

Cablefax Daily™

Thursday — October 5, 2017

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 28 / No. 191

Let's Play Two: For MLB Network, ALDS is the World Series

Baseball's playoffs just got under way Tuesday night, but **MLB Network** is ready for its own World Series. Under **MLB's** current media rights agreements, which run through 2021, the league-controlled cable channel (which counts **AT&T**, **Comcast** and **Charter** as minority owners) has exclusive rights to two Division Series games each year. Those games alternate between the American League and National League each year; this year it's the ALDS. For **MLBN**, these games are kind of a big deal. "These two Division Series games in many ways are our World Series," said **MLBN** pres **Rob McGlarry**. "They're the most premium content we're going to air this year." Many businesses opt to reserve their most valuable product for paying customers, but **MLBN's** approach is the opposite. For the second straight postseason, the net is partnering with many of its distributors to offer a week-long free preview. McGlarry said the logic behind the trial is twofold. "One is the obvious," he said. "It makes the games available to more viewers and subscribers." With 15 MVPDs and one virtual MVPD (**DirectTV Now**) participating, **MLBN** estimates that the trial will expand its reach for the games from its usual 62.4mln homes (per **Nielsen**) to more than 90mln homes. Naturally, it behooves the league to make its product as accessible to fans as possible, particularly during the playoffs, when avidity is at its highest. In addition, McGlarry believes the trials drive at least some viewers to upgrade to a tier that includes **MLBN**. "We think the people that watch the Network's programming—I think the programming speaks for itself," he said. "We're working with our affiliates so we can hopefully drive some of the people who get the free preview to see how good the network is and hopefully upgrade their packages if they don't already have **MLB Network**." Broader year-round distribution remains a key priority for **MLBN**, which according to **Nielsen Universe** estimates peaked at 71mln homes in 2013. Amid cord-cutting across the pay-TV landscape, **MLBN** has achieved OTT carriage on both **DirectTV Now** and **PlayStation Vue**. "With respect to the other virtual MVPDs, we're talking to everybody," McGlarry said. "They're still frankly, I think, figuring out what they want to do. It's obviously easier for them when they're getting launched to go to programmers who have multiple networks so they can get a certain amount of volume, but we're talking to everybody. The anecdotal feedback that we get from virtual MVPDs is that live sports do well." One selling point for **MLBN** is 6% year-to-date viewership growth, mainly on the back of the World Baseball Classic. This year's tournament, won by the Americans, was the most-viewed yet and provided a

Cablefax Awards Gala

November 7 | Taglyan Complex, LA | 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Join Cablefax in LA to celebrate all the honorees for the Program Awards, Trailer Awards and the brand-new Affiliate Marketing Hot List

Register: <http://bit.ly/2xsDJU9>

Questions? Contact Charlotte Clay at cclay@accessintel.com.

Contact Olivia Murray to sponsor at omurray@accessintel.com.

CABLEFAX DAILY (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC ● www.cablefax.com ● 301.354.2101 ● Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com ● Publisher: Michael Grebb, 323.380.6263, mgrebb@accessintel.com ● Community Editor: Alex Silverman, 212.621.4951, asilverman@accessintel.com ● Dir. of Bus Dev.: Rich Hauptner, 203.899.8460, rhauptner@accessintel.com ● Acct. Exec: Olivia Murray, 301.354.2010, omurray@accessintel.com ● VP Marketing: Amy Jefferies, 301.354.1699, ajefferies@accessintel.com ● Marketing Manager: Charlotte Clay, 301.354.1710, cclay@accessintel.com ● Production Manager: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com ● Diane Schwartz, SVP Media Comms Group, dschwartz@accessintel.com ● Group Subs or Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com ● Annual subscription price: \$1,699.97/year ● Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

significant boost to the WBC's profile. McGlarry is also excited about the potential audience for this week's games given the matchups: Red Sox-Astros on Thursday and Yankees-Indians on Friday. "We are fortunate enough to have two of the most prominent teams in baseball and their opponents are two teams with tremendous storylines."

