



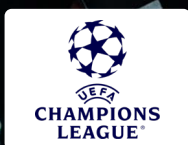
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Uefa overcomes match-fixing fears in Sportradar data deal



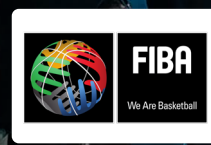
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FOOTBALL

Uefa overcomes match-fixing fears to test betting market with Sportradar

By Ben Cronin

- Uefa to earn about €35m in two-and-a-half-season betting data deal, from 2022-24
- Deal is backloaded, worth €30m across 2022-23 and 2023-24
- NFL's \$100m deal with Genius Sports 'not a reliable yardstick'

Uefa plans to use its first ever betting data distribution agreement with Sportradar to gain a better understanding of the betting market having previously eschewed selling its official data rights over concerns about match-fixing.

The sports betting and data services company will pay the governing body a total of around €35m (\$39.8m) to be its exclusive authorised collector and distributor of data for betting purposes over three seasons from 2021-22 through to the end of the 2023-24 season.

The deal is understood to be backloaded so that it is worth an annual fee of around €15m (\$17.1m) in the second and third years and €5m in the first season because Sportradar will only start exploiting the rights halfway through the season in January 2022.

The agreement, signed last month, was negotiated by Uefa's in-house commercial team rather than through its exclusive sales agencies for club and national team rights, Team Marketing and CAA Eleven respectively.

Sportradar is understood to have secured the rights having held off competition from rival betting services companies Genius Sports and Stats Perform. The three companies responded to Uefa's first ever request for proposals for the collection of official match event data issued in March. The other major data services company operating in the sector, IMG Arena, is not understood to have bid for the rights.

Uefa held a discursive tender process rather than a structured series of bidding rounds and held out the possibility that it might not award the rights at all – a point which further reflected the exploratory nature of the deal. Under the iterative process, bidders were invited to clarify and revise their offers at various stages before Uefa eventually awarded the rights to Sportradar.

Although an early statement indicated the deal covered 1,550 matches, *SportBusiness* understands it includes the rights to roughly 2,200 matches across Uefa national and club competitions in the roughly Two-and-a-half-year period.

These include:

- Uefa Euro 2024
- Uefa European Qualifiers and the Nations League
- Uefa Champions League, Europa League, Europa Conference League, Super Cup
- Uefa Women's Champions League and Women's Euro 2022
- Uefa Under-21 competitions
- The Futsal Champions League, along with the Futsal Euro Championship.

The governing body made a policy decision to exclude U19 and youth tournaments to bring the agreement into line with the Council of Europe's Macolin Convention, which aims to prevent the manipulation of sports competitions.

Key assets

The Uefa men's Euro and Champions League are undoubtedly the crown jewels in the package of rights, with Sportradar claiming betting turnover for the delayed Euro 2020 tournament was worth €1.2bn per match (€62bn total), while it says the 2020-21 Champions League was worth €210m per match and €26.3bn in total.

The company claimed betting on the 2020-21 Europa League was worth €76m per match and €15.5bn in total, while the 2020-21 Nations League was worth €129m per match and €21.2bn in total. Overall, Sportradar claims the four Uefa competitions accounted for 15 per cent of global football betting turnover in 2021.

Set against this, it should be noted that these are sums generated by bookmakers and upstream data suppliers have yet to hit upon a sure-fire way of extracting their share of the huge revenues generated by football wagering.

Several experts added that the sporadic nature of Uefa competitions, which don't provide the same volume of fixtures and betting content as domestic football leagues, would also count against Sportradar in its attempts to monetise the deal. For example, FDC's data deal with Genius includes the rights to around 4,000 matches per season and is thought to be worth around €23.7m a year but, as referenced, the different licensing structure means it isn't completely comparable.

To overcome this, the feeling in the market is that the company will try to bundle the Uefa rights

together with other properties in its portfolio to create a more appealing overall package to customers. There are also indications that it will pass some of the costs of the deal onto these clients through a more aggressive pricing strategy.

One company, which offers odds visualisations for sportsbooks and media companies, and which had previously taken Sportradar's unofficial open source Uefa data, told *SportBusiness* it had been approached by sales representatives from the company shortly after the deal was announced. The sales representative said the price of Sportradar's services would double now that it had secured the official Uefa feed.

When asked if Sportradar would seek to charge sportsbooks a share of their gross gaming revenues (GGR) – a model that enables data suppliers to derive a greater share of the upside when the betting market does well – Lampitt said: "It's not a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to pricing because this data will be used across multiple different products and services such as pre-match odds, live odds, live data as well as engagement tools. Therefore, there are multiple ways in which our commercial team will take the partnership to market."

Match-fixing concerns

Uefa had until this year never engaged with the betting industry due to concerns about the threat of match-fixing. But with most bookmakers offering markets on the majority of its events anyway, the feeling within the organisation was that it may as well make a commercial return from its official data rights as well as leverage such a deal to learn more about the sector.

The data distribution deal follows the organisation's first ever betting sponsorship at its 'Official Partner' level. The deal, brokered by Team Marketing, saw betting platform [Bwin become the 'Official Sports Betting Partner'](#) of the Uefa Europa League and the newly-formed Europa Conference League.

SportBusiness understands Uefa had three objectives in its data RFP. They were to: a) gain a better knowledge of the betting industry; b) secure a financial return from betting data rights and c) channel some of the revenues from the first data distribution deal into bolstering betting integrity programmes.

Sportradar secured the rights having submitted a proposal that offered the best financial return and which also most closely matched Uefa's preferred model. *SportBusiness* understands the governing body was concerned about having to police data collection at matches to guarantee the exclusivity of the deal – a considerable undertaking across the multiple European jurisdictions Uefa competitions operate in – and secured a commitment from Sportradar that it would not have to do this at every single venue.

The winning bid is also understood to have included a commitment to share information about the downstream betting market with the governing body, although this is not thought to have been a differentiating factor from the other proposals. Neither is the data sharing requirement

thought to have impacted on the value of the agreement as Uefa is not understood to have received a better financial proposal that excluded this element.

David Lampitt, managing director for sports partnerships, Sportradar, told *SportBusiness*: “There are obligations in relation to transparency, and an enhanced visibility of the way in which that data is being used and disseminated into the downstream market. Additionally, there are the economics of that distribution because the sports themselves increasingly want to have that level of oversight of their data.”

He added: “Previously, many rights-holders would have had little idea where their data was being distributed, who was collecting and distributing it, because they didn’t have a commercial contract in place for that with these arrangements. That added visibility is one of the significant benefits they derive from that more structured approach.”

Another factor in the success of Sportradar’s bid was the fact that it had already served as Uefa’s official integrity provider since 2009. Under the latest deal, the company will continue to provide these services while also now offering dedicated intelligence and investigation support to Uefa’s own anti-match-fixing unit. It is thought some of these integrity services will now be provided to Uefa on a value-in-kind basis.

Shorter duration

Although the agreement was initially announced as a three-year deal, it is effectively only a Two-and-a-half-season deal because it was only finalised in October and Sportradar requires a lead-in period before it starts to exploit the rights from January 1, 2022.

With data operators and bookmakers having become accustomed to acquiring Uefa match data from unofficial sources, it was felt this delay was needed to allow the market to adapt.

Lampitt said there were parallels with Sportradar’s earlier [official data deal with the NFL](#) – the first ever data partnership agreed by the US league – which preceded the NFL’s most recent agreement with Genius Sports.

“It’s a similar situation to that of the NFL two years ago before our previous agreement came into effect. There was no official data product available, so all of the relevant companies in the data supply market were collecting that data open source and providing that to their customers.

“The same has been true in Uefa competitions and now Uefa are bringing these rights to the market for the first time. That is a shift for operators and therefore, from a sales cycle perspective, it’s not particularly surprising that, taking a new product into the market for the first time will benefit from additional lead-in time in that sales cycle.”

