

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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5Qs: BBC America's Barnett On 'Blue Planet II' and Staying Relevant in 2018

With "Blue Planet II" making its premiere this weekend and some big changes looming in BBC America's programming lineup, Cablefax chatted with network pres/sgm Sarah Barnett about the women forging its future and finding the right content mix. **How is the network looking to replace "Orphan Black" and "Dirk Gently" in 2018?** You're very lucky if you're a network that has a show that becomes as iconic and brand-defining as a show like "Orphan Black." I don't think you replace a show like "Orphan Black." And "Dirk Gently" too. It was a swing at something wildly different, bonkers imaginative, and truly distinctive. I think that our success lies in finding shows to connect to our audience that have something different and are wildly entertaining and have a freshness. Because of the DNA and the roots of this brand, it's not a super niche network in terms of its mix of formats. We constantly are looking at how a network like BBC America stays relevant, stays distinct at a time of over 470 scripted series, how we continue to tell great fictional stories and also have content offerings for an audience that feel differently fresh and energetic. **You're adding "Killing Eve," a female-centric show, to your slate at a pivotal moment for women in film and television.** I think a lot about how we make this moment the beginning of something that accrues to a paradigm shift. It's a moment that is inevitably confusing and messy. To take Killing Eve as a sort of example, that's a show that has many focused, committed women pulling something together. I look at the ways in which actresses in Hollywood are sharing stories, and the stories about women, actresses, coming together to share and consolidate power in a way that women traditionally haven't. I find that wildly encouraging. We have to be able to listen, learn, be horribly moved by some stories that are overbearingly hard to hear, but also keep adjusting together. It's a moment that is full of a certain kind of electric possibility. **What has the introduction of Jodie Whittaker as the first female Doctor, a pivotal moment in the series "Doctor Who" series, meant to the BBKA family?** It's really powerful. It wasn't just a story about a show, it was a story about society. It expanded beyond the TV conversations to become a cultural talking point. This 50-year old franchise that has had this extraordinary regenerative aspect to it and that connects so profoundly with a group of fans, because the show is so unique and has heart—two hearts, literally. Seeing women represented in new ways is a powerful factor in how females form their view of who they can be. **With the growing interest and concern over the wellbeing of the planet and climate change, what added value and**

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impact does a program like “Blue Planet II” have? It transcends differences. Anyone can come and love these shows, and there’s such a literally shared perspective, a shared response we have to the natural world. It cuts across any of the differences that feel like they’re dominating our moment. When you see our world and you see the stories and you watch the season of “Blue Planet II,” it would be disingenuous for the filmmakers not to show the truth of what is a fairly profound impact we’re having on our oceans. It motivates people in the best kinds of ways, through joy and love for our planet to then want to do some things that can have impact. **The acquisition of the Worlds Darts Championship and the Premier League seems different for BBCA. How’d it come about?** It’s another sign of the elastic, dimensional nature of this brand based on the DNA that comes from the UK. It’s live, which is the Holy Grail. It shares some elements with WWE in terms of the colorful spectacle of the fans and some of the characters. There’s no trickery, the sport itself is quite serious. There’s a democratic sense to it. It’s in no way an elitist kind of sport. There aren’t players in the US yet that are world-class just because it’s not a sport people think of professionalizing in the same way. But there is amazing passion. It being exuberant, having a passionate fan base and having the live aspect to us felt like a really great experiment.

Shooting Starz: Starz has filed two petitions with the **FCC** in the past two weeks in an effort to force **Altice USA** to restore the premium programmer’s 16 channels to **Optimum** subscribers. The two parties have been embroiled in a carriage dispute since the start of the year. The filings—a Petition for Declaratory Ruling, Enforcement Order and Further relief filed Jan 8 and an Emergency Petition for Injunctive Relief filed Jan 17—ask the FCC to mandate Altice restore carriage of Starz, **StarzEncore** and **Movieplex** for a required 30-day notice period and correct previous disclosures that Starz asserts are “misleading and false.” The petitions also call for Altice to respond to customer inquiries and complaints in compliance with FCC rules. Altice responded Friday morning, saying Starz’s claims “lack merit” and promising to file its response “in due course.” “We are focused on providing the best content experience for our customers and continually evaluate which channels meet their needs and preferences relative to the cost of the programming imposed by content owners,” Altice USA said in a statement. “Given that Starz is available to all consumers directly through Starz’ own over-the-top streaming service, we don’t believe it makes sense to charge all of our customers for Starz programming, particularly when their viewership is declining and the majority of our customers don’t watch Starz. We have offered and remain open to a deal with Starz to offer the content to customers who want it but they refuse.” The cable provider has launched several “replacement channels,” and certain subscribers will also receive a complimentary subscription to **TCM**. Starz in its emergency petition claimed Altice pushed negotiations off for months before engaging with Starz and would only agree to a short-term extension “if Starz provided all of its programming services for free.” The net also accused Altice of knowingly ignoring the rule

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that requires the 30 days' notice to customers before removing channels to avoid "the inevitable public outcry." This 30-day rule has been questioned over the years. **Time Warner Cable** was rebuked by the FCC in 2006 for removing **NFL Net** from just-acquired **Comcast** and **Adelphia** systems without proper notification. But some believe that the 30-day notification is not required if the programming change occurs because of a contract impasse.

