European football rights across the region.

Its deals for exclusive rights to Serie A – struck with agency Infront – are worth a combined \$20m (€17.3m) per season over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24. Sources say one deal, covering the whole of Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean, is worth \$16m per season. The other, covering Brazil only, is worth about \$4m per season.

Three-season deals for rights to Ligue 1 were struck with the league's international rights-holder, beIN Media Group, for the 2021-22 to 2023-24 cycle. Disney will pay about \$5m per season for exclusive rights across Spanish-speaking Latin America and about \$2m per season for exclusive rights in Brazil.

Its deal with the Bundesliga covers exclusive pay-television rights in Spanish-speaking South America only. Local sources say the four-season deal, from 2021-22 to 2024-25, is worth between \$2m and \$3m per season.

The new agreements mean Disney now holds exclusive rights in Spanish-speaking South America to all five top European football leagues during the 2021-22 season, as well as the Uefa Champions League and Europa League. It also holds exclusive rights across Latin America (including Brazil and Mexico) to all the top five leagues aside from the Bundesliga, which has separate deals in Brazil and Central America.

## Risers and fallers

The value of Serie A rights in Latin America and the Caribbean has remained flat on the previous cycle, 2018-19 to 2020-21, when Disney's pay-television broadcaster ESPN also paid \$16m per season for exclusive rights.

The new Serie A deal in Brazil sees Disney multiply the value of Serie A rights compared to the 2020-21 season, but the value remains a long way off the high prices seen in the 2010s.

Commercial and pay-television broadcasters Globo, Turner and Bandeirantes each held rights to Serie A in one-season deals covering 2020-21 only. Turner paid \$600,000 for its rights to five matches per matchweek. Globo paid \$400,000 for rights to one top match per matchweek. Bandeirantes agreed a revenue-share deal to show two matches per matchweek.

The value of Serie A rights in Brazil was previously much higher. Streaming platform DAZN initially agreed a three-season deal for exclusive rights, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, worth \$10m per season. This deal collapsed in July 2020 when DAZN withdrew from the contract, citing the Covid-19 pandemic as a force majeure event.

The Bundesliga has also enjoyed a significant increase in the value of its rights in Spanish-speaking South America, though like Serie A rights in Brazil, the increase comes from an unusually low base.

The league earned about \$1.4m across deals with telco Claro and mobile app OneFootball in 2020-21. Claro held pay-television rights across Spanish-speaking Latin America, while OneFootball held digital rights across Spanish-speaking South America. Claro is understood to have paid \$1m for its rights, while local sources say OneFootball paid between \$400,000 and \$500,000.

The value of Ligue 1 rights is thought to have remained roughly flat across Spanish-speaking Latin America and Brazil. BeIN Media Group, which holds exclusive international rights to the league, earned \$5.3m per season in a deal with ESPN covering exclusive rights in Spanish-speaking Latin America, from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

BeIN also earned \$1.6m from a one-season deal in Brazil with OneFootball, covering 2020-21 only. Prior to this deal, DAZN agreed a three-season deal for exclusive Ligue 1 rights in Brazil worth about \$4.5m per season, from 2019-20 to 2021-22. Like its deal for Serie A, DAZN cancelled its Ligue 1 deal in 2020.

## Star+ focus

Disney struck its new European football deals to strengthen its Star+ streaming platform, which launched across Latin America and Brazil on August 31. The platform combines sport and adult entertainment programming, and costs the equivalent of about \$10 per month (AR\$880, MX\$199) in Spanish-speaking territories. In Brazil, a monthly subscription will cost R\$32.90 (\$6.07) per month.

Star+ will show at least 1,600 live European football matches in Spanish-speaking Latin America and over 1,000 live matches in Brazil during 2021-22. Most European football matches in each territory will be exclusive to Star+, though insiders say Disney is keen not to alienate its existing pay-television subscriber base.

“Disney’s main revenue in Latin America is from pay-television channels. Their aim isn’t to make that customer base cancel their subscriptions and switch to Star+,” one expert said. “Everywhere you look, the number of pay-television subscriptions is falling and while Star+ might end up as a contributing factor, Disney’s target isn’t to accelerate that decline.”