The period from January onwards until the end of the 2021-22 season includes roughly 400 matches. For this reason, Sportradar is estimated to be paying a pro-rata sum of about €5m this season while it gets up to speed in the shortened exploitation period at the start of the deal.

Streaming rights excluded

The feeling in the market is that Uefa would have made a much larger commercial return if it had included betting streaming rights in the RFP. One data rights consultant operating in the sector said the governing body could have potentially doubled the sums involved. Another data operator thought the absence of streaming rights might also explain why IMG Arena was not involved in the bidding process, as the company is thought to favour these types of deals.

Uefa discussed carving out streaming rights with its broadcast partners but ultimately decided against taking this step. The organisation is also thought unlikely to do so in the next cycle because some of its broadcast contracts extend beyond 2024 and preclude such an arrangement.

The consultant, who spoke to *SportBusiness* on the condition of anonymity, said: “How do you go to BT Sport, which pays £1.2bn for exclusive rights to the Champions League [in the UK] and then say you want to hold back on audio-visual rights for betting?”

“Let’s say you could make an extra £30m, or £40m a season if you included the streaming rights. What’s your value from the UK market? Are you really going to put a cheque for £400m a season in jeopardy to claw back an extra €5m or so?”

Legal dispute

The news that Sportradar’s bid did not place a sizeable burden on Uefa to police the exclusivity of its data rights is interesting in the context of the ongoing [legal dispute between the company and rival bidder Genius Sports](#). The dispute relates to the two companies’ diverging interpretations of what it means to be an official data rights-holder.

In that case, which is due to be heard by the UK Competition Appeal Tribunal next October, Sportradar has accused Genius and Football DataCo (FDC), the data rights-holder for the English Premier League, English Football League and Scottish Football League, of foreclosing the market to rival operators through the structure and policing of the data rights agreement they signed in 2019.

Sportradar claims the five-year data, which granted Genius the rights to capture data at over 4,000 FDC fixtures a year, is anti-competitive. The agreement placed the authority to sublicense the data rights to other data suppliers in Genius’ hands and requires all bookmaker clients in the downstream market to have an ‘over-license’ to use the official Genius data, curtailing their ability to access data from other sources.

FDC and Genius have subsequently taken a zero-tolerance approach to ‘unofficial’ data scouts, evicting any other supplier from a rival firm suspected of gathering data at the games covered by the deal.

Sportradar argues that this strict approach, coupled with the licensing structure and the fact that

a proportion of FDC matches are not televised (making it impossible for data operators to gather data from a media feed), places Genius in a 'super dominant' position.

Genius and the leagues represented by FDC, on the other hand, maintain that they have offered to sublicense the rights to Sportradar and that the approach is a justifiable attempt to protect against irregularities in the information collected, as well as control the way the official data is distributed.

The dispute means Sportradar would risk contradicting its legal position if it now began unilaterally evicting rival scouts from Uefa matches. By the same token, Genius would undermine its stance if it sent scouts to collect data at these matches over the top of Sportradar's official Uefa relationship.

Regardless of the merits of each company's arguments, one data rights consultant spoken to by *SportBusiness* suggested Uefa was unlikely to structure its first data deal in such a way that it would risk embroiling itself in a similar dispute, especially for what it essentially an exploratory exercise.

"They [Uefa] are not going to get rich fast from data. They don't want to be burned in the same way the Premier League has been burned by FDC. And I think this is just a means of them going to have a look at the market and kick the tires."

Lampitt told *SportBusiness* that the company would seek to differentiate itself on the quality of its services. "The way in which we operate as a business is all about delivering the best product for our clients," he said. "Our ability to have direct access to every ground in order to provide the most stable, fastest, and highest quality output is the driver behind what will influence customer buying decision downstream.

"It shouldn't be about creating or even seeking to create some sort of monopoly position where you force people into buying decisions through restriction of alternative competition. That underpins our approach more generally in the market of course."

The company later added that the agreement with Uefa provides for it to sublicense the official data to other suppliers in the market.

Can Sportradar make a margin?

With suppliers and bookmakers already accustomed to accessing open source Uefa data, and Sportradar apparently reluctant to police its exclusivity too stringently, it seems legitimate to ask whether the data company will be able to make a margin on its outlay.

The data consultant spoken to by *SportBusiness* said this was not necessarily the company's primary objective and the deal ought to be seen as a marketing acquisition related to its [recent public listing](#).

“It’s all about the brand and prestige and value for Sportradar, to help its share price, to bolster its reputation in the marketplace,” the source said.

The company’s stock rose around 10 per cent to a recent high of \$23.75 per share on the Nasdaq in the days immediately after the deal was announced, but this was still some way short of its original listing price of \$27 per share.

Lampitt, however, argued that the economics of the deal still had to make sense: “There’s no question that there is strategic value in having a blue-chip, top international rights-holders in our portfolio and Uefa is one of a very small band of sports properties with a product that is globally incredibly popular. No doubt that brings ancillary benefits and strategic value to the organisation, but ultimately, the numbers still need to stack up.”

NFL unrealistic yardstick

The question of whether the deal represents good business for Uefa has been complicated by the National Football League’s [recent data rights agreement with Genius Sports](#). In that deal, Genius is understood to be paying the US league around \$100m (€86.4m) a year in a combination of cash and stock for exclusive distribution rights to official NFL play-by-play statistics, proprietary Next Gen Stats (NGS) data, and the league’s official betting data feed to media companies and sports betting operators around the world.

It is important to note the deal also includes rights to distribute live audio-visual game feeds to sportsbooks in international markets as well as the rights to represent the league’s legal sports betting advertising inventory across NFL owned-and-operated digital platforms globally.

The sizeable agreement is thought to have attracted a lot of attention at Uefa, and indeed among other sports rights-holders generally. But Uefa is understood to be sanguine about the disparity, believing that it does not represent a realistic yardstick for European football.

Several experts spoken to by *SportBusiness* believe Genius, which has also recently undergone its own IPO, paid a heavy premium to attach itself to the biggest rights-holder in the US, just as betting is beginning to be legalised in the country. But at the same time, the unique characteristics of the legislative landscape in the US also gives it a lot more levers to pull to realise some of the value in the deal.

The model adapted in many of the US states to legalise sports betting mandates bookmakers take data from official sources. This has enabled the NFL to create a model that requires betting companies to license official data from Genius to become an Approved Sportsbook Operator for the league, a designation which enables them to use NFL marks and advertise on the NFL digital inventory controlled by Genius.

Legislators in Europe have yet to take a position on official data and Uefa has so far stopped short of creating a similar commercial framework to the NFL while it tentatively explores the

market. A case in point is that Bwin, the governing body's one betting sponsor to date, is not required to take Sportradar's official Uefa feed.

One well-placed source told *SportBusiness*: "Uefa is a far more lucrative property than the NFL from a betting perspective globally but there are different levers to it because the NFL deal is to do with market positioning for Genius, timing in the US and the importance of creating a framework for the advertising and all the affiliate schemes.

"None of that is on the table for Uefa right now – there are no authorised gaming operators in Uefa. They might create that in the next three to five years but that doesn't exist today, and it isn't going to exist while Uefa is taking decisions around how close it wants to be to the betting space.

"The way I see it they're dipping their toes with a partner they've worked with before. They probably would have wanted a bit more for the fee, but they're probably happy enough to take it, and they don't lose anything in the process." ○

MOTORSPORT

French motorsport renaissance sees Canal Plus pay more for F1

By Callum McCarthy

- Canal Plus to pay close to €65m per year for F1 rights in 2023 and 2024
- Current two-year extension worth between €55m and €60m per year in 2021 and 2022
- Canal Plus to be home of French motorsport during era of champions and contenders

Canal Plus will pay a decent increase in fee to extend its deal for exclusive rights to Formula One in France during 2023 and 2024, despite uncertainty around the future of the French Grand Prix after 2022.

