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Serie A picks up pieces as global media rights revenue falls 14 per cent



World Athletics moves early to lock in long-term EBU deal



LaLiga strikes in red-hot Central America to more than double fee

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BASKETBALL

NBA weathers storm to increase digital rights revenue in China

By Kevin McCullagh

- Latest deal with China Mobile worth more than \$50m per season
- Tencent negotiated a discount on its 2019 mega-deal
- Digital rights revenues are better than pre-pandemic expectations

A deal with China Mobile beginning this season has pushed the value of the NBA's digital media rights in China to record highs, a remarkable outcome after a tumultuous period in the market.

China Mobile and the NBA earlier this month [announced a digital media rights and sponsorship deal](#) covering five seasons, from 2021-22 to 2025-26. The deal is understood to be worth \$50m (€44m) in the first season and to rise significantly in subsequent seasons to a value below \$100m. It is understood that media rights accounts for the vast majority of the value of the deal.

The deal gives China Mobile extensive rights including live coverage of all games each season on subscription platforms. The coverage is being made available via the telco's streaming service Migu and its IPTV platform Mobaihe.

The sponsorship rights include China Mobile becoming the NBA's: exclusive communications partner in China, '5G+ ecosystem partner', '5G+ official laboratory partner', and 'official exclusive video ring back tone partner'.

The NBA also has a digital rights deal in China with media group Tencent, covering the five seasons from 2020-21 to 2024-25. Tencent has acquired a more extensive set of rights than China Mobile, including rights to stream live games for free.

The Tencent deal was originally agreed in 2019 at a value of \$300m per season. It is understood to have been renegotiated before it started in 2020-21. A range of industry sources spoken to by *SportBusiness Media* have agreed with the \$270m-per-season value put on the renegotiated deal by Chinese industry news service Lanxiong Sports. The renegotiation is thought to have included a carve-out of streaming and IPTV rights that enabled the later Migu deal.

The renegotiation is understood to have been triggered by the pandemic, but sources believe it may also have been part of the fallout of [the 2019 Daryl Morey affair](#), in which the former Houston Rockets general manager tweeted in support of protestors in Hong Kong.

The upshot of the Tencent renegotiation and the new Migu deal is that the NBA's digital media rights revenue from the market between this season and 2024-25 will exceed \$320m per year.

Digital media rights are the most lucrative category of rights in China due to the twin effects of state broadcaster CCTV's dominance of the linear rights market and the streaming industry that has boomed in the last decade. IPTV rights are often classed with digital streaming rights in China – the two main categories in the market are linear television rights; and digital rights spanning streaming and IPTV.

The NBA has also historically had a free-to-air linear television rights deal in China with CCTV. The last deal between the two parties began in 2019-20 but was terminated shortly after Morey's comments in October 2019. There is no sign of a new deal being agreed.

CCTV stopped showing live NBA matches after Morey's comments. It has shown a handful of matches since, [including the All-Star Game](#) at the end of last season. It has not shown coverage of the 2021-22 season.

A recent value for the NBA's deals with CCTV is not available. During the 2012-13 to 2014-15 cycle, CCTV is thought to have paid about \$33m per year.

Extraordinary outcome

When \$300m per year was achieved in [the original 2019 Tencent deal](#), it was considered a landmark deal for the NBA. It was the biggest-ever media rights deal in China and one of the most valuable overseas sports rights deals ever agreed by a sports league in a single market.

For the NBA to come through a pandemic-related renegotiation and the hugely disruptive Morey affair with more revenue is extraordinary.

The result is even more remarkable given that rights fees in China for many other major sports properties have crashed in the last year. This happened mostly as a result of the virtual collapse of former sports streaming market leader PP Sports. Major European football properties have seen [rights values decline by around 80 per cent](#) in deals agreed this year.

However, NBA revenues in China were not unscathed by the turmoil of the last few years. Most market insiders believe media rights and sponsorship fees were deeply discounted by Chinese partners in 2019-20 because of the Morey affair.

League commissioner Adam Silver told media in February 2020 that the organisation [would lose "hundreds of millions of dollars"](#). ESPN reported in October 2020 that the saga [had cost the league \\$200m](#).

Last season, 2020-21, the NBA's only significant media rights deal in China media is thought to have been the Tencent deal.

Beginning this season, the league also has a clips deal in China [with video platform Kuaishou](#). The deal is reported to be for an initial three-season term with an option to extend for a further two seasons upon agreement between the parties.

Crown jewel

Industry insiders say the NBA's ability to maintain its revenue in China is a result of a few key factors.

First, the US basketball league remains by some distance the most popular sports property in the market. It has nurtured its value in the market over decades, notably creating an NBA China unit to manage commercial rights sales, including media rights, as well as fan engagement and marketing activity locally.

Second, the NBA is the core sports property for Tencent's video entertainment business. Tencent's focus on sport has weakened in recent years, resulting in it dropping some smaller properties or renewing them at lower values. The formerly separate Tencent Sport division has been merged into Tencent Video, which oversees the company's wider streaming business. But the company has maintained focus on the NBA as its crown jewel sports property.

More widely, Tencent is also one of the biggest and healthiest businesses in the Chinese media sector, well able to afford premium fees for the properties it deems important.

Third, the NBA has become one of several rights-holders to benefit from China Mobile's decision to establish a strong position in sports broadcasting. The company has spent heavily on sports rights in the last couple of years and assembled one of the strongest sports portfolios in the market.

Like Tencent, China Mobile is a buyer with a rock-solid business and massive financial resources from business lines other than sports video streaming. ○

FOOTBALL

No guaranteed fees for Uefa as sales agent process sprints to a finish

By Callum McCarthy

- Endeavor, Infront, Relevent the front-runners hoping to replace Team Marketing
- RFP fails to attract minimum guarantee bids, making Team odds-on favourite
- Uefa executive committee to decide winner as soon as December 16

Uefa and the European Clubs Association's hopes of receiving a minimum guarantee for rights to Uefa club competitions look to have been dashed after bidders failed to find a cost-effective method of delivering one.

Four front-runners have emerged in [the process to find a sales agent for Uefa club competitions from 2024-25 onward](#): Endeavor, Infront, Relevent, and incumbent Team Marketing. In accordance with the request for proposal's stipulations, IMG, Infront and Relevent all propose to create separate corporate entities to manage the contract.