Disney has historically exploited its football rights portfolio via its pay-television broadcaster ESPN. Since its acquisition of media group 21st Century Fox and its associated sports rights portfolio, it has also shown matches on pay-television broadcaster Fox Sports in the Latin American markets where the brand remains.

Disney will continue to show live football across its linear pay-television channels but will increasingly reserve marquee fixtures for its Star+ platform in a bid to drive subscriptions over the coming season.

Deals with football rights-holders struck before the Star+ launch announcement have been renegotiated to accommodate the launch of the platform. The renegotiations addressed clauses in existing contracts – namely with the English Premier League and Spain’s LaLiga – that related to linear exposure requirements and ensured Disney has the freedom to make huge numbers of matches exclusive to Star+.

## **Bucking and blocking**

Disney is employing a buy-in-bulk strategy in Latin America at a time most of the major media companies in Europe and North America are streamlining their sports rights portfolios and focusing on properties that drive subscriptions on a standalone basis.

The company’s LatAm strategy differs even from its own strategy in the US, where Disney has aimed to drive subscriptions to its ESPN+ streaming platform by offering premium content across multiple sports without overspending on one particular sport.

Disney holds rights in the US to Spain’s LaLiga and the German Bundesliga but passed on the opportunity to renew rights to Italy’s Serie A at an increased price.

Speaking to *SportBusiness Media* in April, one US broadcast executive said: “At a certain point, it doesn’t make sense to pay an exponential increase for another soccer property if you think there’s significant overlap between the subscriber bases, or if that property doesn’t add much to the appeal.”

Local experts say the reasoning behind Disney’s inverted LatAm strategy is twofold.

First, the company saw a rare opportunity to achieve total aggregation of top-tier club football without needing to pay huge increases to secure rights to each property. Disney believes a complete slate of top football will provide a uniquely compelling offer to Latin American consumers and accelerate subscriber growth during the streaming platform's launch phase.

Second – and perhaps most importantly – Disney saw an opportunity to block rival media groups from using football rights to launch or expand their streaming services in Latin America.

One expert said the company was particularly wary of ViacomCBS's global strategy of acquiring football rights for its Paramount+ streaming service. ViacomCBS has been aggressively acquiring football rights in the US, Australia and India, and speculation is rife about the company's plan to launch Paramount+ in Latin America.

As one insider told *SportBusiness Media*: "Disney are focused on providing the best possible product for Latin American consumers. The idea was for Star+ to be powerful upon entry to the market and to give no chance to competitors to match our quality and quantity."

To make its strategy work, experts say Disney is spending at least \$210m on European club football rights across Latin America (including Brazil) during the 2021-22 season – a figure that will likely increase from 2022-23 should the media group successfully retain English Premier League rights in the region. [o](#)

## FOOTBALL

# ERT close to Euro 2024 and 2028 deals in Greece at increased fee

By Nick Roumpis

- ERT close to deal worth over €16m for exclusive rights in Greece to Euro 2024, 2028
- Uefa earns decent per-tournament increase; received €6m for rights to Euro 2020
- Deal marks ERT's return to broadcasting major international football properties

**Uefa is close to securing an increased fee for rights in Greece to Euro 2024 and 2028 finals as it nears the completion of a deal with the country's public-service broadcaster, ERT.**

*SportBusiness Media* understands ERT will pay a little over €16m for exclusive media rights to both tournaments – a per-tournament fee of €8m. The deal is not yet finalised but its completion is thought to be a formality.

On a per-tournament basis, Uefa will increase its income from the Greek market by more than a third for rights. Exclusive rights to Euro 2020 [were acquired by advertising agency IPG Mediabrands for about €6m](#). IPG later sublicensed the rights to commercial broadcaster Antenna for €8m.

For the European Championships in 2024 and 2028, ERT was determined to bounce back after its previous losses to Antenna. The commercial broadcaster also outbid ERT for rights to the 2022 Fifa World Cup and will pay about €12m. This was 20 per cent more than the €10m paid by ERT for the Fifa World Cup 2018.