SportBusiness Media understands pay-television operator Canal Plus will pay about €65m per year during a two-year extension, covering 2023 and 2024, for exclusive linear and non-exclusive digital rights to Formula One. The deal also includes rights to the F2 and F3 junior series, as well as Porsche Supercup races that take place on an F1 race weekend.

The deal is thought to have been renewed for another two years in private talks between Canal Plus and Formula One Management, the series' commercial rights-holder.

Canal Plus is thought to pay an average of between €55m and €60m per year during its current three-plus-two-year deal for Formula One rights.

The original three-year deal, from 2018 to 2020, was worth about €55m per year and included exclusive pay-television rights only. A two-year extension clause was activated in 2020, covering 2021 and 2022, which included exclusive linear rights across pay-television and free-to-air. It is thought Canal Plus paid an incremental increase for the rights in 2021 and 2022.

Canal Plus is one of Formula One's most important partners, paying a large rights fee in a key European market that has hosted two races per year since 2018: the Monaco Grand Prix and the French Grand Prix. The broadcaster has held pay-television rights to Formula One in France since 2013 and has been the exclusive linear broadcaster of F1 in France since 2020, when it began exploiting free-to-air rights on its digital-terrestrial C8 channel.

It is expected that Canal Plus will continue to exploit free-to-air rights on its own channels over the next three years. The last time free-to-air rights were sold separately in France was in a deal

with commercial broadcaster TF1 for rights to four races – including the French GP and Monaco GP – worth €3m per year over three years, from 2018 to 2020.

It is not thought Canal Plus faced any competition for the rights from 2023 onward but was willing to pay an increase to secure its position as the home of motorsport in France over the long term. In addition to F1, the broadcaster recently agreed long-term extensions with MotoGP until the end of 2029 and with the World Rally Championship until 2030.

Sources say Formula One will continue to offer its F1 TV Pro and F1 TV Access OTT services in France until at least the end of 2024.

F1 TV Pro is a premium subscription product – priced at €7.99 per month in France – offering access to all live races and customisable feeds. All practice and qualifying sessions are also available, as well as press conferences and pre- and post-race interviews. Live F2, F3 and Porsche Supercup races are also available on the service.

F1 TV Access is priced at €2.99 per month, offering access to a large archive of live F1 races from previous seasons and exclusive ancillary content.

Motorsport renaissance

Informed sources say that while the French Grand Prix looks unlikely to return to the calendar after its final contracted race in 2022, the popularity of F1 and motorsport more widely in France is set to endure regardless.

Canal Plus's decision to acquire rights to F1, MotoGP and the World Rally Championship over the longest terms possible is largely due to the increasing number of French championship contenders – either current or future – competing in each series.

Another key reason is the large, loyal subscriber base that comes with Formula One. This year's French grand prix attracted a peak of 2.1m viewers across Canal Plus's pay-television and free-to-air channels and an average of almost 1.9m viewers. However, the majority of these viewers watched on Canal Plus's pay-television channels, not on C8. C8 attracted average viewership of just over 850,000 during this year's French GP.

Canal Plus's F1-focused subscriber base is tipped to grow over the next decade. French F1 drivers Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon have both won races over the past two years, with Gasly particularly singled out for longer-term success in the sport. And Theo Pourchaire, who currently competes in F2, is tipped to secure an F1 seat in 2023 or 2024.

In other series, French drivers and riders dominated 2021. In MotoGP, young French rider Fabio Quartararo clinched his first world championship in 2021 and is tipped to contend for many more over the course of the next decade. While in the WRC, seven-time world champion Sebastien Ogier is poised to win his eighth title in 2021 at the season-ending rally in Monza, Italy.

In particular, Canal Plus has enjoyed a massive boost in viewership for MotoGP. The series broke MotoGP viewership records in France several times during 2021, culminating with the French GP in May which attracted an average of just over 1.8m viewers across pay-television and free-to-air.

Much like F1, the majority of viewers watched on a pay-television channel, with 1.1m tuning in to Canal+ Sport and 735,000 watching on C8. The race peaked at 2.24m viewers, a greater number than for F1's French Grand Prix. [o](#)

FOOTBALL

Uefa club rights values in Asia fall after highs of DAZN expansion era

By Kevin McCullagh

- Wowow to pay \$10m per season for Uefa club competition rights in 2021-24 cycle
- Sources peg beIN deal in Southeast Asia around \$20m-per-season mark
- Declining values indicative of tough market conditions across Asia

The value of Uefa club competition rights has fallen heavily in Japan and also declined in Southeast Asia during the current cycle, mirroring wider trends in the markets.

Values in both territories had been boosted in the previous cycle by multi-platform broadcaster DAZN, which was seeking to expand across Asia. DAZN agreed early withdrawals from deals in the two territories with Uefa and its sales agent Team Marketing, with the pandemic believed to be a contributing factor. DAZN has also abandoned plans for a Southeast Asia service and reined in spending in Japan.

The value has declined in Japan by around 75 per cent, with pay-television broadcaster Wowow paying about \$10m (€8.8m) per season in a three-season deal for the new cycle, 2021-22 to 2023-24. The deal covers the Uefa Champions League and Europa League, but not the Europa Conference League.

In the previous cycle, from 2018-19 to 2020-21, DAZN agreed a deal worth just over \$40m per season covering the Champions League and Europa League. DAZN withdrew at the end of 2019-20. Wowow picked up the rights in the latter half of 2020-21 in a deal understood to have been worth close to \$10m.

The decline in Southeast Asia was less dramatic. The majority of local industry sources believe pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports will pay between \$15m and \$18m per season over three seasons, from 2021-22 to 2023-24. However, a minority of sources said the deal was worth considerably more, closer to \$25m per season, having been propped up by the threat of competition from broadcasters in individual markets.

The deal is for a group of the region's biggest markets, including Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, and covers all three competitions for the three-season cycle.

A direct comparison with the previous cycle is difficult due to differences in how the rights were sold in Southeast Asia (see below: beIN bolsters). Deals with beIN and DAZN during the previous cycle covered almost an identical set of markets and generated combined fees of about \$27m per season. The deals covered the Champions League and Europa League only.

Japan plummets

Japan has become a difficult, uncompetitive market in recent years. This has particularly been the case since DAZN throttled back spending after an aggressive start in the market. Wowow is thought to have faced little or no competition to secure the rights.

Sports rights buyers in Japan are being squeezed by economic difficulties during the pandemic and longer-term decline in the linear television business. They are generally bidding only to retain the properties they have and are cutting costs where possible. There are no growing and ambitious new players in the market spending to gain market share. One industry insider told *SportBusiness Media* in recent weeks: “There is no new money in the market”.

DAZN had paid an increase of about 50 per cent in the previous Uefa rights cycle, agreeing a deal in 2017. It launched in Japan in 2016 and spent aggressively in its first few years to build a strong sports portfolio and gain market share.

DAZN has been cutting back spending in a bid to push its Japanese business toward breaking even. Amid the worst of the pandemic last year, it renegotiated its centrepiece deal with the domestic football league, the J.League, downwards in value by around 11 per cent. Around the same time, it negotiated exits from its Uefa deals in Japan and Southeast Asia

Wowow’s fee for the full seasons in 2021-22 and 2022-23 is similar to its fee for the second half of the 2020-21 season because Japanese audience interest is overwhelmingly in the latter half of the season, the knockout stages of the competitions. Audiences for Uefa club competition rights in Japan, and across Asia, are hobbled by the early morning, midweek kick-off times. For example, the group stage Champions League and Europa League kick-off times next week are at 2:45am and 5am in Japan.

BeIN bolsters

BeIN’s deal in Southeast Asia covers Cambodia, Laos and Brunei, alongside the bigger territories mentioned above.