SportBusiness Media understands all four have submitted bids spanning six seasons, from 2024-25 to 2029-30. All bids are based on projected commercial rights income with no guarantee to either offer money up front or make up any shortfall. Sources say bidders explored all avenues including private equity backing and bespoke investment funds, but that the cost of borrowing and the risk of investing in such a project was judged to be too great.

One source said that, given the need to borrow at least €4bn (\$4.52bn) each season to cover a guarantee Uefa would accept, even the lowest hypothetical cost of credit would have wiped out any margin it could have hoped to make. Insuring a shortfall guarantee – in which a bidder would guarantee to make up any deficit should they not hit sales targets – was also deemed too expensive and risky.

On the private equity and investment front, sources say funds were seeking an internal rate of return (IRR) of between 15 and 25 per cent from any investment in a special purpose vehicle selling Uefa club competition rights, making any such move completely infeasible.

In addition, Uefa and the ECA are understood to have rejected several offers that included the purchase of an ownership stake in Uefa club competitions.

Team Marketing generates over €3.6bn per season from commercial rights to Uefa's club competitions in the current cycle, from 2021-22 to 2023-24. It does not provide Uefa with any guarantee and works on a commission basis, keeping just over one per cent of total revenue – between €40m and €50m per season in the current cycle.

The lack of guarantee offers has disappointed Uefa president Aleksander Čeferin and ECA president Nasser Al-Khelaifi, who continue to push bidders to find a way to make it happen. After companies presented to Uefa and the ECA on November 22 and 23, Čeferin and Al-Khelaifi stressed the advantage of offering a minimum guarantee in follow-up calls to bidders on December 1.

Bidders are due to submit additional information and any necessary amendments to their original presentations on December 6. Sources said a final decision on a winning bidder could be made as soon as December 16, when Uefa's Executive Committee is next to meet.

However, they could have to wait until December 31 to know their fate. While multiple sources told *SportBusiness Media* that December 16 has been earmarked as decision day, the RFP states that a decision could be made on December 31 or even later, at the governing body's discretion. The RFP was sent out by Uefa Club Competitions SA, the joint venture between Uefa and the ECA, on October 15 with a bid deadline of November 15.

Opportunities for growth

Team Marketing – which has been the agency responsible for selling commercial rights to the Uefa Champions League since 1992 – is still considered by experts to be odds-on to renew its contract.

Experts cite various factors in favour of Team, including the agency's intimate knowledge of the competitions; the short timeframe in which the process is taking place and the lack of time any winning bidder would have to incorporate, recruit staff and sell rights; Uefa's reluctance to entertain offers of direct investment; and the lack of minimum guarantee offers.

Any winning bidder would be expected to create a separate corporate entity based in Switzerland, quickly recruit key roles and begin the sales process in Q2 2022. Team is already based in Switzerland and has around 150 full-time staff.

Despite the odds being stacked against Team's rivals and widespread skepticism over Uefa and the ECA's intentions, sources at agency bidders say they feel there is a genuine chance they could dislodge Team and win the contract – a marked difference from industry sentiment when the RFP was released.

Presentations were heard on November 21 and 22 by a 14-person panel comprised of Uefa and ECA executives. Each shortlisted bidder was allocated a 45-minute slot to present their commercial plan for the competitions, followed by a 45-minute question-and-answer session led by Čeferin and Al-Khelaifi.

Bidders are said to have been satisfied they would have an exclusive mandate to agree deals without interference, despite the RFP stating that Uefa and the ECA reserve the right to “negotiate all elements of, and have final approval in respect of, all agreements to be entered into with commercial partners”.

Uefa and the ECA then held a call with each bidder on December 1 to ask further questions, request information and provide advice regarding improvements to each respective bid. Multiple sources said that Uefa and the ECA continued to mention the importance of providing financial guarantees on these follow-up calls.

Keys to victory

Even if minimum guarantee offers were feasible, none of the bidders polled by *SportBusiness Media* said they would have made such an offer, given the huge amount of risk involved.

“One bad sale in a top-five European market and that could be the end of your company,” one prominent agency executive said. “It’s an unthinkable risk for an agency, a fund or an investor to take. Only the Saudis or the Qataris could swallow a loss like that.”

Informed sources say the prescriptive nature of the RFP and the lack of minimum guarantee bids means Team’s rivals have submitted relatively similar proposals that focus on particular areas of improvement.

These include media rights growth in the United States, Asia-Pacific and Europe’s top-five markets; a greater focus on marketing the competition to young people, including now-customary nods to expanding the competition’s presence in the ‘metaverse’; and a more flexible approach to the sales process than Team’s historically rigid, three-season sales cycles predicated around discrete tenders in each market.

It is understood that several former Team executives have been actively consulting bidders on their company structures and sales strategies, putting their knowledge of Uefa club competitions and European football politics to work. At least one ex-Team executive has been named as a key member of staff on a bid that rivals Team.

Sources say Relevent is especially focused on marketing the Champions League in the US and Asia, drawing attention to its role in the growth of LaLiga’s media rights revenues in the US, the relative growth of English Premier League media rights revenue in the US compared to the Champions League, as well as its established record as a European club football tournament promoter via its pre-season International Champions Cup tournaments.

Both Endeavor and Infront are thought to have been particularly aggressive on media rights revenue projections in Europe, where four of Europe’s big five markets – the UK, France, Italy and Spain – are experiencing a period of stagnation or worse. Only Germany produced a large percentage increase for Team Marketing in the current cycle – something that analysts believe is unlikely to be repeated when the rights are sold from 2024-25 onward.

Team itself is under pressure to be more ambitious with its projections, having delivered a cycle-on-cycle revenue increase of about 13 per cent from the 2018-19 to 2020-21 cycle to the current 2021-22 to 2023-24 cycle. Experts also said Team is likely to offer an overhaul to its commission structure, with higher revenues only available should it hit lofty targets.

Uefa once owned a 20-per-cent stake in Team before selling it to Highlight Communications – now Team’s 100-per-cent shareholder – in 2010. One informed source said it was not inconceivable that such a model – where Uefa and the ECA takes a direct stake in the agency selling the rights – could return from 2024-25.