Land of the Knee – Free: Many baseball fans took note of the touching rendition of the "The Star Spangled Banner" at the start of Tuesday's AL wild-card game on **ESPN** by Broadway star *Aaron Tveit*. It came after a moment of silence for the victims of the Las Vegas mass shooting. But those with closed captioning on might have been scratching their heads over whether there was a protest taking place during the national anthem. As Tveit sang, the captioning incorrectly displayed the words "oer the land of the knee – of free" in the last line of the song. ESPN said it was assured by the third-party captioning service it uses that it was an honest mistake. It certainly was ill-timed given the recent controversy surrounding **NFL** players kneeling during the anthem. "Our closed captioning is handled by a third-party company, **NCI**, that has done good work for us for many years. NCI assures us that this was an honest, unintentional mistake and they attempted to correct it in real time," an ESPN spokesperson said. In a statement, NCI apologized to ESPN and viewers for what it called an unfortunate error. "This error occurred because the steno captioner mistakenly hit one extra key on the Stenotype machine when trying to caption the word 'free.' The error was quickly corrected. This error was absolutely not intentional," NCI said. The error seemed to go unnoticed for the most part. A **Cablefax** editor was contacted by a viewer who saw it, and found a few users on Twitter who also noted the flub. For those unfamiliar with the world of captioning, a Stenotype machine is used—what you see in courtrooms. It does not have letters on its 22 keys, which means a combo of keys are stroked to equal certain individual letters. An NCI rep likened it to playing chords on a piano vs typing letters on a computer keyboard. If you really want to dive deep and understand how this could have happened consider that the word "free" is actually stroked as TPRAOE (TP equals an F, then R, then AOE equals the long E sound). Knee is stroked as TPHAOE, with TPH equaling N, the H being the accidental letter stroked. The captioner in this instance had an error corrector in his dictionary in case he accidentally dragged in the letter R when captioning the word knee, which is why TPHRAOE translated as knee. We've been assured everyone feels awful and that the captioner has been instructed to change the error corrector for "knee." For our part, we hope the captioner doesn't take it too hard. People with these skills are becoming quite rare. A 2013-14 report from the **National Court Reporters Association** found that the national average pass rate for certification is only 20-30% and the applicant pool has been steadily decreasing, with some states seeing as high as an 85% decrease in applicants.

Verizon Exit: *Marni Walden*, evp and pres of **Verizon** global media, plans to leave the company in February. Walden oversees the media and digital biz, including **AOL** and **Yahoo**. She'll move into a strategic advisory role on Dec 31, reporting to Verizon CEO *Lowell McAdam* until her departure. **Oath** CEO Tim Armstrong will continue to be responsible for leading the company created by the AOL and Yahoo acquisitions, but will report directly to McAdam with Walden's exit. The Telematics organization, which also fell under Walden's purview, will report to *John Stratton*, evp and pres of global operations.

A Million for Contour: Less than two years after launching its Contour platform powered by **Comcast's** X1 technology, **Cox** reports that it has 1mln customers using the product. That makes it the fastest video product launch in company history. *Fierce Cable* first reported the milestone. Cox celebrated by giving its millionth customer a year of free video and internet service and an all-expenses paid trip to Disneyland. Cox reports that most customers are using the voice remote weekly and are watching VOD at least once a month.

Charter & Local 3: Charter's ongoing labor woes continue, with the union launching an ad campaign aimed at the MSO. Some 1800 workers have been on strike since March. The *WSJ* reported the news of the campaign, with **IBEW** reportedly spending six figures on the initiative. Charter didn't offer any comment on the ads, with a spokesperson saying it's staying focused on customers and what it believes is a competitive offer that includes an average 22% wage increase along with retirement and health benefits. The members of Local Union No 3 of IBEW were employed by **Time Warner Cable** before Charter's purchase in May 206 and had been working under an expired contract. The union has complained that Charter has put forth proposals that would eliminate various benefits, including pension and hospitalization plans, along with overtime pay for weekend work.

VR News: **Discovery Communications** and **Google** announced the launch of a seven-part, 38-episode VR series, “Discovery TRVLR,” which explores cultures all over the world. The first installment premieres Nov 3 on **YouTube** and **DiscoveryVR.com** as well as the Discovery VR app. It can be experienced in VR with the new Google Daydream View headset as well as with Cardboard. It can also be viewed through the web, Android and iOS phones. Each of the seven chapters begins with a sunrise and closes with a sunset. Chapters for North America, South America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia consist of six episodes each, while the chapter for Antarctica features two episodes, for a total of 38 episodes in the series. -- **Microsoft** has acquired social VR app **AltspaceVR**. The startup announced its closure in August when funding fell through, but later announced it might pull through. “Microsoft is most interested in preserving the current community that uses AltspaceVR to connect and interact with new and old friends. These first few months will focus on fostering our community and making sure AltspaceVR remains a friendly, welcoming and vibrant place to hang out in virtual reality,” AltSpace said in a blog post.

MSG GO: All of **MSG Networks’** major distributors are now carrying the live-streaming and VOD platform, with Charter now inking a deal. It will be available to Charter customers who receive MSG Networks. MSG launched the TV Everywhere app in 2014.

Programming: **ESPN** caught a big fish in the sports media sea, adding former **Fox Sports** commentator **Katie Nolan** to its talent roster. Nolan most recently hosted her own show on **FS1**, “Garbage Time with Katie Nolan,” which was cancelled in February. Fox execs at the time insisted the net planned on expanding her role, but she has since been absent from FS1 programming. ESPN said in a statement that details on her specific assignments are forthcoming. -- Meanwhile, ESPN obtained rights to carry **F1** racing beginning next year. It will air 16 races on **ESPN2**, three on ESPN and two on **ABC. NBC Sports**, F1’s current media partner, said in a statement that it “chose not to enter into a new agreement in which the rights holder itself competes with us and our distribution partners.” -- **Starz** ordered scripted drama “Sweetbitter” straight to series, bringing six half-hour episodes to the net. Based on the best-selling novel from **Stephanie Danler**, Sweetbitter tells the coming-of-age story of Tess, a 22-year-old working in the restaurant world of NYC.