In the previous cycle, beIN originally acquired the rights in Hong Kong only in a deal understood to be worth close to \$10m per season. DAZN is understood to have paid close to \$18m per season for the rights in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and the Philippines.

The vast majority of the value in both cycles lies in the rights in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Separate deals have been done this cycle with pay-television broadcaster Elta in Taiwan and multi-platform broadcaster TAP Digital Media Ventures in the Philippines.

BeIN is understood to have faced some competition for the rights, which were awarded after a second round of bidding. Most industry insiders believe competition was not particularly strong. There are thought to have been several bids from pay-television broadcasters in individual markets.

The Uefa rights complement beIN's strong portfolio of European football rights in the region. It also has rights in the same markets for Spain's LaLiga, Italy's Serie A and France's Ligue 1.

In the previous cycle, DAZN sublicensed the rights in three of its five territories after shelving a plan to launch a dedicated service in the region. It agreed deals with: pay-television broadcaster Astro in Malaysia, thought to be worth between \$5m and \$7m per season; beIN in Singapore, worth between \$3m and \$4m per season; and Elta in Taiwan, worth about \$500,000 per season.

However, DAZN failed to find a buyer willing to meet its valuation in Thailand, resulting in a heavy loss. Coverage of Uefa club competitions in Thailand and the Philippines last cycle was mostly streamed for free on DAZN's Goal.com website. [o](#)

FOOTBALL

Eleven seizes opportunity for reduced Premier League fee in Portugal

By Imran Yusuf

- Eleven to pay between €10m-€12m per season for Premier League, from 2022-25
- Fee reduced from €15m-€20m per season in previous deal with SportTV
- Sport TV secures F1 for around €2m per year, retains MotoGP for €1m per year

Multi-platform broadcaster Eleven Sports' deal for exclusive rights in Portugal to the English Premier League was enabled largely due to low first-round bids from competitors.

Eleven, which has not previously held rights for the English Premier League in Portugal, is understood to be paying between €10m and €12m per season over the three seasons from 2022-23 to 2024-25.

Portuguese pay-television broadcaster Sport TV currently holds the rights in [a three-season deal](#), from 2019-20 to 2021-22, valued at between €15m and €20m per season. Sport TV paid just under €10m per season from 2016-17 to 2018-19.

Regarding the decrease in value, one source told *SportBusiness Media* that the fee Sport TV is currently paying is "not economically viable". Sport TV [registered a loss](#) of €5.69m for the 2020 financial year, with 2019's figure having stood at €3.57m.

In May, the Premier League [went to market in Portugal, along with over 40 European and Central Asian countries, with its ITT](#). Companies were asked to lodge bids for both three-season (2022-23 to 2024-25) and six-season (2022-23 to 2027-28) contract periods. The bid deadline was on June 24.

A total of four different live rights packages were on offer in seven of the 'Broadcast Territories', including Portugal.

It is understood that in the first round, Eleven did not bid, but Sport TV's bid was lower than the Premier League's expectations. The process for Portugal then went to a second round, at which Eleven saw an opportunity and secured the full package of live and exclusive rights to all 380 matches per season.

It is understood that Eleven acquiring the rights for six seasons, rather than three, was never likely, as the EPL wanted a mandatory 35 per cent increase from the first three-season cycle to the second three-season cycle to secure rights from 2025-26 onward.

One source described the return of Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo to Manchester United as “the cherry on the cake” rather than being a driver of the deal for Eleven. It is understood the deal had already been reached prior to the transfer.

The league features a number of prominent Portuguese players, such as Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United), Bernardo Silva and Ruben Dias (Manchester City), Diogo Jota (Liverpool) and João Moutinho (Wolverhampton Wanderers).

For Eleven, the Premier League bolsters a football portfolio which already includes the [Uefa Champions League](#), [LaLiga](#), [the Bundesliga](#) and [Ligue 1](#). The company has continued on a steady growth trajectory in Portugal since its [2019 carriage deals](#) with Portugal’s three major pay-television operators: Nos, Vodafone and Meo.

Experts say it is unlikely Eleven will seek to develop behind-the-scenes content at Premier League club Leeds United, which, like Eleven, is owned by Aser Ventures, the investment company of Andrea Radrizzani.

Sport TV doubles down on motorsport

Sport TV’s deal for rights to the Formula 1 motor-racing series for the three years from 2022 to 2024 is understood to be for a fee of around €2m (\$2.27m) per year.

Eleven are also paying around €2m per year in the current cycle, from 2019 to 2021.

It is understood that Eleven opted not to attempt to retain its rights. Sources say that Eleven was reluctant to keep paying a fee at this level when F1 is offering the same product in the territory through its OTT platform [F1 TV](#).

Sport TV’s rights deal will also include coverage of the Formula 2, Formula 3 and Porsche Super Cup series.

The F1 deal came after Sport TV signed a five-year extension to its MotoGP rights agreement. The new deal with series promoter Dorna Sports runs from 2022 to 2026 and is understood to be valued at just over €1m (\$1.14m) per year, which sources say is a slight increase on the previous cycle.

In markets where fees are not at a premium, Dorna believes in building its brands with long-term partners, as also demonstrated in [its five-year renewal](#) with Discovery-owned Eurosport for World Superbikes in Europe.

Sport TV has held MotoGP rights in Portugal for over a decade and both partners were satisfied enough to sign on for a further five years. Sport TV agreed a one-year stopgap deal for MotoGP

rights this year, following on from a four-year deal from 2017 to 2020.

Local interest in MotoGP has increased since 2020, when the Portuguese GP returned to the calendar. This year's race at the Algarve International Circuit – commonly known as Portimão – took place on April 18. In addition, Portuguese rider Miguel Oliveira has risen to prominence by winning at Portimão last year.

It is understood that Sport TV did not face strong competition from Eleven Sports for MotoGP rights, as without the intention of renewing its F1 rights, Eleven did not see itself as being able to offer motorsport fans a comprehensive package.

Bundesliga renewal

In the summer, Eleven renewed its exclusive deal for rights to the German Bundesliga in Portugal rights for four seasons, from 2021-22 to 2024-25, for about €1m per season.

The fee is understood to be the same as what Eleven paid from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

The deal with Bundesliga International covers multi-platform rights to the Bundesliga, the second-tier Bundesliga 2, promotion/relegation play-offs and the German Supercup. The inventory also includes the Bundesliga Highlights Show and Bundesliga Weekly magazine programme.

One expert told *SportBusiness Media* that Bundesliga audience ratings in Portugal are now at the same level as La Liga, which has suffered in Portugal due to the league's loss of Ronaldo and ex-Barcelona star Lionel Messi. [o](#)

BASKETBALL

United Media pays increases across pan-regional deal for Fiba tournaments

By Nick Roumpis

- United Media will pay about €37m for Fiba rights in multi-territory deal, from 2021-29
- Deal covers ex-Yugoslav countries, Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus
- Deal worth €16m in the Balkans; about €20m in Greece and Cyprus; €1m in Bulgaria

United Media is paying increases in multiple territories for rights to events hosted by Fiba, world basketball's governing body, in a pan-regional deal covering the Balkans, Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria.

Media group United Media – which operates the Sportklub pay-television channels in the ex-Yugoslavia countries and the Nova pay-television channels in Bulgaria and Greece – will pay about €37m for exclusive rights to Fiba events over eight seasons, from 2021-22 to 2028-29.

The deal was brokered by Fiba Media, [the joint venture between Fiba and DAZN](#) responsible for the commercial rights of all major Fiba national-team competitions until the end of the 2032-33 season.

United's deal includes all major events between 2021 and 2029 including the EuroBasket tournaments in 2025 and 2029; the Fiba Basketball World Cups of 2023 and 2027; qualifiers for these competitions; and women's European and World Championships.