The deal represents ERT's return to broadcasting major international football tournaments after it lost out on rights to both [Euro 2020 and the 2022 Fifa World Cup 2022](#). Aside from these tournaments, ERT has shown all major national team football competitions in Greece since 1966.

## Bouncing back

ERT's outlay for Euro 2024 and 2028 represents an increase compared to the previous deal in the country, but falls well below the watermark it set for Euro 2021. [Then, ERT paid €13m for exclusive rights to Euro 2012](#) as part of a wider deal struck by the European Broadcasting Union.

That deal was signed in 2009, prior to the collapse of the Greek economy in the 2010s.

ERT's new deal was agreed with agency CAA Eleven, Uefa's exclusive sales agent for commercial rights to its national team properties. CAA Eleven tendered rights to Euro 2024 and 2028 separately.

One source noted that ERT was keen to bid strongly for both competitions, despite there being no guarantee that the Greek national team will take part in either tournament. Greece has failed to qualify for the last three major tournaments: Euro 2016, the 2018 Fifa World Cup, and Euro 2020.

Another source said: "Uefa managed to leverage ERT's determination to secure the rights. They would definitely have not closed a deal for Euro 2028 if the rights fees had remained flat."

ERT has had financial difficulties amid the ongoing financial crisis in Greece, which resulted in the broadcaster's closure in 2013. A smaller entity called Nerit replaced ERT, before the latter opened again in June 2015. Before its closure, ERT had been one of the biggest buyers of sports properties in Greece.

ERT was able to agree an increased fee for the Euro 2024 and Euro 2028 rights after reporting after-tax profits of €43.8m in 2020, compared to losses of €15.9m in 2019. [o](#)



## FOOTBALL

# Uefa secures club competition fee increase in Bulgaria with A1, bTV

By Nick Roumpis

- Uefa club competitions rights in Bulgaria worth a total of €9m per season
- Champions League value increases by 38 per cent: €6.5m per season for new cycle
- Europa League and Europa Conference League valued at a combined €2.5m per season

**Telekom Austria's appetite to retain Uefa Champions League rights – as well as its addition of Europa League and Conference League matches to its portfolio – has driven up the value of Uefa club competitions in Bulgaria from 2021-22 onward.**

Telekom Austria – which owns telco A1 Bulgaria and pay-television broadcaster Max Sport – acquired Champions League rights alongside commercial and pay-television broadcaster bTV. The two will pay a combined €6.5m (\$7.6m) per season over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

The same two companies have also agreed to pay a combined €2.5m per season for exclusive rights to the Uefa Europa League and Uefa Europa Conference League over the same three-season cycle, from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

The new deals mean that the value of Champions League rights in Bulgaria will increase by 38 per cent, while the value of Europa League rights – helped by the addition of the Europa Conference League from 2021-22 – has increased by almost double.

In the previous cycle, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, Telekom Austria and bTV paid [€4.7m per season](#) for exclusive rights to the Champions League in Bulgaria. Champions League rights were previously held exclusively by bTV, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, in a deal worth about €3.5m per season.

Europa League rights were previously held by bTV and public-service broadcaster BNT from 2018-19 to 2020-21, in a deal worth just under €1.3m per season.

## Tender details

Agency Team Marketing, Uefa's exclusive sales agent for commercial rights to its club

competitions, launched a tender process for the new three-season cycle in March this year. A first-round bid deadline was set for April 26.

Rights to the Champions League were tendered in two discrete packages – one containing exclusive rights to all matches played on Tuesdays and another containing exclusive rights to all matches played on Wednesdays.

A1 will show all Tuesday night Champions League games, while bTV will show all matches held on Wednesday nights. The Europa League and Europa Conference League matches, which take place on Thursdays, will be split on a 50:50 basis between the two broadcasters.

The increase in value for UCL rights in Bulgaria was mainly driven by Telekom Austria's push to keep Uefa Champions League under its umbrella at the same time as adding Uefa's other two competitions.

Overall, Uefa will earn about 50 per cent more for rights to its club competitions compared to the 2018-19 to 2020-21 period.

Sources said that pay-television operator Nova – owned by the United Media Group – did not submit a bid.

