

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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RSN Update: Liberty Media and Sinclair Still Circling Fox Nets

The season hasn't even started yet, but according to **Liberty Media** pres/CEO *Greg Maffei*, the **Atlanta Braves** may win the 2019 World Series. For the record, **OddsShark** recently put the Braves' World Series odds at 14/1—behind the 6/1 odds for the **Red Sox**, **Astros** and **Yankees**. The odds may be a bit better for Liberty walking away with the **Fox** RSNs that **Disney** must sell to meet DOJ requirements. "It's a set of assets we know well," Maffei said of the RSNs during the company's earnings call Thursday. "We understand both their strengths and their weaknesses, which are manifest, and you have a seller who is a forced seller. My understanding is by the terms of their consent decree, which could be modified, they're going to be a seller, not a spinner. But the current consent decree does not allow them, as I understand it, to spin." Liberty was the latest entrant into the battle for the nets, but its interest isn't much of a surprise, given its ownership of the Braves as well as **Formula 1**. Then, of course, there's the history Maffei referenced with Liberty the previous owner of **Prime Sports**—a group of RSNs that became the **Fox Sports Net** group. Other interested parties include **MLB**, **Sinclair** and private equity firm **Apollo**. The Yankees are expected to buy back **YES**, and **L.A. Angels** owner *Arto Moreno* reportedly has interest in up to four of the RSNs. Sinclair, which is launching its own RSN with the **Chicago Cubs**, is also still very much in the running. "I can't comment specifically on those reports due to non-disclosure agreements we have signed, but there is a very unique moment in time here in the RSN space that we really like our positioning on," Sinclair CEO *Chris Ripley* said in the company's earnings call this week. "These RSNs represent the most-watched programs on TV and they're really super-premium content with true scarcity value. You can't create more sports." Analysts believe a successful launch of next year's Cubs-focused **Marquee Sports Network** would be an overall positive for other RSNs. "While we still believe that leveraging up to own ALL the DIS/FOXA RSNs would be perceived as a negative for SBGI's stock, it's starting to become clear that owning one or even a handful might make sense—just given the \$40-\$50MM "net FCF" (\$0.43-0.53/share) that will be thrown off by the Cubs," *Marci Ryvicker* of **Wolfe Research** wrote in a note to clients. While there are plenty of reasons to kick the tires, Maffei was clear that Liberty would be disciplined. "We've been rumored to look at [the RSNs], and it would be logical that we would look at it... But we're going to look at it only on the basis that it's attractive for us for the long term and that we can see reasonable upside given what our clear risks on the distribution

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Categories include: *Top Lawyers, Sales Hall of Fame, People to Watch* and other individual categories.

The Cablefax People Honorees will be recognized at **The Celebration of Leadership Gala** on **June 6** at the Yale Club in **New York**.

Deadline: March 1, 2019 | **Final Deadline:** March 8, 2019

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of these in a changing MVPD world,” he said. “We’re approaching them with appropriate caution and appropriate wide-eyed certainty and understanding that we formed a lot of these things with Fox a long time ago and we have a lot of history with them and understand those businesses well.” Liberty had a solid Q4, with its revenue gaining 1% from \$1.99bln to \$2.01bln. A large drive in financials came from **SiriusXM**, which saw operating profit increase 16% to \$436mln. The Braves Group operating loss was \$28mln, reduced from a \$68mln loss a year ago. Who knows—maybe for the first time since 1995 the Braves will take home the Commissioner’s Trophy.

Turner-HBO Shakeup: A day after the *WSJ* reported that longtime **NBC** chmn *Bob Greenblatt* may be in line to join **AT&T** as the head of its TV units, news came that *Richard Plepler* and *David Levy* are leaving the company. While Plepler’s memo was widely circulated in the media Thursday evening, Levy’s departure was hedged with language such as “expected to leave” (hat tip to *TheInformation’s Jessica Toonkel*, who appears to have been the first to report Levy’s exit). Plepler has served as HBO chmn/CEO since January 2013, while Levy was promoted from **Turner Sports** to president of all of Turner in 2013. Both men have been with the company much longer. Plepler joined HBO back in 1992 to head corporate communications, while Levy started his career at Turner in 1986 as an account exec. In a memo Thursday, Plepler said it was the right time to exit and that he will work closely with **WarnerMedia** chief *John Stankey* to assure a seamless transition. “We created a great and unique enterprise and I know that you will protect its legacy and do all to enhance its future in the years to come,” Plepler wrote. The news comes following the *WSJ* report that Greenblatt has been in “advanced” talks with Stankey for a place within the company heading TV, including **HBO**, **Turner** and the upcoming **WarnerMedia** streaming platform. Greenblatt ran **NBC Entertainment** and **Universal TV** from 2011-2018, stepping down as **NBC** chmn in September in 2018.