The upcoming EuroBasket due to take place in September 2022 was originally scheduled for 2021 but was cancelled due to Covid-19. As such, the tournament forms part of deals in the previous cycle, from 2017-18 to 2020-21.

Balkans

Prior to the new deal being struck, United already had a four-season agreement in place for coverage of Fiba events in the ex-Yugoslav countries, from 2021-22 to 2024-25, worth about €7m.

As a result of the latest pan-regional deal, the agreement in the ex-Yugoslav countries has been

extended until the end of the 2028-29 season for another €9m – totalling €16m over the eight seasons from 2021-22 to 2028-29.

On a per-season basis, this is about double the amount Fiba Media earned from its previous deal for national team competition rights in the Balkans with advertising agency Direct Media, from 2017-18 to 2020-21. That deal is thought to have been worth about €4m over the four seasons.

Direct Media sublicensed pay-television rights to United Media across the region before being bought by United in 2018. Direct Media continued to service the free-to-air sublicensing deals it had struck across the region.

United has traditionally considered major basketball events as an integral part of its portfolio in the Balkans. [It is the incumbent broadcaster of the EuroLeague](#), EuroCup and the Italian Lega Basket Serie A. In 2019, it lost NBA rights to pay-television broadcaster Arena Sport, which is owned by rival media group Telekom Srbija.

Greece and Bulgaria

In Greece, United's pay-television broadcaster Nova is understood to be paying €9m over the four seasons from 2021-22 to 2024-25, increasing its fee to about €10m in the second four-season cycle from 2025-26 to 2028-29. This is the first time that a pay-television broadcaster has acquired major international basketball event rights in Greece, replacing public-service broadcaster ERT. This deal also includes Fiba rights in Cyprus.

[ERT paid about €6.5m to secure exclusive rights to Fiba competitions between 2017-18 and 2020-21](#). The new deal with United Media represents an average per-season increase of 38 per cent in Greece.

Though ERT bid to retain the rights from 2021-22 and was unsuccessful, United and ERT are in active negotiations over a sublicensing deal that would see ERT acquire rights to the matches of the Greek national team. Greece's first game during the cycle will take place on November 25 against Great Britain.

In Bulgaria, United is understood to be paying around €1m for rights over the 2021-29 cycle. Bulgaria's national team are competing for a spot in the 2023 Basketball World Cup, which is to be held in Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines. ○

FOOTBALL

Telenet pays big increase to secure essential Premier League deal

By Callum McCarthy

- Telenet will pay about €27m per season for English Premier League rights
- Deal represents increase of about 50 per cent on Telenet's previous deal
- League leveraged Nent aggression across Europe to force increase in Belgium

The English Premier League has secured a strong increase in Belgium with incumbent broadcaster Telenet, leveraging the potential threat of market entry by Nent and Viaplay.

Telco Telenet will pay about €27m per season for exclusive rights to the Premier League in Belgium in a three-season deal, from 2022-23 to 2024-25. This is an increase of about 50 per cent on its current three-season deal with the league, from 2019-20 to 2021-22, [worth about €18m per season](#).

It is also a strong increase on Telenet's previous three-season deal for Premier League rights, worth about €20m per season from 2016-17 to 2018-19. This deal represented the high watermark for Premier League rights in Belgium until the telco's most recent agreement.

Telenet's new deal is for three seasons only as it did not want to commit to the league's Europe-wide stipulation that any six-season bid must include a 35-per-cent increase after the first three-season cycle. Telenet would have been expected to pay at least €36.5m per season from 2025-26 to 2027-28 in order to secure a longer term deal.

The deal was announced in July after a Europe-wide tender process run by the league. [Rights across Europe were tendered from 2022-23 onward in late May](#), with a first-round bid deadline of June 24. It is understood Telenet was invited to private negotiations with the league after the first round, during which it quickly secured the rights with an increased bid.

Sources say that during these private negotiations, Telenet parent company Liberty Global was invited to submit a multi-territory bid spanning Belgium and the Netherlands as a means of warding off the looming threat of media group Nent and its Viaplay streaming platform. Liberty Global also owns pay-television operator Ziggo, which was the incumbent broadcaster of the Premier League in the Netherlands.

Liberty declined to submit such a bid, instead allowing its subsidiaries to continue handling their own individual acquisition strategies. While Telenet successfully renewed its rights, [Ziggo lost Premier League rights to Nent in the Netherlands from 2022-23](#) after the media group submitted a strong six-season bid.

Though it is understood Telenet faced at least one rival bid, Nent is not understood to have made an attempt to acquire rights in Belgium. The media group's aggression in other territories made Telenet and Liberty Global wary of their threat, and the league was happy to leverage this to secure a strong increase in the territory.

For Telenet, securing Premier League rights was essential to the long-term survival of its sports broadcasting business. The league has become the central pillar of its Play Sports channels since [Telenet lost rights to the Belgian Pro League at the beginning of 2020-21](#).

Telenet will now attempt to refinance its purchase via improved carriage deals and sublicensing deals.

The telco will continue to exploit the rights in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, on its pay-television Play Sports channels. But as Telenet operates only in Flanders, it is expected to sublicense French-language rights to a broadcaster in the French-speaking region of Wallonia. Telenet has sublicensed French-language rights to telco Voo for the past six seasons, including in the current 2021-22 season. ○

TABLE TENNIS

World Table Tennis gets big increase in China from Migu

By Kevin McCullagh

- WTT agrees four-year deal with Migu worth between \$4m-\$4.5m per year
- Value is 70-per-cent increase on previous deals in China
- Migu becomes gatekeeper as talks with CCTV remain difficult

World Table Tennis has bucked the trend in China by securing a large percentage increase in the value of its media rights in a deal with Migu.

Streaming platform Migu – owned by telco China Mobile – is paying between \$4m (€3.5m) and \$4.5m per year in a deal covering exclusive rights in China to all WTT and International Table Tennis Federation events, from 2021 to 2024.

The deal started at the beginning of this year but was only [recently finalised and announced](#). Migu and China Mobile's Mo Bai He IPTV platform have been showing WTT and ITTF events throughout this year. Coverage will continue on both platforms throughout the contract.

China Mobile is acting as a gatekeeper for the rights and will ensure that all WTT and ITTF events are shown on free-to-air television. It has struck a sublicensing deal with state broadcaster CCTV to fulfil this.

In the ITTF's [previous four-year deals in China](#) – with CCTV and sports marketing company Seca, from 2017 to 2020 – the ITTF is understood to have earned a total of about \$2.5m per year. The new deal therefore represents an increase of about 70 per cent on the previous cycle.

The [IMG agency is advising WTT](#) on global media rights sales under a long-term deal beginning this year 2021.

WTT is the [new commercial unit](#) set up by the ITTF to manage its commercial rights and oversee a revamp of the annual professional table tennis tour. This year was the first of a new annual tournament structure created by WTT, with new branding and design. It is also the first year of a new commercial cycle for ITTF/WTT.

Most top-tier professional table tennis events each year are now have WTT branding. A handful

of events do not have WTT branding and continue to be titled as ITTF events. The WTT organisation is managing the commercial rights for all events.

Several more media rights deals are expected to be announced by WTT in the coming weeks ahead of this year's ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals in the United States, beginning November 23.

In a significant change for the new rights cycle, WTT has taken television production of its events in-house. It was previously handled by individual event organisers. IMG is managing production for WTT globally.

Rare increase

The fee increase in China has been secured at a time when the values of many sports rights properties in the market are in freefall.

The virtual collapse last year of PP Sports, previously the market-leading sports streaming platform, led to massive reductions in value for a host of rights-holders, particularly in football. The Chinese Super League, Uefa and most of the top five European football leagues all suffered big declines this year as they went to market for deals to replace their previous PP Sports agreements.

However, rights fee increases in China are not unheard of for properties that were not so highly valued previously. The UFC [managed a significant fee increase](#) in a deal announced in March.