### **Telekom Austria holds position**

By paying an increased fee for Uefa club competitions, Telekom Austria-owned A1 has managed to retain the strongest football property in its growing portfolio.

Earlier this summer, A1 [renewed its rights to Italy's Serie A](#) for another three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24. It also secured rights [to Italy's Coppa Italia and Supercoppa Italiana](#) for the same cycle.

In May, A1 agreed to continue [show Spain's LaLiga](#) for another five seasons until 2025-26, having already held the rights to the league during the last three seasons.

Its sports portfolio also includes the French Cup, Turkish Cup, Major League Soccer, Copa Libertadores, Copa Sudamericana, Euroleague and [the Bulgarian basketball league](#). It also recently acquired rights [to show NFL games for the first time in the country](#).

Bulgaria is the largest contributor of revenue for Telekom Austria outside its home country. [In 2020](#) the telco giant generated €513.8m in revenues from Bulgaria. In Austria, it generated €2.62bn.

Telekom Austria also operates A1 subsidiaries in North Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia, Belarus and Croatia. ○

## TENNIS

# Nine pays increase for US Open to secure grand slam in Australia

By Imran Yusuf

- Nine will pay \$2.3m per year for exclusive rights to US Open in Australia, from 2022-24
- Deal represents strong increase; incumbent ESPN was the only rival bidder
- Nine to show US Open on free-to-air channels and OTT platform Stan Sports

**Nine Entertainment's new three-year deal for exclusive US Open rights has completed its set of grand slam tennis tournaments, making it the home of tennis in Australia until at least the end of 2023.**

Nine – which owns the eponymous commercial broadcaster and streaming platform Stan Sport – will pay about \$2.3m (€1.96m) per year for exclusive rights to the US Open in Australia for the next three years, from 2022 to 2024.

This is a strong increase on the tournament's previous deal with pay-television broadcaster ESPN, which held rights in a five-year deal, from 2017 to 2021, [worth an average of \\$1.6m per year](#). ESPN's deal included rights in Australia and New Zealand, while Nine's deal includes rights in Australia only.

Nine now holds exclusive rights in Australia to all four tennis grand slams. Its deal for rights to the [Australian Open runs from 2020 to 2024](#). Its deals for [Wimbledon and the French Open both run from 2021 to 2023](#).

As with its coverage of other grand slam tournaments, Nine will show US Open matches across its linear and digital platforms. Every match from the US Open singles, doubles, juniors and wheelchair tournaments will be shown on Stan Sport, while selected matches will be shown on its commercial channels such as Channel 9.

In the previous cycle, ESPN had sublicensed free-to-air US Open rights from 2017 to 2021 to public service broadcaster SBS. For the 2021 tournament, SBS broadcast all men's and women's singles quarter-finals, semi-finals and both finals.

Sources say Nine was keen to become the undisputed 'home of tennis' in Australia following its

acquisition of Australian Open rights in 2018 and its Wimbledon and French Open deals in 2020. In addition to the four Grand Slams, Nine's tennis offering includes the Davis Cup, Billie Jean King Cup and the Laver Cup.

Experts say Australian viewers show greater interest in the US Open than the French Open, not least due to it being situated in a time zone better suited to the needs of Australian broadcasters.

Marquee US Open matches are usually played between 6am and 12 noon on Australia's more populated east coast, during which time there are few schedule clashes with popular local sports and entertainment programming. A day's play at the French Open usually begins during Australian primetime – during which commercial broadcasters prefer to show local sports or popular entertainment shows – and runs through the night.

### **Nine's effective promotion**

The United States Tennis Association, the national governing body for US tennis and US Open rights-holder, was advised on the sale of its rights by the IMG agency under a global advisory deal – excluding the US, Canada, and Latin America – that runs from 2017 to 2025.

It is understood IMG and the USTA were confident in Nine's ability to boost the US Open's stature. IMG also sells Wimbledon and French Open rights into Australia and was encouraged by Nine's performance in promoting both tournaments this year, as well as its investment in production and talent, the localisation of its coverage, and its overall reach through its linear channels and its streaming platform.