Swint Swings for BAMTech: *Variety* got the scoop Friday that former **Apple** and **Samsung** exec **Kevin Swint** was tapped to serve as svp, gm for **Disney's** SVOD service. Swint most recently worked in a consulting capacity in VR, video, social media and other areas. From 2013-15, he was vp, product/content & services at Samsung, which included the launch of short-form streaming video service Milk Video. His time at Apple included a three-year stint as director of movies, worldwide. In 2003, he led the launch of **Walmart** Music Downloads.

Broadband Bonanza: And the broadband bills keep coming. The latest round of infrastructure bills from **House Communications** subcmte Republicans includes legislation that would exempt broadband facilities from environmental and historic preservation reviews in certain instances, such as on a federal property that have already granted another such facility. Other measures include attempts to streamline application processes for communications facilities on public lands, including the institution of a shot clock for deciding on applications. Democrats also are pushing bills, with Reps **Anna Eshoo** (CA) and **David McKinley** (WV) following up the "Dig Once" bill with a "Climb Once" Act aimed at streamlining deployment of new broadband equipment on utility poles. The bill would ensure that no federal laws can impede states and localities ability to implement "one touch" make-ready policies that allow for a list of pre-approved contractors that pole owners agree on to handle make-ready work, eliminating the need for multiple contractors to perform the work.

Sprint-Cox Deal: **Sprint** and **Cox** reached a new multiyear deal that will allow the wireless carrier to leverage Cox's broadband infrastructure to densify its network while simultaneously increasing the efficiency of its macro backhaul and small cell deployment. The agreement comes as part of a settlement of patent litigation between the two companies that dated back to late 2011. In announcing the deal, Sprint noted it has more spectrum capacity than any other US carrier, enabling it to keep pace with growing demand for unlimited data.

Thanks, But No Thanks: **Facebook** won't submit a bid for the **NFL's** 2018 "Thursday Night Football" package, according to a source cited by *Bloomberg*. The NFL put out an RFP late last year and, according to the report, is expected to decide before the end of February. The RFP reportedly leaves the door open for a digital player to win the entire package, though broadcast partners are still considered the favorites for primary rights. **Amazon** simulcasted 10 games this past season under a one-year deal, drawing an average minute audience of 310K. **CBS** and **NBC**, also under one-year deals—split the primary telecasts. *Bloomberg* reported those nets intend to bid less than the combined \$450mln they paid in 2017. **Facebook** has indicated it is interested in live sports, most notably bidding \$600mln for the rights to an Indian cricket league, which it ultimately lost to **Fox**. It has also streamed **MLB**, **MLS**, mid-tier college football and some soccer.

Government Shutdown: At our deadline, the government was headed toward a potential shutdown. But the **FCC** is not impacted for now. The agency said that because of available funding it plans to remain open and pay staff at least through the close of business on Friday (Jan 26).

Golf Channel Union Woes: It's not just MVPDs who have union disputes to contend with. **NBCU's Golf Channel** has been negotiating for nine months with a union that represents its live tournament technicians. Those efforts continue, but some technicians have walked off the job. The strike was apparent to some last Sunday when there were some quality issues at events in Hawaii, the Bahamas and Florida during the first day of the strike. *Global Golf Post* reported that everyone jumped in to help, with even vps running golf carts and hauling cameras. The net aired 19 hours of live coverage, with the golf pub saying that by Tuesday's Web.com final round, the average viewer could "barely tell a difference in coverage." "Our contingency plans are fully operational and we will continue to deliver live coverage with this week's full slate of tournaments, as well as support the union members who have chosen to come back to work. Thank you to our viewers for their patience," a network spokesperson said. This spat only involves events that are shown exclusively on Golf Channel (not those on **NBC & Golf** or **CBS & Golf**).

GLAAD Nominations: **GLAAD**, an LGBTQ media advocacy organization, announced the nominees for its 29th annual Media Awards, which are intended to recognize fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the LGBTQ community in media. Cable nets scored a cumulative 29 nominations (out of a total 141), with **FX**, **HBO** and **CNN en Español** leading the way with three nods each. **Comedy Central**, **Freeform** and **Disney Channel** each received two. Broadcast nets edged out cable with 30 total, anchored by **ABC**, **CBS** and **NBC**, who received six apiece. Streaming services claimed 13 nominations, including seven for **Netflix** and three for **Amazon**.