While WTT and IMG are understood to have spoken to a range of possible buyers, it is not clear whether Migu faced serious competition for the rights.

WTT might have secured an even stronger deal had it not been for the pandemic. Its plans for what should have been a landmark launch year for the new tour were severely disrupted. Asian markets including China have employed some of the strictest travel restrictions globally, severely impacting Asia-focused international tours like WTT.

There have been no events in China this year and WTT has managed to run only 10 of 34 planned top-tier events.

Although table tennis is one of the most popular sports in China, properties in other sports like basketball and football have far outstripped it in recent years in terms of media rights fees. Industry insiders say Chinese table tennis audiences are very focused on the Olympics and the performance of the national team there, and have historically been much less enthusiastic about the annual tour. The new fee increase represents welcome progress for the ITTF and WTT.

Table tennis officials in China appear keen to improve the standing and value of the annual tour. There is heavy Chinese involvement in WTT, with Chinese Table Tennis Association officials in senior positions at the organisation and financial backing from Chinese firm Quanguan Sports.

Migu the gatekeeper

China Mobile's gatekeeper role for WTT is a signal of an important recent dynamic in China: state broadcaster CCTV has become an extremely difficult negotiating partner for international sports rights-holders. A protracted management reshuffle in the state broadcaster's sports department is understood to be the main reason.

ITTF events have historically been broadcast extensively by CCTV, so for the federation to sell exclusive gatekeeper rights to a subscription platform is unusual. However, there are mitigating factors that make the deal different from a typical pay-television deal in another market.

Firstly, Migu is required to sublicense to CCTV free-to-air linear rights covering all events. CCTV has been duly showing coverage of events this year.

Secondly, Migu has a very close relationship with CCTV. The two companies have an [extensive, high-value content sharing agreement](#) covering Uefa Euro 2020, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and the 2022 Fifa World Cup. The deal includes commitments for joint work on production.

China Mobile is also ultimately a state-owned company, like CCTV.

CCTV is thought to have made an underwhelming offer for the rights in direct negotiations, which encouraged the WTT to do the deal with Migu.

Difficulties negotiating with CCTV have also manifested in [late deals agreed by European football leagues](#) with the broadcaster in recent weeks, deep into the 2021-22 season. CCTV began broadcasting Italian Serie A matches in the last couple of weeks, following deals last month with the German Bundesliga and French Ligue 1.

Migu has emerged as something of a saviour in the Chinese sports rights market in the last year, as PP Sports imploded and rights-values nosedived. Migu has in the last 18 months agreed a slew of rights deals and [built one of the strongest sports portfolios](#) in the market. ○

BASKETBALL

NBA lands huge increase in Greece but suffers decline in Mena

By Nick Roumpis

- Cosmote paying \$3m per season for exclusive NBA rights, from 2021-24
- BeIN renews NBA deal for about \$6m per season, from 2021-24
- NBA earns about 90 per cent more in Greece; 20 per cent less in Mena

The NBA has almost doubled its fee in Greece amid growing competition between local broadcasters Nova and Cosmote, while a late agreement with beIN in the Middle East and North Africa resulted in a 20-per-cent decline.

SportBusiness Media understands pay-television broadcaster Cosmote is paying over \$3m per season to renew its NBA rights in a three-season deal, from 2021-22 to 2023-24. The new deal represents an increase of about 90 per cent [on the previous fee of just under \\$1.7m](#) per season paid over three seasons from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

Greece has traditionally been one of the most important European markets for the NBA, but its popularity in the country has grown even further in recent years thanks to Greek superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo, who won an NBA title last season with the Milwaukee Bucks.

Antetokounmpo's rising star is one of the main reasons for the significant increase in Greece, but strong competition between pay-television broadcasters Nova and Cosmote also contributed.

One source said the NBA was looking for \$4m per season in Greece before settling for a lower fee. It is understood that there was not much difference between the bids from Cosmote and Nova, as the latter also submitted a bid in the region of \$3m per season.

Experts say the NBA usually favours incumbent broadcasters unless a bid from a rival broadcaster is worth significantly more.

Cosmote, which announced the latest renewal for the 2021-24 cycle [in May](#), has been the NBA's broadcaster in Greece since 2012. The latest package includes over 350 live games per season, comprising up to eight regular season games per week, the NBA Playoffs and the NBA Finals.

The NBA's post-season play-in tournament, which was introduced last year and sees teams that occupied the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th seeds in each conference fight for a playoff spot in knock-out games, has also added to the value of NBA rights.

Cosmote – Nova battle

Cosmote has already lost several major properties to Nova, including [Germany's Bundesliga](#) and [Spain's LaLiga](#), thus it was eager to retain its NBA rights.

For Cosmote, rights to the NBA are – along with rights to eight Greek Super League clubs, the Uefa club competitions [and Serie A](#) – the broadcaster's 'blue chip' properties moving forward.

Besides replacing Cosmote as the broadcaster of the Bundesliga and LaLiga in Greece, Nova has also secured rights to the English Premier League for six seasons, from 2022-23 to 2027-28. Nova will pay over €100m in total for the rights, [in a deal that starts from €15m in the first season and gradually increases up to €23m for the sixth season](#).

After losing several properties to Nova, local experts said it was vital for Cosmote to retain NBA rights for another three seasons.

Cosmote's basketball portfolio also includes Spain's ACB Liga Endesa, Russia's VTB United League and Fiba's Basketball Champions League. Nova has rights to Europe's top-tier club competition EuroLeague, as well as the EuroCup and Italy's Lega Basket Serie A.

MENA fee goes down

The NBA also struck a late agreement with beIN covering the Mena region earlier this month at a reduced price.

BeIN has been the NBA's broadcaster in the region for the past 14 years, but its three-season renewal from 2021-22 to 2023-24 was only struck two weeks after this season started on October 19.

The broadcaster's decision to not renew rights to Serie A and Bundesliga in the region cast doubt over the fate of NBA rights as the season started – sources said there was uncertainty over beIN's spending budget and overall strategy around major sports properties.

After lengthy negotiations, it is understood that beIN will pay just under \$6m per season in its new deal, a decrease of more than 20 per cent on the \$8m per season it was paying in its previous five-season deal from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The new deal is also worth less than the \$6.5m per season paid by beIN during the 2013-14 to 2015-16 cycle.

BeIN is also the incumbent NBA rights-holder in France, [paying about \\$8m per season between 2020-24 cycle](#).

Big renewals ahead

After securing multiple extensions in Europe this season, the NBA will soon set its sights on two big renewals that are due in the next two seasons.

The league's deal with pay-television broadcaster Sky in the UK is coming to an end after the 2021-22 season. [Sky paid about an annual fee of \\$3.5m for the four-season deal](#), a 130 per cent increase on the \$1.5m that rival BT was paying from 2015-16 to 2017-18.

In Italy, the NBA's deal with Sky Italia is due to end after the 2022-23 season. [Sky Italia secured the rights after agreeing to pay \\$5.5m](#) in the first season (2010-20) rising to \$7m in 2022-23.

The common denominator in both renewals could be growing OTT platform DAZN, which has been present in Italy for four years and is close to acquiring UK pay-television broadcaster BT Sport. ○

FOOTBALL

Uefa sees modest gain for club competition rights in Hungary

By Nick Roumpis

- Uefa to earn €12m per season in Hungary for rights to club competitions
- AMC Networks and MTVA split UCL rights in deals worth €10m per season
- MTVA and RTL split rights to Europa League and Europa Conference League

Uefa has secured a modest increase for its club competition rights in Hungary thanks to its new deals with MTVA, AMC Networks and RTL.

SportBusiness Media understands that Uefa will earn a total of about €12m per season for rights to the Uefa Champions League, Europa League and Europa Conference League in the three-season cycle from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

This is an increase of around 10 per cent [on the €11m per season that Uefa earned from Champions League and Europa League rights during the 2018-21 cycle](#).

