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What the Industry Reads First

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CES 2020: Sports All Over the Latest Tech

When it comes to technology in TV, sports often leads the way. It quickly embraced HD when it rolled out and dipped an early toe in VR. A **CES** panel Thursday zeroed in on a few key areas—data gathering, immersive experience and, yes, 5G—where sports is headed. “As far as the consumer experience goes, there has got to be a connection between the physical world that’s there at the game and the digital world that they carry in their pocket. I think those two bridges are starting to happen,” said *Doug Lodder*, **Boingo Wireless**’ svp, business development. “You ask what I’m most excited about, it’s... the continued evolution of 5G networks, the continued availability of CBRS spectrum, the launching of the 2.5 GHz band... all that comes together to create really fast, low latency networks.” The panel all agreed that sports betting has huge potential. Lodder predicted micro-betting—odds placed on small events during play—will be huge, which drives home the importance of that really low latency. “When you’re making a bet, you know that the bet was made prior to the event happening” with low latency, he said. Fans are “screaming” for more info on athletes as well. “We’re seeing on the data side a lot of biometric, wearable technology that is increasing,” said *Andrea Berry*, svp, gm of broadcast and TV for **Production Resource Group**. “You’re getting all these biometrics that tell why an athlete was successful in that match or that game. Fans really want to know why. How much is his punch, how fast is his punch, the speed of the kick. As we continue to collaborate with production and creative people on the technology side, they’re going to come up with more stories that push the envelope for the technical people to gain the type of data they want.” But what about VR? Moderator *Mike Davis* of **Fox Sports** quipped that four years ago, CES would have had three panels on VR. Is it still a thing? “We’ve always had the longest view in the room of VR,” said *Danny Keens*, head of content for **NextVR**, which has had virtual reality partnership with **Fox Sports**, **Turner Sports**, **WWE** and **NBA Digital**. “We always understand that the key to success was device factors, screen resolution and, of course, great content.” Going into 2020, things are looking strong for VR, he said. “To date, one of the Achilles’ heels of immersive media, certainly VR, has been screen resolution. The promise is a courtside NBA game, but ultimately, that’s not what you experience. It feels like you’re staring at a phone screen... That’s now changing,” Keen said. “You’re start to now really get that sense of presence.”

FX at TCA: **FX** chief *John Landgraf* lauded the net’s integration into **Hulu** in March as a “transformative opportunity for

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Source: Nielsen, FY 2019 (12/31/2018 - 12/29/2019), Households and Women 18+, L3 AA(000), Weekend Prime (Sat-Sun/8p-11p), Ranked Among Nielsen-rated Ad-Supported Cable Networks.

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our brands”—especially after 2019 produced 532 scripted shows (a 7% increase over 2018) with a pace that “is likely to increase perhaps substantially this year, which to me is just bananas.” Interestingly, he said FX will serve as a branded “hub” within Hulu rather than integrate seamlessly into the streaming service, meaning that the branding will remain intact. When one critic suggested FX’s presence on Hulu might give traditional distributors an argument to lower carriage fees, Landgraf countered that “I think it’s going to make the FX brand actually more valuable, really, because I think it’s going to penetrate more deeply into American culture.” But while he acknowledged that the changing landscape is unpredictable, he argued that long-term value hinges more on quality than immediacy. So with multiple streaming services “flooding the zone” with volume, he said FX remains focused on balancing “the needs of the moment” with quality and peak experiences that lead to long-term value. “The danger of the Internet is that everything becomes junk food,” he said. “It’s delicious. It’s cheap. It’s easily consumed in the moment. But what meal you’ve ever eaten at a fast-food restaurant do you ever remember in your life?” There’s the McRib—but point taken...