Most bidders have found that undercutting Team’s margin has been a more difficult task than they originally imagined. Before undertaking detailed analyses of what would be required to service the contract, some agency sources believed the project could be run with as few as 25 full-time staff. However, most bidders ultimately settled on plans to staff their special purpose vehicles with between 80 and 100 people across all departments. ○

FOOTBALL

Serie A picks up pieces as global media rights revenue falls 14 per cent

By Frank Dunne

- International rights value drops by almost 40 per cent but Infront makes a profit
- Domestic rights value down five per cent as Sky hamstrung by regulator
- 36 per cent uplift in domestic Coppa Italia deal helps league claw back some revenue

Though Italy's Serie A was hamstrung by the country's invasive regulators and by a broader bear market around the world, its own decisions have contributed to a dramatic shortfall in media rights revenue. In particular, its inability to read the shifting geopolitical sands in the Middle East has proved costly.

Media rights income for Italy's top football league, Serie A, will drop by almost €570m (\$645m) over the current three-season cycle, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, or about €189m per season. The league is set to earn about €1.15bn per season for its domestic and international rights, compared to the €1.34bn per season it earned in the 2018-19 to 2020-21 cycle.

Set against the losses, the league is saving about €60m per season in commission fees to the Infront agency, the league's former media rights adviser, by handling the sales process for the 2021-2024 cycle in-house. Despite losing the domestic advisory contract, the agency still made a profit from Serie A rights, netting a margin of between four and eight per cent on the sale of the league's international rights

Domestic Serie A revenue in the new cycle stands at €937.3m per season, down five per cent on the €986.5m per season it earned in the last cycle. The main live rights packages were acquired by streaming service DAZN and Sky Italia, hitherto Italy's primary broadcaster of Serie A since the platform was launched in 2003. [DAZN is paying €840m per season](#) (to which its distribution partner, Telecom Italia, contributes €330m per season), with Sky adding a further €87.5m per season. In the [last cycle](#), Sky paid €780m per season and DAZN €193m per season.

The biggest shortfall is in the revenue from international rights, where income has dropped by 39.5 per cent, from €354.5m per season to €214.9m per season. In the last cycle, the net amount the [IMG agency paid for global rights](#), after two renegotiations, was €325.5m per season. On top of this, IMG paid a fee of four-per-cent of the rights fee for access to the

international signal, working out at €13m per season. The agency also paid €12m per season for betting rights. Italian state broadcaster Rai paid a further €4m per season for global Italian-language rights, taking total league income to €354.5m per season.

In this cycle, the league agreed a [deal with the Infront agency](#) for global rights, excluding the US and the Middle East and North Africa (Mena), worth €139m per season. Infront is thought to have earned between €145m and €150m per season on sales, a margin of between four per cent and eight per cent. The fee includes the cost of access to the international signal.

The league directly agreed a deal in the US with CBS worth almost €57m per season. Betting rights were acquired by Stats Perform for about €18m per season, a 50-per-cent uplift on what IMG had paid. It was a renewal of IMG's deal with the data services company.

The league also enjoyed a big uplift in the value of the domestic rights to its cup competition, the Coppa Italia. Mediaset paid €48.2m, an increase of 36 per cent on the €35.5m Rai had paid in the last cycle.

The bulk of the drop in international fees comes from one market: Mena. In the previous cycle, pay-television operator beIN Media Group had paid about €105m per season for the rights. At the time of going to press, the league still has no broadcast deal in the region.

The 20 clubs have yet to decide on the offer made by the Infront agency last month to cover the shortfall in the region in return for being awarded an advisory deal for the league from 2024-25 to 2029-30. If the offer is accepted, the outcome of the whole sales cycle could look very different – closer to flat than a 14-per-cent drop.

The clubs have also so far failed to agree deals for their domestic archive rights. The league is in talks with both DAZN and Sky. The international archive rights were sold to Infront for the territories it covers. In the last cycle, IMG paid the clubs about €20m per season for their international archive rights.

From 2008 until the last cycle, Infront had been the league's media rights adviser for both domestic and international sales. It guaranteed the league minimum income of €5.94bn over the six seasons from 2015-16 to 2020-21, or just under €1bn per season, and earned a share of revenue above this threshold. Its mandate was not renewed for the current cycle. Rights sales were overseen by the league president, Paolo Dal Pino, its chief executive, Luigi De Siervo, and head of media rights, Maria Solbiati.

On top of the loss in value of its media rights, Serie A is suffering badly from the economic impact of the Covid pandemic. By September 2020, it was already reporting [losses of €500m](#). In September, two of its biggest clubs, Juventus and Inter Milan, each reported losses of about €250m in the previous financial year. The clubs have so far declined a lifeline from [private equity companies](#) which had offered to take a 10-per-cent in a newly created commercial vehicle for €1.7bn.

Serie A total rights value, 2021-24 v 2018-21 (€m per season)

Duration	Domestic value	International value	Total	% fall
2018-19 to 2020-21	986.5	354.5	1,341	
2021-22 to 2023-24	937.3	214.9	1,152.2	14.1

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker; Italian Serie A Media Rights, 2010-21

Serie A domestic rights deals from 2021-2024 (€m per season)

Rights	Buyer	Value
All 10 matches live, 7 exclusive	DAZN	840
3 live matches co-exclusive	Sky	87.5
Radio rights, live	Rai	0.4
Free-to-air highlights (6.30pm)	Rai	4.2
Free-to-air highlights (10pm)	Mediaset	2.1
Digital clips	Rai/Sky/Mediaset/OneFootball ¹	2
Free-to-air local highlights	21 local broadcasters	0.6
Primavera U21 rights	Sportitalia	0.5
Total		937.3

¹Each paid €500,000 per season

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

Serie A international media rights deals, 2021-2024, €m per season

Rights	Buyer	Value
Media, global (ex-US, Mena)	Infront	139
US	CBS	57
Betting, global	Stats Perform	18
Scouting database	Instat/Wyscout	0.4
In-flight/in-ship	Aser Group	0.5
Total		214.9

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

Infront Serie A deals, 2021-24 (€m per season)

Territory	Buyer	Value
Balkans	Telekom Srbija	27
SE Asia, Australia, France	BeIN Media	22
Latam, Central America, Caribbean	ESPN	14.2
Russia	Gazprom Media	9
China	China Mobile (Migu)	4.3
	CCTV	1
Sweden and Finland	TV4 Media	5.5
Brazil	ESPN	3.4
Greece	Cosmote	3
Denmark	TV2 Denmark	3
Indian subcontinent	Viacom 18	0.4

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

Domestic difficulties

The league put its domestic live rights up for [auction](#) on January 4 this year, with a total reserve price for its packages of €1.15bn per season, which would have represented an 18-per-cent increase on the last cycle. It was a difficult moment for the sports-rights market generally. Leading industry figures had argued that growth in the market had peaked. Every rights-holder, even those for premium properties, was facing more testing conditions than at any time for two decades.