Media group AMC Networks, which operates the Sport1 and Sport2 pay-television channels in Hungary and was also the Champions League broadcaster between 2012 and 2018, will share the competition's rights with public-service broadcaster MTVA.

MTVA will have first pick games on Tuesdays and Wednesdays during the 2021-24 cycle, while AMC will show all remaining games. It is thought that the total value of Champions League rights in Hungary for the new cycle is about €10m per season.

Uefa's exclusive agent for commercial rights to its club competitions, Team Marketing, [launched the sales process in Hungary in April](#), giving interested parties a first round bid deadline of May 11.

By acquiring pay-television rights to the Champions League, AMC has taken a high-profile property from the TV2 Group, which held the rights in the previous cycle.

Local experts said that Package B, containing pay-television rights to all remaining matches, was the maximum the network could get given MTVA's strong position and large budget for sports rights acquisitions.

After taking back Champions League rights, AMC has boosted its sports portfolio, [which also includes the Italian Serie A](#), European Handball Federation events – including the top-tier Champions League and the second-tier European Handball League – as well as the NBA, which AMC recently renewed until 2024.

The loss is not disastrous for TV2, which launched its Spíler TV channels in 2016. It [has rights to Spain's LaLiga](#), one Bundesliga match per weekend (both from 2021-22 to 2024-25), and the English Premier League (from 2019-20 to 2021-22). TV2 secured its Bundesliga rights from Hungary's newly-launched pay-television broadcaster Network4, [which acquired Bundesliga rights in May](#), replacing AMC.

In addition, TV2 has struck a deal to renew its existing agreement with the English Premier League for another four seasons, from 2021-22 onward.

Europa League and Conference League

Rights to the Europa League and Europa Conference League will be split between MTVA and commercial broadcaster RTL in a deal valued at around €2m per season. This is thought to be double the €1m per season that Digi Sport and AMC paid for Europa League rights from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

MTVA will have the first pick for one game of either Europa or Conference League per week, while RTL will have rights to the remaining games of both competitions.

With only one Hungarian team – Ferencvaros – playing in the Europa League, this means that MTVA has rights to show the sole local team playing European football this season.

Sources said that RTL bid for rights to the remaining games of the two competitions, hoping that at least one other Hungarian team would qualify for the Europa Conference League. However, all three Hungarian teams – Ujpest, Puskas Akademia and Fehervar – got knocked out before the group stage.

“RTL was unlucky in this respect, but at least the Europa League with fewer teams is more competitive this season, giving them the chance to show some good games of this competition,” a local source said. ○

FOOTBALL

Sky NZ seizes opening to secure 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup

By Imran Yusuf

- Sky NZ to pay about \$1m for rights to Women's World Cup 2023
- Tournament to be hosted in Australia and New Zealand; Sky will sublicense FTA rights
- Spark paying between \$300,000-\$350,000 per season for Uefa club competitions

Pay-television broadcaster Sky New Zealand's agreement for exclusive media rights to all matches of the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup is the largest ever deal for the tournament in the country.

Sky is understood to be paying about \$1m (€880,000) for exclusive rights to the tournament, which will take place from July 20 to August 20, 2023. From the 2023 edition, the tournament is being expanded from 24 teams to 32, and from 52 matches to 64.

Sources say that while the deal represents a huge jump in the value of women's football in New Zealand, it also reflects a lack of competition and the country's small market size, given that New Zealand will co-host the tournament.

The deal is dwarfed in size by the Women's World Cup rights deal in Australia, which is also hosting the competition. Telco [Optus secured the rights](#) with a deal worth close to US\$14m.

Sources also say that significant free-to-air requirements hindered strong interest from other pay-television broadcasters such as telco Spark and pay-television broadcasters ESPN and beIN, whose distribution in New Zealand is in any case through a [joint venture with Sky](#).

One match per day, including all matches of the New Zealand national team, will be shown free-to-air. This was a requirement from Fifa in order to ensure wide distribution in the country.

It is understood that these 25 free-to-air matches also include four round-of-16 matches, two quarter-finals, both semi-finals, the final, and a selection of matches from the group stages which the broadcaster will select in conjunction with Fifa.

While the free-to-air plan has not yet been announced, one source told *SportBusiness Media* it was likely that these matches would be aired on Sky's free-to-air channel Prime.

However, other experts say Sky, in order to recoup more advertising revenue, might sublicense these free-to-air rights to the Discovery-owned Three channel or to public broadcaster TVNZ, which has the widest reach among channels in the country. This year Sky sublicensed the rugby league State of Origin series to Three and women's netball matches to TVNZ.

Tender details

Fifa [launched a tender](#) in the two host countries in April, with first-round bids due in May. Previously, Women's World Cup rights in these territories had been subsumed within a wider umbrella of Fifa events, but this time it was on a standalone basis.

For Fifa, this reflects a change in strategic approach to women's football, which, with regard to selling the Women's World Cup, one source described as "creating a new vertical on the sponsorship side and also on the media rights side."

The three packages offered to broadcasters in New Zealand were the same as those on offer in Australia: 'A1', containing rights to show 25 matches live on free-to-air; 'A2', containing rights to show all matches on pay-television; and 'B', containing comprehensive, exclusive rights for all matches, with an obligation to secure free-to-air coverage for 25.

After discussions with Fifa, it is understood that Spark opted not to bid due to the above requirements and its concerns about being able to commercialise the rights. Sources told *SportBusiness Media* that TVNZ was also interested in securing the rights.

Regarding the rights fee, experts say another useful benchmark is the 2017 Rugby League World Cup, when the rights-holder faced a similar situation. Despite the popularity of the sport among the public and New Zealand hosting the tournament, the [IMG agency was only able to sell the rights](#) to Sky for just over \$800,000.

Nevertheless, the rights fee paid by Sky is a large increase on the value of previous Fifa Women's World Cups in New Zealand. Sky was the broadcaster of the last two Women's World Cups, in 2015 and 2019, under [a deal covering all Fifa events](#) from 2015 to 2022. Sky paid around US\$2m in total for these rights, but the vast majority of this would have been internally allocated to the 2018 and 2022 men's World Cups.

Spark nets Champions League

Spark, meanwhile, has secured exclusive media rights in New Zealand to Uefa club competitions from 2021-22 to 2023-24 for about \$300,000 to \$350,000 per season.

The rights cover the Uefa Champions League, Europa League and Europa Conference League, including highlights, review shows and clips.

Spark are currently using the feed of UK pay-television broadcaster [BT Sport](#), including studio analysis, which sources say has proved popular among New Zealand viewers.

New Zealand is 12 hours ahead of Central European Time, so a match starting at 9pm in central Europe starts at 9am in the country. Sources say this is a more advantageous time than, for example, the east coast of Australia, where matches begin at 7am.

The rights are sold internationally by the Team Marketing agency. Team first went to market with the [rights in Oceania](#) at the beginning of the year, setting a first-round bid deadline of February 15.

Sky New Zealand held the rights during the 2018-21 cycle and are understood to have also bid for this cycle. One source told *SportBusiness Media*, however, that Sky and beIN “wouldn’t have pushed up the value given other focus points.” This summer Sky renewed its media [rights for Australia’s National Rugby League](#) for five years, from 2023 to 2027.

Sources say Spark was keen to acquire Uefa club competition rights as it believes midweek Champions League content works well with the mostly weekend-based English Premier League.