Sources told *SportBusiness Media* "ESPN was interested in retaining its rights and intended to renew. But it had no interest in paying a significant increase. ESPN, which recently [secured rights to Australia's National Basketball League](#), has prioritised funds for properties away from tennis.

ESPN was also hindered by the fact its streaming platform, ESPN+, is not available in Australia.

Streaming platform Stan Sport, launched in 2020, has changed the business model for Nine. It could afford to be more aggressive in its pursuit of the US Open rights in the expectation that the 'set' of tennis grand slams would be an attractive offer to get tennis fans to take out year-long subscriptions.

A Stan 'Basic' subscription costs A\$10 per month, and the Stan Sport add-on costs an additional A\$10 per month.

Ultimately, most of Nine's rivals held back on competing for the rights as Nine's dominance in the tennis sphere is palpable. Pay-television broadcaster Foxtel – which [held US Open rights from 2013 to 2016](#) and Wimbledon and French Open rights prior to Nine – is understood to have made a strategic decision to move away from grand slam tennis. The broadcaster is unable to exclusively show the country's most important tennis property, the Australian Open, due to it being a listed event.

In March this year, the Australian government [granted a two-year extension](#) to the 'anti-siphoning' list of sporting events that stops pay television broadcasters from buying the rights to events on the list before free-to-air broadcasters have had the chance to acquire the rights.

The listed tennis events comprise every match at the Australian Open and Australia's home matches in the Davis Cup, along with the final if Australia is involved.

The US Open is not on the list after Fox and IMG's successful application for the tournament to be taken off the list during the 2013-2016 cycle. [o](#)

## FOOTBALL

# Indonesian player Mola TV launches overseas, but sport will stay secondary

By Kevin McCullagh

- Indonesian streaming platform to expand to UK, Italy, Malaysia, Singapore
- In line with strategy shift last year, sports content is not a major focus
- Low-value deals agreed for UFC and European football properties

**Indonesian streaming platform Mola TV has acquired sports rights in several new markets as part of an upcoming international expansion. But the main focus of the service will continue to be non-sports content, following a shift away from sport that began last year.**

In recent weeks, Mola acquired rights for properties including: the UFC in Malaysia and Singapore non-exclusively, and in Indonesia exclusively, for just over four years, from this month to the end of 2025; Confederation of African Football qualifiers in Singapore, Italy, the UK and Indonesia; French Cup football in Malaysia, Singapore and the UK, in a one-season deal covering 2021-22; Dutch Eredivisie football in the UK (one season, 2021-22), Italy and Singapore (both for three seasons, 2021-22 to 2023-24); and Croatian league football in Italy, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, for three seasons, 2021-22 to 2023-24.

The platform is launching in the UK, Italy, Malaysia and Singapore next month. As in Indonesia, its offering will be led by films and television series, music-related content, and other original content.

Mola representative Mirwan Suwarso told *SportBusiness Media* the company is seeking customers in new territories after reaching the limits of the market for paid video services in Indonesia. The company believes there is currently a ceiling of about 2.7m subscribers for its premium OTT service – available at \$3.50 to \$11 per month – in Indonesia. It believes this number could double in the next five years, but it is nevertheless disappointingly small in a market with a population of 271m and 37m television households.

“In Indonesia, the number of people willing to pay for a premium content service is negligible,”

Suwarso said. “We want to test the water to see if we can enlarge our customer base, riding on the economies of scale we have built in Indonesia.”

Sports content will play a relatively minor role in the new markets. The sports rights acquisitions listed above were modestly priced and opportunistic, and this approach will continue, Suwarso said.

In Indonesia, he said, “[Mola has] no ambition to be a major player in the sports area.” He added that the company “recognises sports has an important place on Indonesian media and TV,” but that it was happy to be only a relatively small player in sport – for example, by pursuing non-exclusive deals rather than exclusive deals.

The company has been involved in recent bidding processes in Southeast Asia for Italian Serie A football rights and US Open tennis rights but made only very low bids.