Arguably, a five-per-cent drop is not a bad outcome in the circumstances, when the value of the domestic live rights to the strongest football league in the world, England's Premier League, remained flat. To do better, Serie A needed to be able to pit two players against each other: long-term incumbent Sky and newcomer DAZN. Mediaset had long since scaled down its pay-television ambitions and an Amazon bid could not be relied upon.

However, any hope of drawing an aggressive bid from Sky was stymied by a May 2019 ruling by the country's antitrust authority, L'Autorità per le Garanzie della Concorrenza e del Mercato, preventing Sky from acquiring rights for digital exploitation on an exclusive basis until 2022. This capped the amount Sky, under its new US owner Comcast, was prepared to invest in premium sports rights.

Serie A is unique in world football for the level of regulatory scrutiny to which it is subjected. Its rights sales are governed in the first place by legislation, the highly prescriptive 2008 Melandri Law. The law requires the league to provide the company's competition and communications regulators with detailed guidelines of its sales strategy. Invariably, they are approved after consultation. Yet, invariably, the antitrust authority investigates the completed deals with broadcasters, often leading to protracted legal battles which, eventually, the league usually wins.

Too many eggs in beIN's basket

The bulk of the loss is the value of the league's international rights is down to the Mena region, where beIN Media Group had been paying €105m per season for the rights. Globally, beIN was responsible for about 55 per cent of the league's income. However, the league managed to alienate its most important international partner.

The kind view is that Serie A got caught up in geopolitics and is paying for something that was beyond its control: the Saudi economic blockade of Qatar. The harsher view is that the league is paying for two mistakes: not being proactive enough in the battle against the Saudi-run pirate service beoutQ, which was decimating beIN's business, and awarding the hosting rights to the Italian Super Cup to Saudi Arabia, almost exactly one year after the blockade was announced. The hosting deal netted the league \$30m, a fraction of what it has lost from not renewing with beIN.

BeIN did not bid for the rights in the initial auction process for Mena. In subsequent private

negotiations it is thought to have made several offers in the single-digit millions of dollars, including one proposal to share revenues on pay-per-view coverage of the league. All bids were rejected by the league.

There is currently no broadcast deal in Mena. The situation was set to be discussed again in a league assembly on Friday (December 3). The league has been seeking one-month non-exclusive deals with multiple operators and [held talks with sports marketing agencies](#) about a mandate to sell the rights, with a target of €50m per season.

Since the beginning of the season, the league has been showing Serie A matches on a specially created, free-to-view YouTube channel. One local rights expert argued this was a tactical error: anybody can see that the number of subscribers to the channel is in the low tens of thousands – hardly a strong bargaining position for pitching Serie A as a must-have property for media operators.

Coppa Italia

The league had two success stories in this cycle: betting rights and the Coppa Italia. The 50-per-cent increase in the betting and data rights reflects a continued growth in that market, largely underwritten by a liberalisation of sports betting laws in the world’s biggest sports market, the US. A healthy increase had been widely predicted.

The 36-per-cent increase in the value of the Coppa Italia rights was largely down to a reformatting of the competition to increase the proportion of games between teams in the two divisions, Serie A and Serie B. It also reflected a bounce-back in Italy’s advertising market post-Covid and Mediaset’s corresponding appetite for putting live sport back on its free-to-air channels.

The sales cycle for the international rights to the cup is not yet complete, so a total value is not yet available. Friday’s assembly will also decide on what to do in markets where the Coppa rights have not yet been sold. In the last cycle, the [league sold the rights directly](#), earning about €10m per season. ○

Coppa Italia/Supercoppa domestic rights, 2021-24 (€m per season)

Package	Broadcaster	Value
Exclusive live TV	Mediaset	48.2
Live radio	Rai	0.4
TV highlights	Sky	0.5
Total		49.1

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

Coppa Italia/Supercoppa deals in selected territories, 2021-2024

Territory	Broadcaster
US	CBS ¹
Americas (ex-US)	S&T Sports Group
Germany, Austria, Japan, Spain	DAZN
Australia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Indonesia, Macau, Thailand, Singapore	Reddentes Sport
Sub-Saharan Africa	Star Times
Baltic states, UK, Ireland, CIS, Turkey, Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia Indian subcontinent	Saran Media
Balkans	KG Telesports
Bulgaria	EAD
Nordics	Silver Spring Media
Greece, Cyprus	Asset Entertainment
Poland	Media Sports Management
Ukraine	TRBC Ukraine
Albania	Artmotion
Netherlands	Ziggo
Israel	Charlton
Malta	Melita

¹CBS paid €6m per season for Coppa Italia rights in the US

Source: SportBusiness Media Rights Tracker

ATHLETICS

World Athletics moves early to lock in long-term EBU deal

By Imran Yusuf

- EBU to pay about \$17m per year for World Athletics rights in Europe and Africa
- WA initiated discussions, keen to take all key agreements to 2029
- EBU to focus on digital distribution via members to boost audiences

The European Broadcasting Union will pay a slight increase to retain its rights to World Athletics Series events, including the World Athletics Championships, from 2024 to 2029.

The EBU, the consortium of European free-to-air broadcasters, is understood to have agreed to pay an average of about \$17m (€15.17m) per year for rights in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa across all platforms. Non-exclusive radio rights are also included.

The fee in the new deal represents an annual increase of about 20 per cent on the current cycle. In the current deal, the EBU teamed up with the ESPN Media Distribution agency to strike a [deal worth about \\$85m \(€75.8m\)](#), from 2018 to 2023, for platform-neutral rights to World Athletics events in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. ESPN MD is not involved in the deal from 2024.

In the new deal, 29 EBU members have already signed up to broadcast the World Athletics Series events over the course of the six years, with more members expected to sign up before 2024.

Experts say that between six to ten members are providing the bulk of financing as guarantors of the deal, with a sliding scale down through the other members.

The key properties in the deal's inventory are the three outdoor World Athletics Championships in 2025, 2027 and 2029.

In addition, the deal also includes the following WA competitions: Indoor Championships (in 2024, 2026 and 2028); Road Running Championships (in 2025, 2027 and 2029); U20 Championships (in 2024, 2026 and 2028); Race Walking Team Championships (in 2024, 2026 and 2028); Cross Country Championships (in 2024, 2026 and 2028); and Relays (in 2025, 2027 and 2029).