Social TV: **Complex Networks** is developing content for **Facebook’s** Watch platform, with the producer set to bring four original short-form series exclusively to the social network. Coming first on Oct 5 is “Taste Buds,” a food show following critic **Daym Drops** on various food adventures with his guests. The three other series will make their appearances later this fall. “Price The Hype” touts itself as the first-ever sneaker game show, placing contestants head-to-head in shoe-themed trivia and challenges as they compete for money and expensive shoes. “Dumb As Hell” will look at the hilarity behind pop culture, with hosts debating and reenacting the dumbest things they encounter. Sneakers are also at the forefront of “Everything’s For Sale,” a program centered on a “sneakerhead” trying to pitch the newest releases to customers.

People: **Atlantic Broadband** is bolstering its video services team with the appointment of **Elizabeth Asencio** as head of content acquisition. Her responsibilities will include leading content acquisition negotiations across all platforms, including both digital and linear platforms. She’s held positions at a number of different content companies including **NBCU, Starz, Disney** and **ESPN**. -- **Discovery Comm** announced the elevation of **Elisa Freeman** to evp, domestic & Canadian distribution. Freeman has spent the last 18 years with Discovery, and most recently served as svp, global distribution operations and international education development. -- Congrats to former *Broadcasting & Cable* editor-in-chief **Melissa Grego**, who was named CEO of **HRTS** (formerly the Hollywood Radio and Television Society). She’s the first woman to lead the org in its 70-year history.

#DC5G Summit

OCTOBER 11, 2017
WASHINGTON, D.C.**NEW SPEAKER!****Amy Maclean**
Editorial Director
CablefaxProduced in
partnership with
Cablefaxwww.DC5GSummit.com

Think about that for a minute...

Magic

Commentary by Steve Effros

OK, this column is going to diverge a little from the norm. I usually try to focus on analyzing and interpreting what's going on around us in the context of the cable/broadband industry and how it could possibly either affect us or suggest better ways for us to operate. Today I'm going to essentially recommend that for those of you who can, you should go see a theatre performance in New York. Does that have anything to do with the work we do? Well, I would suggest it does, and I strongly suggest that you go see for yourself.

The show is called "In & Of Itself." It's a one-man show at the Daryl Roth Theatre in New York City, performed by Derek Delgaudio, an award-winning magician who was recently named Magician of the Year by the Academy of Magical Arts. This guy is amazing for a lot of reasons. Read on.

My son, an actor and writer in New York, tipped us off to this show. He had gone to see it and told us that we simply had to come up to New York and see this performance, that it was one of the "most pure theatrical performances" he had ever seen. Trust me, he not only has seen many, he's a very critical reviewer. With a recommendation like that, Lucia and I didn't hesitate to see if any tickets were still available. Luckily, the show has been extended because apparently a lot of folks have had the same reaction Jamie, and ultimately we, had. Hopefully you will be able to experience it too.

The word "experience" is very important here. This is where I tie it all in to our business. We, the cable/broadband folks, have had an almost unimaginable impact on news, entertainment, politics, social interaction and just about everything else. Some of it has



been good, and some, like the unintended free-for-all we have created in the election process, not so good. No one is clear on what should be done about all those impacts, and that's definitely going to be more of the subject matter of my columns. But in this case this show is an eye-opening, mind-bending example of the fact that there are some things that simply can't be translated to the screen, the computer or data points.

In & Of Itself is a theatrical journey that must be experienced in a small, personal venue. You just have to be there to appreciate its introspective look at how we perceive ourselves and the world around us. I have no intention of giving you many details about this performance. Yes, there are clear demonstrations of sleight of hand prestidigitation (that is, like card tricks). Delgaudio is a master of them. But he is also a master storyteller. I, too, have seen plenty of theatre and I have not seen anyone who does it better. He is riveting, and personable. His stories resonate, and by the end of the evening I can almost guarantee that you will walk out in wonder, not only at what you have experienced, but what it makes you think about. And that's, of course, what this column is intended to do as well; get folks to think.

In the case of this performance I can only suggest as strongly as I can that you go see it for yourself. It proves, and I say this with a real measure of relief, the everlasting value of live theatre, and there is no other way to describe it: it's magic.

Steve

T:202-630-2099
steve@effros.com

(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

 **MOST POWERFUL WOMEN
IN CABLE** PRESENTED BY **Cablefax**

**Partner with Cablefax to feature
your brand at the Most Powerful
Women in Cable Awards**



Ad Space Close: Oct. 23

Publication Date: Nov. 2017

Rich Hauptner at rhauptner@accessintel.com
Olivia Murray at omurray@accessintel.com

**Register for the
MOST POWERFUL WOMEN LUNCHEON**
November 16 | Edison Ballroom, NYC
www.cablefax.com/awards