

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Friday Night Lights: Rethinking the Local Sports Approach

A decade ago, cable operators were making news by rolling out linear networks concentrated on local sports programming—part of the industry's commitment to super serve communities. These days, they're taking a second look at how they offer that content. **Charter** has been gradually shuttering many of its local sports networks across the country over this past year, most of which came with the acquisitions of **Time Warner Cable** and **Bright House**. **Spectrum Sports** in Rochester, NY, is one of the latest examples, shutting down last week. The local sports channel for Albany went dark in June; Spectrum Sports Florida in July. Others have followed and some are still to come. The moves leave some local colleges and sports teams, including baseball's Rochester Red Wings, without a TV partner. But the MSO hasn't abandoned the idea of providing local sports content, moving some of the most popular programming online or on to existing Spectrum news channels. A Charter spokesperson said the channel closures aren't about cost savings, but increasing coverage of sports on Spectrum news channels while better meeting customer needs and creating digital opportunities. An example can be seen in upstate New York, where Charter is now airing up to 16 high school football games on Friday nights—one game in each market on the linear news channel and three games streamed online (the linear game also will be streamed) via MySpectrumSports.com, local news sites and the Spectrum News app. Previously, Charter only had one high school game in each market. "It's a big change, but it's a huge addition to what we're offering viewers," said *Steve Arvan*, gm and senior director of Spectrum Sports NY. "It's essentially four times the amount of sports we did last year each and every Friday night... We're giving customers more games on different platforms, and letting them watch it how they want to watch it." **Cablevision** made a similar move four years ago, converting linear network **MSG Varsity** to an online network with live and VOD programming, now dubbed **News 12 Varsity** under **Altice USA**. As part of Charter's commitment to expanded football coverage upstate, it is now featuring weekly 15-minute pregame shows along with expanded halftime shows that include highlights across the state. For now, the strategy is football centric, but that could change down the road, Arvan said. "Friday night high school football here and around the country tends to be an event," he said. Charter is considering taking the upstate strategy into other markets. It's already moving sports content to its regional news nets in some areas. A multi-year deal to air Carolina Panthers programming and live preseason games in

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NC has that content on Spectrum News channels, with Spectrum Sports Carolinas no more.

Done Deal: **Altice USA** and **Disney** made their highly anticipated distribution deal official Thursday, days after avoiding blackouts with a buzzer-beating deal in principle. As previously reported, Altice-owned **Optimum** will carry the **SEC Network** and soon-to-launch **ACC Network**. It will continue to provide access to **WABC**, **Disney Channel**, **Disney Junior**, **Disney XD**, **ESPN**, **ESPN2**, **ESPNU**, **ESPNEWS**, **ESPN Deportes**, **ESPN Goal Line**, **ESPN Bases Loaded**, **ESPN3** and **Freeform**, along with multiplatform, digital and VOD content. Optimum won't carry **ESPN Classic** anymore. The announcement states that the companies expect to collaborate on ESPN's upcoming OTT product and will leverage Altice's data analytics platform.

Netflix Price Hike: **Netflix** is raising the prices for two of its three tiers of service in the US. It marks the first major change in pricing for the SVOD service since 2014. The mid-level "standard" service is increasing from \$9.99/month to \$10.99, while the top-tier "premium" package is jumping from \$11.99/month to \$13.99. The entry-level "basic" package is staying at \$7.99/month. The main differences between the tiers include the availability of HD and UHD and the number of devices an account can watch on simultaneously. Wall Street responded positively to the move; shares of Netflix stock jumped 5.39% on Thursday. **Wells Fargo Securities'** *Ken Sena* pointed out that Netflix's last price increase resulted in a 10% YOY decline in net subscriber adds for 2Q14, a 24% decline in 3Q14 and a 19% drop in 4Q14. Prior to the news of the price hike, Wells Fargo had modeled a 7% YOY decline in net adds in 4Q17, but "perhaps the decline ends up being a little bigger than this." Still, Sena asserted the move is "warranted and good for the [long-term]." He also wrote Netflix's price increase is "particularly good" for the prospects of **Disney's** looming OTT service, which Wells Fargo previously estimated could cost \$9.99 a month when it launches in 2019. **BTIG Research's** *Rich Greenfield* wrote, "We are modestly raising our revenue and earnings forecasts for Netflix, despite modestly reducing subscriber forecasts. While Netflix has clearly been focused on rapidly expanding its subscriber base, it has, and always will be a balance of subscribers and pricing to enable the best possible content and maximize long-term profits."

Dreamers Support: **Univision** filed a declaration in support of a suit by the NY Attorney General and 14 other states, along with DC, to block the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. NY AG *Eric Schneiderman* said Univision and **Warby Parker** are the first NY-based companies to file in support of his lawsuit. President *Trump* last month announced the end of the program, which protects young, undocumented immigrants brought to the US from deportation. Univision told the court it will face business disruptions and financial losses with a segment of its workforce set to eventually lose work authorization. The Spanish-language programmer added that the loss of those DACA beneficiaries will reduce its diversity and connection with the communities it serves.

Pierced Armor: The Vegas Golden Knights, the newest addition to the **NHL**, drop the puck on their inaugural season Friday night in Dallas. The question of whether fans in the team's hometown will be able to watch the game, however, remains unanswered. As of press time on Thursday, the team's local broadcast partner—**AT&T SportsNet Rocky Mountain**—still does not have a distribution deal with **Cox**, the largest cable provider in the region. Cox reiterated its stance that it remains "open to adding AT&T SportsNet Rocky Mountain to the Cox Las Vegas channel line-up if we can do so at a reasonable cost." The Golden Knights have told the media that they chose AT&T SportsNet, despite the fact that it didn't yet have deals with local providers Cox and **CenturyLink**, in order to reach an expansive footprint throughout the Rocky Mountains. The hope was that the local carriage deals would work themselves out before opening night. While the RSN is on **DirectTV** and recently reached a deal with CenturyLink, a stalemate between AT&T SportsNet and Cox could immediately alienate potential fans of Las Vegas' first major pro sports team.