Virtually all of the media rights value of the deal rests in the three outdoor Championships.

As part of the deal, WA and the EBU also plan to create a documentary series in the mould of Formula One's 'Drive to Survive' series. It is understood that the push for this came from EBU members hungry for original sports content for their respective digital platforms.

Locked-in till 2029

The Dentsu agency [holds broadcast rights](#) for WA Series events outside of Europe and sub-Saharan Africa to 2029. Meanwhile, international rights to WA's Diamond League, the annual series of 14 athletics meetings, are sold by the IMG agency, with Infront [assuming the contract](#) from 2025 till 2029.

With key agreements locked in until the end of 2029, Worth Athletics also wanted to secure its Series rights in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. It is understood that WA – previously named the [International Association of Athletics Federations](#) until 2019 – initiated talks with the EBU regarding the renewal.

While WA is said to have conducted rigorous internal reviews on the value of the rights, the organisation had also set out strategic ambitions which prioritise engagement with young audiences and digital distribution.

WA communicated this to the EBU, which in turn came back with a financial and strategic offer that clinched a deal.

Having [lost out on Olympics rights](#) in recent cycles – first to the Sportfive agency and then to media group Discovery – the EBU was determined to retain WA Series rights.

It is understood that no entity other than the EBU was at any stage likely to take on the contract for this cycle. WA had initiated talks with the EBU prior to the onset of Covid-19, but disruptions due to the pandemic led to the deal being finalised well over a year later.

Digital distribution

One source told *SportBusiness Media* that, with changes to the traditional agency sales model for properties at the level of the WA Series events, rights-holders can no longer guarantee sales in every market. In short, times are tough for non-top-tier properties and rights-holders must adapt.

In this environment and in a bid for greater reach, new audiences and to cater to all fans, the EBU are understood to be planning what one source described as a “digital vertical athletics channel.” This will take the form of a digital channel embedded in its members' existing OTT platforms such as the UK's BBC iPlayer or Italy's RaiPlay.

Experts say that the EBU is considered by some to have a somewhat 'old-fashioned' image, but

this should be balanced by the fact that many of its members, perhaps most notably the BBC, have a significant and highly forward-looking digital presence.

The EBU plans to harness the digital strength of its member platforms to ensure WA content is widely available. The EBU will also support those members who are yet to undergo digital transformation to ensure a minimum standard across the board.

The digital channel will not operate a one-size-fits-all model as there are different regulatory frameworks across the EBU's membership. For example, some members receive commercial revenue through advertising and others do not.

It is understood that the EBU hopes to roll out the channel and then quickly expand it beyond WA and [European Athletics](#) events to other sports within its portfolio, such as aquatics, gymnastics and winter sports.

Free-to-air reach

While the above is an integral part of the deal, the core part of the EBU's coverage for now is still free-to-air linear broadcasting.

As one source told *SportBusiness Media*, athletics is not a driver of pay-television subscriptions but it does, through free-to-air coverage, reach large audiences, which also brings significant sponsorship revenues into play.

Experts told *SportBusiness Media* that the free-to-air market for athletics in Africa, particularly in countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, is highly valuable and is therefore an important component of the deal.

The plan in Africa for the current cycle was derailed by [Kwesé TV shutting down](#) in 2019. ESPN MD had [brokered a deal](#) which saw Kwesé become the exclusive broadcaster for IAAF events and content in sub-Saharan Africa. The deal from 2018 to 2023 was worth a total of around \$11m.

When this fell through, the EBU signed a deal with the [TV Media Sport](#) agency for exclusive free-to-air rights in sub-Saharan Africa for the WA Series from 2019 to 2023.

Sources say the EBU is keeping its options open in Africa with regard to 2024 onwards, with all options – including continuing with TV Media Sport, or perhaps working with an agency such as Infront – on the table.

The EBU is keen to roll out more digital distribution in Africa during the next cycle and is particularly focused on working with local telcos to ensure coverage for mobile users.

While the details are not yet decided, both WA and the EBU see wide free-to-air distribution in Africa as paramount to grow the sport. The EBU also plans to use its digital channel in Africa as well.

WA is understood to be keen to be more strategic in where it decides to host its events, with a view on growth in those markets. Sources say that hosting one of the outdoor Championships in Africa between 2024 and 2029 is a possibility. [o](#)

FOOTBALL

LaLiga strikes in red-hot Central America to more than double fee

By Callum McCarthy

- Sky to pay €62.5m per season for exclusive LaLiga rights in Mexico, from 2024-32
- League more than doubles income from current deal worth €30m per season
- Eight-season deal struck amid fierce competition from Disney and Turner

LaLiga and its international sales agent, Mediapro, took advantage of a red-hot market in Mexico and Central America to double its media rights income from the region, securing a new eight-season deal with Sky.

Pay-television operator Sky Mexico – a joint venture between media group Televisa and telco AT&T – will pay an average of €62.5m (\$70.5m) per season for exclusive LaLiga rights over eight seasons, from 2024-25 to 2031-32. The deal functions as an extension of Sky's existing four-season deal for exclusive LaLiga rights from 2020-21 to 2023-24, which is worth €30m per season.

Mediapro and the league decided to tender the rights in Mexico and Central America to take advantage of a particularly competitive moment, as US and Mexican media giants are investing heavily in content for their respective streaming platforms.

Sky beat fierce competition from media groups Disney – which recently launched its Star+ subscription streaming service across Latin America – and WarnerMedia, which owns streaming service HBO Max.

LaLiga is the second-most valuable club football property in Mexico and Central America behind Liga MX, Mexico's top-tier domestic league. Disney wanted LaLiga rights from 2024-25 to secure [the future of football content on Star+](#), while WarnerMedia wanted to spread LaLiga matches across HBO Max and its pay-television TNT Sports channel.

Sky has held LaLiga rights across Central America since 2015-16 and the league forms a key part of its football programming along with [its rights to the English Premier League](#). In the face of such stiff competition from US media giants, it was happy to pay a huge increase to secure the backbone of its football programming well into the next decade.

Tender details

LaLiga rights were awarded to Sky in the second round of an open tender launched on August 30. A bid deadline was set for September 27, after which a second-round bid deadline was set on October 20. Sky was announced as the winner on November 10.

Potential bidders could make offers for five seasons, eight seasons or both. It is understood all bidders made offers for both durations in the first round, before progressing to the second round with eight-season bids.