Dead Still Walking: Ratings declines for some of its biggest series may have dominated conversations around **AMC Networks** in recent times, but the company was still able to post better-than-expected 4Q results thanks to ad revenue growth and some unexpected hits. During Thursday’s earnings call, a moment was spent celebrating **BBC America** for a stellar 2018 with sleeper hit “Killing Eve” and the introduction of the first female lead in “Doctor Who.” “About five years ago, we partnered with the BBC investing in **BBC America**, because we believe the channel has untapped potential,” **AMC Networks** pres/CEO *Josh Sapan* said. “We’ve steadily realized that ambition, and I think 2018 was a particularly bold demonstration of it.” While **BBC America** thrived, **AMC’s** “The Walking Dead” continued to suffer through a viewership decline. “We are well aware that when a show has been around for nine years, you would expect the viewership to be declining,” COO *Ed Carroll* said. It hasn’t spooked **AMC** from continuing with the universe, and the company announced that

Cablefax: What’s Happening... April & May

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		Awards	Events
APRIL	<p>NAB Show Cablefax will preview and cover the hottest trends, panel discussions and show floor action at this massive annual gathering of the TV and broadcast industry.</p> <p>Customer Experience In a crowded marketplace, smart providers know that to stand out they must create the ultimate customer experience. This report examines what’s working and what isn’t when it comes to both traditional distribution and direct-to-consumer offerings.</p> <p>CFX Leaders Retreat Join us at this exclusive, off-the-record executive retreat designed to generate in-depth discussions on industry challenges and opportunities, leaving participants with actionable ideas to take back to the office.</p> <p>Cablefax: The Magazine – April Issue The Work Culture List *NEW* Cablefax: The Magazine’s newest issue shines a spotlight on top employers who are making waves in areas such as veteran hiring, continuing education and diversity.</p>	<p>The FAXIES Entry Deadline: April 12 Final Deadline: April 26</p>	<p>CFX Leaders Retreat April 29-30</p>
MAY	<p>Cable Center Cable Hall of Fame & WICT Signature Luncheon Cablefax will provide the lowdown on this year’s honorees and all the details surrounding these annual must-attend events.</p> <p>The Year Was 1979... It was a pivotal year for the industry that included the creation of WICT, ESPN, USA Network. Cablefax looks at what made this such a key year for the industry and how it has changed over the past four decades.</p> <p>The Gatekeepers A series of Q&As with MVPD programming and technology gatekeepers.</p>		

it would be moving forward with another TWD spinoff series being actively developed right now. No premiere talks are in the works quite yet though. AMC Networks' revenues increased 6.3% YOY to \$773m while operating income fell 15.1% to \$137m. Those revenues reflect a 1.4% rise in ad revenues to \$272m thanks to higher pricing.

Building Out: It's the time to shine for AVOD services. **Tubi** revealed Thursday it has signed a deal with **NBCU** that will add nearly 400 TV episodes and movies to the service. The announcement comes not long after **Viacom** purchased Pluto TV and is part of an aggressive plan from Tubi management to expand in 2019. The company achieved record growth in 2018, with more than four times the amount of content on the service over 2017. Tubi has also said it will invest over nine figures in content acquisitions into 2019 to continue building out its catalog.

Newsday Wednesday: **Fox News** led other cable news nets in total viewers for *Michael Cohen's* testimony on the Hill Wednesday, while **CNN** was top among the cablers in the 25-54 news demo. According to early **Nielsen** data, Fox News notched 2.29m viewers from 10am-2:30pm ET, ahead of **MSNBC** (2.87m) and CNN (2.08m). Throw in broadcast, and **ABC** was the most-watched net at 3.1m, followed by **CBS** (3.06m). During those 4.5 hours, CNN averaged 562K 25-54s, ahead of MSNBC's 457K and Fox's 381K. Wednesday primetime, which included special coverage of the summit between President *Trump* and North Korean leader *Kim Jong-un*, saw Fox take the crown in total viewers (3.45m vs 3.14m for MSNBC). MSNBC had the edge in 25-54s (645K vs Fox's 629K).

Programming: **ESPN** thanked *Jason Witten* for his contributions to "MNF" over the past year and wished him luck as he hangs up his mic and returns to the **Dallas Cowboys**. The net said it would determine its MNF plans for the upcoming season in the coming weeks. -- **WGN America** set May 28 as the premiere date for Season 2 of Mennonite drug drama "Pure." -- **SundanceTV's** true crime doc "Ministry of Evil: The Twisted Cult of Tony Alamo" has arrived on **AMC Premiere**. Its companion podcast, "The Truth About True Crime with Amanda Knox," will also be available to AMC Premiere subs through iOS, Android and web and on **Comcast's** X1 platform. -- *Donnie Wahlburg* will host **HLN's** newest original series chronicling the most terrifying criminal acts from recent history. "Very Scary People" will premiere on March 17 at 9pm. The first episode will be available on March 8 on demand as well as on CNNgo platforms and CNN's mobile apps.