Spark currently [holds Premier League](#) rights for three seasons, from 2019-20 to 2021-22, in a deal worth about \$2.5m per season. Spark’s other properties include [New Zealand cricket](#), [Formula One and MotoGP](#). ○

BASKETBALL

SABC nets two-year deal for NBA with eye on more top-tier properties

By Imran Yusuf

- SABC paying about \$200,000-\$250,000 per year, from 2021-23
- NBA sees SABC as strong partner to boost growth in the country
- SABC has also secured rights for India's cricket tour of South Africa

The South African Broadcasting Corporation's deal for free-to-air rights to the National Basketball Association signals its intent to secure prominent global properties and "create a whole new proposition for sport on the free-to-air space," according to the broadcaster's general manager for sports Gary Rathbone.

The public-service broadcaster is paying the NBA between \$200,000-\$250,000 per season over two seasons, 2021-22 and 2022-23.

SABC Sport will air over 35 games each season with the rights including a Christmas Day game, NBA All-Star Saturday Night, the Conference Finals and the Finals. The 'NBA Action' weekly magazine show will also be aired by the SABC.

The SABC will broadcast matches live or delayed on SABC 1 and the SABC Sports Channel on the digital-terrestrial TelkomOne and OpenView platforms. Experts say that the SABC's reach is the key driver of the NBA partnering with the broadcaster.

The SABC's weekly live match during the regular season will be on Saturdays. There is a seven-hour time difference between the east coast of the US and South Africa. A source told *SportBusiness Media* the weekly match would, in most cases, be the game which commences at 5pm EST, meaning a midnight start in South Africa.

Rathbone says the late start on Saturday nights does not pose a problem as the primary target audience are largely South African youth. "The popularity of basketball is growing, particularly in the younger demographic. It speaks to younger South Africans in a direct way," he said.

The NBA is understood to be working with SABC Sport to produce a localised pre-game and half-time studio show for these Saturday matches.

The SABC plans to [launch a streaming platform](#) next year and the broadcaster will be able to simulcast its NBA matches on this platform, but not offer catch-up and VOD. For fans wanting this, the NBA's own streaming platform, NBA League Pass, is available in South Africa.

Rathbone also revealed to *SportBusiness Media* that India's cricket tour of South Africa, comprising three Tests, three ODIs and four T20s and commencing on December 17, would be broadcast by the SABC.

Previously, Cricket South Africa and pay-television broadcaster SuperSport signed a [six-season deal](#), from 2015-16 to 2020-21, worth about ZAR100m per season. Over the course of the deal, the SABC sublicensed CSA content from SuperSport on a series-by-series basis. It is understood SuperSport are still in negotiations with CSA regarding pay-television rights for the new cycle.

NBA returns to SABC

The NBA was last shown on the SABC from 2011 to 2013. In the 1990s, the NBA was also aired on free-to-air television in South Africa when SABC showed the *NBA Inside Stuff* magazine programme.

In the last cycle, the NBA [agreed a rights deal](#) with commercial broadcaster e.tv. This ran in the 2019-20 season and also the pandemic-affected season of 2020-21.

Last season e.tv. continued to air matches during the NBA's bubble in Orlando, showing Saturday games as well as major events such as the Finals.

It is understood that the NBA was satisfied with its partnership with e.tv, which is still involved in the new deal in one form, as matches are available on the SABC through e.tv's [OpenView](#) HD platform, South Africa's first free-to-air satellite TV service platform.

However, it is understood the SABC and the NBA were both keen on a deal. The NBA, which opened its African headquarters in Johannesburg in 2010, sees widespread free-to-air coverage on the public-service broadcaster as key to growth in South Africa.

The MultiChoice Group, which owns SuperSport, currently broadcast the NBA through a carriage deal with ESPN that enables coverage of the league on its SuperSport channels. This agreement began in July 2020.

In South Africa, ESPN broadcasts up to three games per week on US Fridays and Sundays – not on Saturdays, which falls under the SABC's domain – throughout the regular season and playoffs. ESPN also broadcasts NBA Action and popular US-produced NBA shows and NBA coverage, including SportsCenter and NBA Today.

Like the SABC, ESPN will also show select key tentpole games and programming, including Christmas Day games, the NBA All-Star Game, the Conference Finals and the Finals.

Range of content

In August, the SABC unveiled a [deal with media group Disney](#) that includes rights to the English Football League, the Basketball Africa League, World Athletics events, the Dutch Eredivisie and Top Rank boxing.

Regarding the South African national football team, the SABC made an agreement with Fifa for all six of the national team's World Cup 2022 qualifiers, which concluded on November 14 with the team's match against Ghana.

The SABC currently holds rights to one fixture per match week of the [German Bundesliga](#), covering 2020-21 to 2021-22, alongside ancillary content in the form of a weekly preview show and the Bundesliga highlights programme.

For Rathbone, the NBA will become a core part of this portfolio. The deal is for two seasons, but Rathbone says: "We're very keen to grow this. I see this as a big part of our offering to SA sports fans in the coming years." ○

FOOTBALL

Romania's TVR misses EBU rights payment for 2022 Fifa World Cup

By Nick Roumpis

- TVR seeks extension after missing 2022 World Cup rights payment
- TVR also missed payment to EBU in 2020 but was given one-year extension
- Legislation preventing TVR paying rights fees in advance of events

Romania's public broadcaster TVR has missed a payment to the European Broadcasting Union for rights to the 2022 Fifa World Cup, putting the fate of its existing agreement at risk.

SportBusiness Media understands that TVR failed to pay an instalment of over €1m (\$1.16m) in September and is currently in talks with EBU over an extension of the payment deadline.

Sources say TVR's inability to meet its obligations to the EBU is due to the Romanian government preventing it from making advance payments for sports rights. The government began cracking down on TVR's spending in 2017 amid the broadcaster's spiralling debts.

In 2012, Romania's public broadcaster agreed to pay about €18m to secure rights to the Fifa World Cups in 2018 and 2022 as part of a wider deal by the EBU, which acquired the two tournaments' rights in a 37-territory deal worth between €310m and €315m.

Under the agreement with the EBU, TVR had to make up to two annual payments for the first three years and up to three payments in the remaining years.

It is understood the total amount left to be paid by TVR to EBU for rights to the 2022 World Cup is around €4m. Having missed the payment for the September instalment, TVR is at risk of losing the rights if EBU decides to go to the market seeking a broadcaster to replace TVR.

The two parties are understood to be in discussions over finding a solution. TVR will look to extend the payment deadline and make the instalment at a later date.

At the same time, TVR has asked the government to change the legislation restricting it from making timely payments. TVR has previously missed another payment to EBU for rights to the 2022 World Cup in March 2020 due to insufficient funds but managed to secure a one-year extension.

It is understood that the latest missed payment by TVR is a result of a decision made by the Romanian government in August that blocks funds being spent on future events. The Romanian taxpayers used to be the main funder of TVR via the citizens' electricity bill, however this tax was abolished in 2017. It is since then that TVR became an organisation fully funded by the government.

EBU issues

This is not the first time that TVR is facing problems around payments to the EBU. In 2016, Romania was disqualified from the Eurovision Song Contest after failing to pay the €15.3m debt it owed to the EBU.

This came at a time that TVR was facing insolvency on the back of cumulative losses of RON689m (€139m/\$159m) for the fiscal year 2015. Since then, TVR's ability to bid for major sport events has been undermined.

Its first crucial loss was rights to the Uefa European Championship in 2016, which were shared between telco Telekom Romania and commercial broadcaster Pro TV.

TVR's financial situation since then has improved as the broadcaster has reported marginal profits for the financial years 2019 and 2020.

TVR's inability to make upfront payments has also delayed the finalisation of a deal to acquire rights for the upcoming 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing and the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

The Romanian broadcaster has reached an agreement in principle with media group Discovery but is awaiting clearance from the Romanian government in order to be able to pay the deposit. TVR is understood to be paying [around €2.5m for rights to the 2022 and 2024 Olympic Games](#).

The upcoming Olympic Games are one of the last major events in TVR's rights portfolio, as its bidding capabilities have shrunk amid its payment restrictions. ○