The tender is understood to have been conducted by agency Mediapro, which holds international rights to LaLiga in the current four-season rights cycle, from 2020-21 to 2023-24, during which it pays a minimum guarantee of €897m per season.

It does not have a deal in place from 2024-25, but it has been directly involved as a sales agent in LaLiga's latest eight-season deals in both the US and in Mexico – *SportBusiness Media* understands [LaLiga's €1.4bn, eight-season deal with Disney in the US](#), from 2021-22 to 2028-29, was also brokered by the agency.

LaLiga North America, the joint venture between the league and agency Relevant, is understood to be responsible for managing the future relationship between the league and broadcasters in the US and Mexico, as well as promoting the league in those territories.

Mediapro's involvement in LaLiga deals beyond 2024-25 suggests the agency is set to remain as LaLiga's international sales agent after its current deal ends. ○

FOOTBALL

Polsat pays modest increase to retain Champions League rights in Poland

By Nick Roumpis

- Polsat paying about €40m per season for exclusive Champions League rights
- Deal represents increase of about 15 per cent on Polsat's deal from 2018-21
- Nent did not bid, will instead pay €5m per season for Europa League rights

The value of Uefa Champions League rights in Poland has remained at a high level as Polsat has paid a modest increase to secure Uefa Champions League rights in the country for the next three seasons.

The Polish commercial and pay-television broadcaster is understood to be paying about €40m (\$45.3m/£34m) per season, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, for exclusive rights to the Champions League and the annual Uefa Super Cup.

This is an increase of nearly 15 per cent on [the €35m per season paid by Polsat during the 2018-2021 cycle](#), when the broadcaster shocked the market by taking rights away from long-term incumbent, pay-television broadcaster NC Plus, paying a huge premium. NC Plus's deal, from 2015-16 to 2017-18, was worth about €20m per season.

The agreement between Uefa and Polsat is for platform-neutral rights to all Champions League matches, plus rights to 39 Uefa Youth League matches per season. All live matches will be shown on Polsat Sport Premium channels.

Team Marketing, the exclusive sales agent of Uefa club competitions, launched a tender for rights in Poland in February, with a first-round bid deadline of March 1.

After securing the rights, [Polsat agreed to sublicense some of the matches to Polish public-service broadcaster TVP](#).

After negotiations between Polsat and TVP went down to the wire, a deal was struck days before the Champions League's kick-off in September, under which TVP will air one Wednesday fixture from each matchweek. The public-service broadcaster will also show a highlights programme with action from Tuesday and Wednesday matches.

Polsat had a similar sublicensing agreement in place with TVP during the previous cycle between from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

There is no Polish side competing in the Champions League this season but TVP will hold rights to all matches featuring a domestic side, should one qualify next season.

TVP recently strengthened its hold on the matches of the Polish national team in a wide-ranging agreement for Uefa national team rights [across the 2022-28 cycle](#).

Polsat v Nent

During the 2021-24 tender, it became evident from the early stages that Polsat was keen on extending its partnership with Uefa, as it wanted to maintain its sole high-profile property in its relatively thin sports portfolio, sources said.

Polsat's portfolio also includes third-party rights to Uefa European Qualifiers and Uefa Nations League matches from 2018-19 to 2021-22, which it acquired for a total of €10m. It is also the incumbent rights-holder for EuroLeague Basketball and the Polish Basketball League.

However, Polsat lost Europa League rights for the 2021-24 cycle to Nent, [which also secured rights to Europa Conference League, Uefa's new third-tier club competition](#).

Nent is understood to be paying €5m per season for rights to both competitions in the current three-season cycle, from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

The majority of sources say this is lower than the €6m per season that Polsat was paying for Europa League rights during the 2018-21 cycle. However, a source close to both deals said that the value of Europa League rights from 2018-19 to 2020-21 was €3.5m per season, which would mean that Nent paid an over 40 per cent increase to secure the rights.

It is understood that Nent only bid for the Europa League and Europa Conference League rights, preferring to acquire content that included Polish teams.

The deal for Europa League and Europa Conference League rights furthered Nent's move into Poland, [following its acquisition of German Bundesliga rights from 2021-22 to 2023-24](#). Since then, Nent has also added the English Premier League to its armoury, in a six-season deal that runs from 2022-23 to 2027-28.

Nent launched its Viaplay OTT platform in Poland in August at a price point of PLN34 (€7.32/\$8.58) per month. ○

FOOTBALL

Telekom Srbija pays massive increase for Ligue 1 rights in the Balkans

By Nick Roumpis

- Serbian state-backed telco pays €5.5m per season for Ligue 1, from 2021-24
- Deal represents 800-per-cent increase on previous deal in the region
- Ligue 1 becomes latest property to secure huge increase from Telekom Srbija

BeIN Media Group has secured a monstrous increase for Ligue 1 rights in the Balkans for the next three seasons in one of the most lucrative deals for the league in Europe.

BeIN – the French league’s international media rights distributor over the six seasons from 2018-19 to 2023-24 – will receive around €5.5m (\$6.2m/£4.7m) per season from Telekom Srbija for Ligue 1 rights over the three seasons from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

This is 800 per cent higher than the €600,000 per season that Telekom Srbija, which owns pay-television broadcaster Arena Sport, was paying during the 2018-21 cycle. It is understood that rival media group United Media unsuccessfully challenged Telekom Srbija for the rights.

The deal far exceeds the value generated in other key international markets such as Brazil, Latin America, the UK and Germany.

Is Messi enough?

Leo Messi’s summer transfer to Paris Saint-Germain has helped increase Ligue 1’s popularity worldwide. However, market sources are not convinced that Messi’s presence in the French league is enough to justify the huge increase paid by Telekom Srbija in the Balkans.

“Messi cannot be the reason for spending this amount of money on Ligue 1 rights. It mainly has to do with Telekom Srbija’s aggressive bidding strategy,” a source said.

This is not the only property that has seen its value soar in the Balkans on the back of intensified competition between Telekom Srbija and its rival United, which owns pay-television broadcaster Sportklub.

Earlier this year, competition between the two companies produced one of the biggest cycle-on-

cycle increased in the history of sports media rights, [when Telekom Srbija agreed to pay an average of €100m per season](#) for English Premier League rights from 2022-23 to 2027-28. United is paying about €12m per season in the current three-season cycle from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

[Infront also secured a huge increase for Italian Serie A rights](#) in the Balkans as Telekom Srbija agreed to pay around €25m per season from 2021-22 to 2023-24. This is a 400-per-cent increase compared to the telco's €5m per season fee in the previous three-season cycle.