People: **MGM** extended *Gary Barber's* contract, solidifying his position as chairman and CEO of the company through 2022. Barber has overseen major changes since joining MGM in 2010, transforming it and expanding its distribution footprint. The extension news follows MGM's recent acquisition of **EPIX** for \$1.2bln. -- **Cable ONE** gen counsel *Alan Silverman* will retire, effective Dec 29. "For the past 32 years—after two years at *Newsweek*, where he also assisted **The Washington Post Company** (now **Graham Holdings Company**) in our initial foray into the business with our acquisition of **Capital Cities Cable**—we have been lucky to have Alan serve as our general counsel," Cable ONE pres/CEO *Julia Laulis* said. A national search is commencing for his replacement, with *Matthew Stoloff* to serve as interim gen counsel.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Tales of Valor...

The entertainment landscape has always been a welcome home for series that examine the sacrifices of those in the nation's military. Not only do audiences naturally respond to patriotic tales, but these universal stories of heroism and sacrifice tap into our primal need to follow characters whose feats are greater than our own. Meanwhile, the fight against terrorism over the last few years has helped draw our attention to the super-secret subset of the military known as special forces, with several new shows giving us a glimpse into this world from various angles. Perhaps we can give **History Channel** some credit for starting the trend in January with the launch of "Six" starring *Walter Goggins* as a Seal Team Six member in harm's way. Now broadcasters have followed suit as the new fall season gets underway, with **NBC** last week premiering "The Brave" about an undercover military unit and **CBS** premiering "Seal Team" only two days later. Not to be left out, **The CW** on Oct 9 will premiere "Valor" starring *Christina Ochoa* and *Matt Barr* as combat helicopter pilots with the Army Rangers. Long story short, they go on a mission. It goes horribly wrong. Let the conspiracy ensue... At Summer **TCA** in August, Valor set itself apart from the other military dramas by highlighting the female military experience front and center. "We had very positive feedback when it came to having the female element in the forefront, having a female point of view and kind of a new storyline to go with that," Ochoa told critics. "I think that, for the most part, they are very dedicated to giving us authenticity, whether it be on set we also have two wonderful veterans, female veterans, in the writers' room." With the overwhelming success of CW parent **Warner Bros'** "Wonder Woman" in theaters (not a military drama per se, but Gal Gadot does storm a WWI battlefield at one point), it's perhaps only fitting that Valor's premiere will lead into The CW's own female-driven contribution to the DC comic-book universe: "Supergirl." But whether the focus on heroic females derives from superhero fantasy or grounded reality, one thing's for sure: Audiences can't seem to get enough. And that's a welcome trend in TV and beyond. — *Michael Grebb*

Reviews: "Spielberg," 8pm, Saturday, **HBO**. Arbitrary though it is, one test of a film about filmmaking is whether or not it gets viewers excited to see or re-see films it mentions. With *Susan Lacy's* 2-hour+ retrospective "Spielberg," the answer is a resounding yes. While there's plenty of discussion about Spielberg's place in cinema's pantheon and talk about technique, Spielberg's child-like sense of fun and fascination with visual storytelling make this doc an enjoyable ride. The usually reticent Spielberg did hours of interviews for this project. His insight, as well as interviews with fellow directors, talent and producers, add depth to the visual delights. -- "The Halcyon," 10pm ET, Monday, **Ovation**. "Halcyon" is another example of Brits doing period pieces well. "Downton Abbey"'s producers offer this WWII drama based in a London hotel. *Steven Mackintosh* as a smooth, likeable hotel manager leads the cast. -- Notable: "Let's Make a Deal," 9am-3pm ET, Sunday, **GSN**. Bravo to **GSN** for memorializing charitable, loyal (he was married for 70 years) host *Monty Hall* with a 6-hour marathon, including "LMAD"'s first ep, from 12/30/63. Hall, who passed Sept. 30 at 96, hosted nearly 5K eps. -*Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings (9/25/17-10/1/17)

	Mon-Sun Rtg	(000s)
1	ESPN	1.4 3142
2	FOXN	1 2290
3	MSNB	0.7 1676
4	USA	0.6 1364
5	HGTV	0.5 1160
5	TBSC	0.5 1108
7	CNN	0.4 970
7	HALL	0.4 947
7	ID	0.4 887
7	FOOD	0.4 876
7	HIST	0.4 870
7	DSNY	0.4 851
7	DISC	0.4 812
7	NFLN	0.4 646
7	DSE	0.4 85
16	TLC	0.3 772
16	FX	0.3 752
16	ADSM	0.3 726
16	TNT	0.3 681
16	A&E	0.3 620
16	TVLD	0.3 617
16	NKJR	0.3 585
16	HMM	0.3 474
24	NAN	0.2 563
24	AMC	0.2 530
24	BRAV	0.2 529
24	LIFE	0.2 491
24	SYFY	0.2 480
24	OWN	0.2 464
24	APL	0.2 460
24	FRFM	0.2 456
24	DSJR	0.2 450
24	CMDY	0.2 448
24	INSP	0.2 440
24	VH1	0.2 420
24	TRAV	0.2 406
24	MTV	0.2 405
24	SPK	0.2 399
24	LMN	0.2 397
24	WETV	0.2 364
24	EN	0.2 361
24	WGNA	0.2 299
24	SCI	0.2 264
24	NKTN	0.2 263

*Nielsen data, supplied by ABC/Disney, is based on coverage area of individual networks

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