People: Former **Lifetime** programming head *Liz Gately* has joined **Spotify** as head of creative development. It reunites her with former colleague *Dawn Ostroff*, who joined the streaming music service as chief content officer in June. -- *Carl Kalapesi* has joined **FreeWheel** as the company's COO. Prior to taking on the role, Kalapesi served as vp, global strategy and business operations at **Oath**. He's also held roles at **Boston Consulting Group** and the **Interactive Advertising Bureau**. -- Congrats to **Cablefax's** *Sara Winegardner*, who was promoted to senior editor. She joined the team in October 2017 as associate editor, contributing to **Cablefax Daily**, **Cablefax: The Magazine** and the biweekly CFX Tech column.

Editor's Note: Ready to nominate your team for Sales Team of the Year? Have a next generation leader that deserves recognition? **Cablefax** has combined entry for People to Watch, Sales Hall of Fame, Top Lawyers and other recognition programs under the **Cablefax People Awards**. Final entry deadline is March 8. Enter at CablefaxPeople.com.



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PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Living on a Prayer...

If you crave utterly bizarre, whimsically off-center, haplessly surrealistic, sweetly sardonic comedy (and who doesn't?), *Simon Rich* should be on your entertainment speed dial. This former "Saturday Night Live" writer and creator of **FXX's** hilarious "Man Seeking Woman" now brings us "Miracle Workers" (premiered Feb. 12) on **TBS**, offering an odd commentary about bureaucracy, power and—oh, I don't know—maybe the meaning of life. Or not. In summary, *Miracle Workers* follows Craig and Eliza (*Daniel Radcliffe* and *Geraldine Viswanathan*), two angels who answer insignificant prayers at Heaven Inc. ("Please God, let me find my car keys") and suddenly become humanity's last hope when God (*Steve Buscemi*) decides to destroy Earth so he can focus on his big new project: A lazy river restaurant in which patrons can use an extended claw device to grab food as they float by on intertubes. Who thinks of something that ridiculous? The same man who for *Man Seeking Woman* created Tanaka, a Japanese Penis Monster—that's who. "The show is on the surface very nihilistic and cynical," Rich told **Cablefax**. "There's a cosmology that most things that happen are completely random and meaningless. The goal is to start from that reality and see if you can find a way to take the characters on a journey where they decide not to give up." Rich said he's not trying to offend anyone or put God in a bad light, but "it's an attempt to start in the darkest place imaginable and find some kind life-affirming redemption." Truth be told, an absentee God might explain a lot about the war-torn and often chaotic world of today, complete with the idea that answering even a small prayer can have unintended consequences (They help a man find a glove only to discover he's a mass murderer). "It's a pretty bleak system, but if you watch it all the way through the end, hopefully you'll find a redemption," Rich said. The 4th episode of this 7-episode series airs on March 5, but you can get caught up at **TBS.com** before then. We'll trust Rich that God somehow finds God in the end. — *Michael Grebb*

Reviews: "Leaving Neverland" premiere, 8pm, Sunday, (part I), **HBO**. You likely know the general outline of this extraordinarily well-done doc. Two boys, aged 8 and 10, meet *Michael Jackson* at the height of his popularity. He befriends them and their mothers. Soon he's a member of the family, calling, visiting, and flying them all over the world first class with him. Eventually, one of the boys and his mother go on tour with Jackson. The boy is part of the show. And about 38 minutes into the first part of the two-part doc, one of the boys, now a 40-year-old man, describes, calmly and with a hint of remorse, how Jackson introduced him to pre-sexual acts. Eventually, there was sex, both the boys say. Where were their mothers? In the vicinity, living the good life, courtesy of Jackson. "I got to meet Sean Connery," one mother tells us, with great satisfaction. Eventually she says, I had one job to do as his mother and I failed. She doesn't seem too sad. -- "Free Solo," premiere, 9pm, Sunday, **Nat Geo**. This is a great chance to see the Oscar-winning film about rope-free mountain climber *Alex Honnold*, though if you have a fear of heights, be careful. Honnold's climbing on the edge of mountains will keep everyone on edge. It's amazing. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (02/18/19-02/24/19)		
Mon-Sun	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.784	2,394
MSNBC	0.616	1,882
HGTV	0.430	1,315
ESPN	0.421	1,286
USA	0.391	1,194
TBSC	0.377	1,153
ID	0.364	1,113
HIST	0.360	1,098
HALL	0.348	1,062
A&E	0.334	1,021
TNT	0.323	985
DISC	0.318	970
TLC	0.312	954
CNN	0.299	914
FOOD	0.297	908
NICK	0.254	776
FX	0.244	745
AMC	0.243	742
TVLAND	0.219	668
INSP	0.206	629
ADSM	0.192	587
SYFY	0.192	586
BRAVO	0.186	567
NAN	0.183	559
CRN	0.173	528
HMM	0.172	525
NATGEO	0.167	509
FRFM	0.160	489
LIFE	0.159	486
MTV	0.157	478
DSNY	0.155	472
DSJR	0.154	470
TRAVEL	0.150	458
GSN	0.147	449
APL	0.147	449
VH1	0.142	433
HBO	0.135	414
WETV	0.134	410
NKJR	0.134	408
WGNA	0.120	365
COM	0.119	363

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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- Cablefax Publisher Michael Grebb.



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