LaLiga did not gain an equally impressive increase [as its deal with Telekom Srbija is worth about €12.5m per season](#), an increase of around 40 per cent on the previous cycle.

Telekom Srbija's spending spree has many critics in the Balkans – including United Media – who believe the scale of the telco's spending could be anti-competitive.

However, Vladimir Lučić, chief executive of Telekom Srbija, has told local press that the telco's acquisitions of sports content are pure business decisions.

“Interest in the French league has skyrocketed with the recent arrival of Lionel Messi. The transfer has also gathered interest and traction globally bringing new partners to the table who have been interested in acquiring Ligue 1 Uber Eats rights through beIN Sports.” [○](#)

FOOTBALL

Premier League makes strong gain in the Baltics amid fierce competition

By Nick Roumpis

- Nent will pay about €7m per season for 2022-25; 35 per cent more for 2025-28
- Six-season deal represents exponential increase for Premier League rights in Baltics
- Nent secures rights after knock-out first-round bid beats TV3

The English Premier League has seen its value in the Baltics soar amid Nordic Entertainment (Nent) Group's dynamic entrance into the market and heated competition with local rival TV3 Group.

Nent, which launched its Viaplay subscription streaming service in the region in March, secured a six-season deal for exclusive rights to the Premier League, from 2022-23 to 2027-28. Nent is thought to be paying about €7m (\$7.9m/£5.9m) per season for exclusive rights to the Premier League in the three-season period from 2022-23 and 2024-25, with the fee increasing by just over 35 per cent for the last three seasons of the deal, from 2025-26 to 2027-28, to about €9.5m per season.

The increase from cycle to cycle is due to the Premier League mandating a 35 per cent increase after the first three-season cycle in all its six-season deals agreed from 2022-23 onward.

Nent's fee in the first three seasons represents an increase of 233 per cent on the €2.1m per season that rival TV3 Group pays in the current three-season cycle from 2019-20 to 2021-22. The €9.5m per season paid in the final three seasons represents an increase of about 329 per cent.

It is understood that Nent secured the rights after the first round, during which it saw off competition from TV3. Sources said that TV3 knew Nent would bid aggressively for the rights as it wanted a high-profile property ahead of its launch in the Baltics. As such, it secured a large increase in its budget in order to bid for the rights.

However, Nent's bid was significantly higher than TV3's, allowing it to secure the rights without going to the second round.

“TV3 had the backing of its owner Providence Equity Partners to spend high for Premier League rights, but Nent is a really tough player to compete against,” a local source said.

Aside from competition, the increase is also due to the fact that all 380 matches per season have been made available in the Baltics from 2022-23. [The previous deal between Saran and All Media Baltics](#) included rights to 200 matches per season.

The deal with Nent represents the first time in a decade that the Premier League has sold rights in the Baltics directly to a broadcaster. Its previous three deals in the region saw the involvement of IMG, Saran Media and AMI respectively.

Nent announced the acquisition of Premier League rights in the Baltics alongside similar deals for the Netherlands and Poland. Nent’s deal in these three territories are among the few six-season deals already agreed for the 2022-28 period. Other long-term deals – unprecedented for the Premier League’s agreements in Europe before the latest tender – include six-season deals with [Match TV in Russia](#) and [Telekom Srbija in the Balkans](#).

Last year, Nent also landed [a six-season deal with the Premier League in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden](#).

Peter Nørrelund, Nent’s group chief sports officer, told *SportBusiness Media* earlier this year that the broadcaster did not have plans to sublicense any of the rights in the Netherlands, Poland and the Baltics.

“We like long contracts; we like to build relationships with IP owners. I’m very happy the Premier League has started to licence six-season agreements,” he added.

Strong Baltic footprint

The addition of Premier League rights to its Baltics portfolio was the most high-profile move made by Nent in the region, but it is far from its only major acquisition.

Nent already holds German Bundesliga rights for its Viaplay service in the Baltics – alongside the Netherlands and Poland – in an eight-season deal from 2021-22 to 2028-29. The multi-territory Bundesliga deal [is understood to be worth in the region of €500m](#), or €62.5m per season.

Nent also saw off competition from TV3 in Team Marketing’s sales process for Uefa club competitions rights in the Baltics. The Stockholm-listed company [is understood to have paid about €3m per season](#) for exclusive rights in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the Uefa Champions League, Europa League and Europa Conference League from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

This is 150 per cent up from the €1.2m per season paid by TV3 in the previous cycle, and it took TEAM three bidding rounds before awarding the rights to Nent.

Other properties in Nent's portfolio in the Baltics [include the FA Cup, the English Championship, Uefa national team competition rights](#) between 2022-28, [as well as National Hockey League rights](#) from 2021-22 to 2025-26. ○

FOOTBALL

United's Nova pays big increase to Kosmos for LaLiga rights in Greece

By Nick Roumpis

- United Media to pay €8m per season for LaLiga rights in Greece, from 2021-26
- Deal agreed with Kosmos, which also acquired LaLiga rights in Albania and Kosovo
- Kosmos pays €3m per season for rights in Albania and Kosovo, from 2021-26

United Media has paid a strong increase to take LaLiga rights in Greece from rival pay-television broadcaster Cosmote, acquiring the rights from agency Kosmos.

Nova, the Greek pay-television broadcaster owned by United, will pay €8m (\$9m/£6.8m) per season for exclusive rights to Spain's LaLiga in a five-season deal from 2021-22 to 2025-26, bringing the rights back to Nova after more than a decade.

This represents an increase of about 33 per cent on the €6m per season Cosmote paid to agency Asset Ogilvy for LaLiga rights from 2018-19 to 2020-21. The €8m per season paid by United is also double the fee paid by Cosmote during the 2015-18 cycle.

Nova's deal, announced in May, covers all matches from Spain's top two tiers of club football. It acquired the rights from Kosmos, which put an end to a 12-year period during which Asset Ogilvy held LaLiga rights in Greece and sold them on to Cosmote.

It is understood that Kosmos paid around €7m per season to secure LaLiga rights in Greece from the Mediapro agency, LaLiga's international broadcast rights distributor. Its five-season deal was secured in the face of competition from Asset after a single round of bidding.