This approach is in line with a shift in emphasis on sports content spelled out last year. Last July, Suwarso told *SportBusiness Media* that Mola was exiting the market for international sports rights and would primarily focus on Indonesian domestic and national team sports content going forward.

This marked a significant change from when Mola first emerged in Indonesia. It made a dramatic entrance to the market in 2018 by acquiring English Premier League rights for the current cycle, 2019-20 to 2021-22. It paid about \$40m (€35m) per season, a 40-per-cent increase on the previous deal. There followed a string of sports rights deals, with the most valuable including Uefa national team rights and Indonesian football federation domestic rights.

Mola is far from profitable and the company’s sports rights spending is one of the main reasons. Suwarso said the Premier League and other sports content had served as “a good vehicle to launch us, to establish us”. He acknowledged the company was a long way from break-even, but said it had “a 20-year vision”.

## Changing strategy

Mola is ultimately owned by Indonesian conglomerate Djarum, whose main business is in tobacco but also operates in a host of other areas including banking, e-commerce, electronics, coffee and energy drinks.

When the platform was originally launched, it was intended to be free-to-view and to operate as an advertising platform for Djarum-owned brands. In particular, it was used to drive sales of internet-connected TV sets and set-top boxes manufactured by electronics subsidiary Polytron. Originally, Mola was available exclusively on Polytron devices.

The strategy changed during the pandemic. First, a low subscription fee of around \$1 per month was introduced. The content focus also switched away from premium sport, with a greater emphasis placed on content that appealed to women and children. Later, the company moved

into more high-value films and television series, and increased the subscription cost. Mola TV has also been made available across all internet-connected devices in Indonesia, not just Polytron devices.

Now, the company is seeking to increase the return on the investments it has made in its platform by adding overseas subscribers at relatively low additional cost. “Even if we get 10,000 extra subs in Singapore or Malaysia – and at the ARPU (average revenue per user) we are targeting, we think that is possible – this would be a success,” Suwarso said.

The price point for Mola TV in the new markets will be around \$10 per month.

Mola’s services in the UK, Italy, Malaysia and Singapore will be officially launched at the end of October. The launch will be staged around a music event in London, Mola Chill. The festival is a format the company has already used in Indonesia. It involves appearances by established and aspiring professional musical artists and is streamed live by Mola. Previous editions have included appearances by international artists including Seal, Charlie Puth, Kehlani and Fatboy Slim.

Suwarso said the service was not aiming to compete at the very top end of the market in each territory against the likes of Netflix or major pay-television platforms. Rather, it wanted to position itself as an attractive additional service.

“We see an opportunity to become an alternative player in these markets. We want to be a smaller player, in with the other platforms, leveraging what we have built in Indonesia.”

In Indonesia, he predicted that the growth of premium streaming services would be held back by the relatively low-wage market and consumer expectations for free content.

“Entertainment in Indonesia is seen by the masses as a right,” he said. He contrasted this with India, which although another low-wage market had a population that was accustomed to paying for even the most basic television content via a licence fee. Indonesia has not had a television or radio licence fee since the 1980s.

Suwarso said the global players like Disney and Netflix that are currently trying to develop their businesses in the Indonesian market were in “for a big surprise” when they realised its limits.

## **Original content**

Mola is planning to bring a more international flavour to one of its sports-based original television series. The original, Indonesia-focused version, Garuda Select, involved the selection of a team of talented Indonesian youth footballers, who were taken to Europe for training and to play matches. Their journeys were followed by camera crews. Last year, it added Italian and African players, and Suwarso said Mola is now looking to add British players too.

Mola’s other original content is mostly focused on music and films. One of its highest-profile



productions has been Mola Living Live, where it interviews global stars from entertainment and sport – past guests have included former boxer Mike Tyson and film director Francis Ford Coppola. The format allows viewers to pitch questions to the interviewee during the live broadcast.

Mola is connected to Italian Serie B football team Como 1907, which is also owned by Djarum. The deal for Croatian league football rights in Italy came about via Como. The content was originally acquired to be streamed on the team's online video platform, Como TV. There is interest in Croatian football in Italy due to the geographical proximity of the two countries and the fact Croatia has been a historical source of talented young players for Italian football. ○