Elsewhere, Kosmos also acquired LaLiga rights in Albania and Kosovo, which it later sold on to local pay-television broadcasters DigitAlb and Artmotion respectively. Kosmos paid over €3m per season for the rights in a five-season deal from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

This is an increase of more than 50 per cent on the €2m per season paid by IMG for LaLiga rights in Albania and Kosovo during the 2018-21 cycle.

It is understood that the sales process of LaLiga rights in these two countries went to the second round, with Kosmos outbidding local broadcasters Tring and DigitAlb.

Despite losing LaLiga rights in Greece after over a decade, Asset managed to remain as the league's agency partner in Cyprus. Mediapro received offers from bidders in three different rounds, with Asset acquiring the rights in the face of competition from media group Adjara, [which acquired Setanta Sports Eurasia earlier this year](#) and had plans to further expand into Cyprus.

Asset is understood to be paying over €500,000 per season for LaLiga rights in a five-season deal from 2021-22 to 2025-26, an increase of over 20 per cent compared to the previous cycle from 2018-19 to 2020-21.

The deals in Greece, Albania and Kosovo were the first major football rights deal to be done by Kosmos, which was founded in 2017 as a commercial rights-holder for tennis's Davis Cup. Since then, [Kosmos has struck a deal with Helbiz Media](#), Lega Serie B's global media rights distributor, over broadcast deals in Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Balkans and Latin America between 2021-22 and 2023-24.

The acquisition of LaLiga rights has raised eyebrows in the southern European market about whether Kosmos plans to expand its footprint in the region.

In October, Kosmos – in collaboration with Madrid-based broadcaster Enjoy Television – also acquired rights to French Ligue 1 from 2021-22 to 2023-24 in Spain. [It later sublicensed five games per round](#) to Spanish media group Mediaset.

Capitalising on Cosmote-Nova competition

Kosmos saw potential for LaLiga rights in the Greek market amid fevered competition between Cosmote and Nova.

The latter has already snapped away several major properties from Cosmote, including the German Bundesliga, the English Premier League and LaLiga. On the other hand, Cosmote paid €4m per season, an almost 100 per cent increase, to replace Nova as the Serie A rights-holder in the country, while it retained rights to the NBA and Uefa club competitions.

United has been growing its sports portfolio in Greece as an indirect response to its heated competition with Telekom Srbija in the Balkans, where the state-owned telco has been spending big to take away major properties from United.

In the Balkans, Telekom Srbija holds rights to the English Premier League (from 2022-23 to 2027-28), the French Ligue 1 (from 2021-22 to 2023-24), the NBA (from 2019-20 to 2024-25), and the Uefa club competitions (from 2021-22 to 2023-24). United Group has retained rights to the EuroLeague and Fiba international basketball competitions. ○

FOOTBALL

MTV3, YLE see win-win in Fifa World Cup 2022 sublicensing deal

By Imran Yusuf

- MTV3 will pay YLE €3m-€3.5m for 22 matches from 2022 World Cup
- YLE keen to recoup some of €8m spend on World Cup rights
- Qatar World Cup falls during high season for Finnish advertising market

Public-service broadcaster YLE will recoup almost half its fee by sublicensing some rights to next year's Fifa World Cup to commercial broadcaster MTV3.

MTV3, owned by telco Telia, is understood to be paying between €3m (\$3.39m) and €3.5m to YLE to sublicense exclusive rights to 22 matches from the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

YLE had secured the rights in Finland to the 2022 World Cup for [about €8m \(\\$8.97m\)](#) in 2018, agreeing the deal directly with Fifa. MTV3 had provided competition to YLE during that rights auction. Fifa had earned an increase in Finland for the 2022 tournament of about 60 per cent on the €5m YLE paid for the [2018 World Cup](#).

Every match at the 2022 tournament will be broadcast on free-to-air television in Finland under the new pact. YLE will show 42 matches while MTV will show 22 matches. Only YLE will show the opening match and the final live.

Aside from the above, the specific matches are yet to be determined as the World Cup draw does not take place until April 1 next year. However, a source told *SportBusiness Media* that the two broadcasters share an understanding on principles with regard to the split, with MTV3 likely to show at least one match per game day.

Matches shown live will also be available to watch live and on demand via OTT platforms YLE Arena, mtv.fi and the C More live streaming service.

Conversations around sharing the rights to the 2022 tournament first took place in autumn 2020, when Fifa [initiated broadcast rights sales processes](#) in Finland and the rest of the Nordic region for the women's World Cup in 2023 and the men's World Cup in 2026.

The outcome of the process for the World Cup 2026 was that YLE and MTV3 will [split the rights](#)

for the [tournament](#). During discussions leading up to that agreement, it emerged that both sides were also keen to split YLE's rights for Qatar 2022.

In addition to Qatar 2022, rights in the original Fifa package included the U17 and U20 World Cups, the U17 and U20 women's World Cups, the Futsal World Cup and the Beach Soccer World Cup. The sublicensing deal, however, is only for the 2022 men's world cup.

Win-win

The scheduling of the tournament in November and December is attractive to MTV3 as it falls in Finland's advertising high season. The commercial potential fuelled MTV3's willingness to pay a strong fee for its 22 matches.

When the deal for the 2022 World Cup was done in 2018, it was perhaps "too soon" according to experts for the broadcasters to come to a sharing arrangement. Instead, YLE, the traditional broadcaster for summer football World Cups in Finland, emerged as the sole broadcaster for the tournament.

At the time, YLE was determined to win the rights having failed to renew Uefa national-team rights when the Nordic Entertainment Group (Nent) – then Modern Times Group – acquired rights to [all European Qualifier and Nations League matches, from 2018-19 to 2021-22, for about €4.5m](#).

By late 2020, however, YLE saw advantages in sublicensing some of the matches. This would enable the public broadcaster to recoup fees which it can now deploy on other sports rights. Furthermore, YLE will have more scheduling flexibility with MTV taking 22 matches. Winter sports – particularly skiing – form a core part of YLE's sports portfolio.

Although the [2026 World Cup](#) will be a summer tournament, the number of matches will increase from 64 to 80, a key driver for the broadcasters' decision to share rights to that tournament. Each will show 40 matches, and they will share matches featuring Finland's national team if it qualifies, with the first match set for YLE and the second for MTV3, and so on.

YLE is no stranger to sharing rights, with a recent major arrangement being its [sharing of rights with Discovery](#) for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games after sublicensing rights from the broadcast group. Sources say this arrangement has so far proved satisfactory for YLE. ○