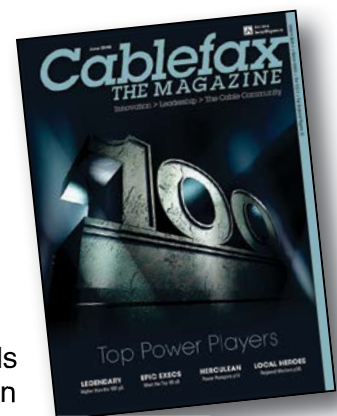
Fios Rolls out New Billing: Verizon introduced a new **Fios** pricing plan that it claims “disrupts the cable industry” and doesn’t require a bundle or contract for the best rates. The new “Mix & Match on Fios” offering allows customers to choose internet as low as \$39.99/month (plus equipment) for the lowest option. Home phone is \$20/month. TV packages vary from \$50, \$70 to \$90 month, with Verizon offering a 60-day test drive of 425+ channels and then a recommendation of the best plan. Longtime a la carte fan **The Parents Television Council** responded by saying that the unbundling isn’t really unbundling. “While the company may be offering smaller bundles of network programming, Verizon is just the latest distributor to be fooling itself about what consumer choice really means,” PTC pres *Tim Winter* said in a statement. “Unless and until consumers get to pick and choose—and pay for—the television networks they want to bring into their homes, what they’re proposing is only a distinction without a difference. The irony is that the network programmers are increasingly offering their own content on an a la carte basis via apps and other subscription services, yet they prohibit the cable, satellite and telco distributors from having the ability to sell networks on an a la carte basis. As long as customers are forced to pay for bundles of unwanted networks, cords will continue to be cut.” The new billing got a thumbs up from **Consumer Reports** for eliminating the RSN fee and broadcast surcharge. Congress passed reforms last month that will require pay TV providers beginning this summer to disclose the total price, including all itemized charges, fees, and estimated taxes, before a customer signs up for a video package. **New Street Research** analysts applauded Verizon for eliminating the “promo-and-rack-rate pricing strategy,” and said cable could benefit from a similar approach even though it may be difficult. “Their customers



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would thank them for it though, and it would ultimately boost the value of their businesses too (and as mentioned above, they have more to gain given the share of their business that comes from broadband),” a research note said.

Morgan Murphy Station Dark on U-verse: AT&T U-verse’s lineup lost WISC-CBS/MNT in Madison, WI, Wednesday evening. The station is owned by Morgan Murphy. DirecTV and AT&T TV Now were not impacted. If a deal isn’t reached by the weekend, U-verse subs could lose two of the four NFL Division round games this weekend.

AT&T Closing Audience Network: AT&T is closing its pay TV channel AT&T Audience Network, transitioning its streaming and linear channels in spring 2020 into a preview channel for upcoming streamer HBO Max. “We will begin to transition Audience Network from its current approach to support AT&T’s broader original content and marketing focus on the upcoming HBO Max service,” said Daniel York, chief content officer, AT&T Consumer. HBO Max is launching in May, and it’s currently unclear what will happen to its original shows such as “Mr. Mercedes.” “Any future use of Audience Network content will be assessed at a later date,” said a spokesperson from the company. Audience Network is currently available on DirecTV, AT&T U-verse, AT&T TV Now and AT&T’s Watch TV skinny bundle (free for subs of AT&T’s Unlimited & More wireless plans).

CES Notebook: For those expecting additional details on the upcoming Peacock streaming service, NBCU’s CES keynote Wednesday was a bit disappointing. The ins and outs of the streamer were all saved for the upcoming Jan 16 investor meeting. Instead, NBCU chmn, advertising and partnerships Linda Yaccarino focused on the shift in how viewers consume content and how advertisers are starting to adjust to those challenges. “The future is all about personalization... to reach beyond the screen and form a personal relationship with the right ad, with content,” Yaccarino said. “That’s when the magic happens.” She also touched on how the power of social media has changed the way decisions are made on which shows to renew, pointing directly to how “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” was revived by NBC following fan outrage at Fox’s decision to cancel the comedy. “Those are the times when tech gives consumers a voice,” Yaccarino said.

Fox, CBS Ink Mountain West Deal: The Mountain West conference announced a new six-year media-rights package Thursday with CBS and Fox Sports for football and men’s basketball, moving many of the games from ESPN. Beginning with the 2020-2021 season the deal extends CBS’ long-running agreement with the conference. CBS Sports will remain the primary rights holder, airing the conference’s top football and men’s basketball games. Each net will air 23 football games and 32 men’s basketball games annually, but CBS able to select up to 10 additional football games and 10 additional men’s basketball games each year. Fox Sports will have exclusive rights to Boise State home football games (formerly belonging to ESPN) and to the Mountain West Football Championship game. A full slate of MW football and men’s basketball games will be carried each year across the various Fox Sports linear platforms.

TiVo Launches New Products, Channels: TiVo is launching a new product TiVo Stream 4K, a streamer with live TV and Cloud DVR from the Sling TV app. The \$69.99 product is an HDMI dongle along the likes of Chromecast, Fire TV or Roku Streaming Stick. There will be no TiVo service fees for recording TV, but a Sling TV subscription is required. It also comes with a free access to streaming content network TiVo+. The company also announced it added a collection of new content partners to TiVo+, adding 23 channels to its current lineup of 26 free streaming channels. Its debuting its News category with channels including USA Today, Cheddar and Top Stories by Newsy. Sports is expanding with Sportswire and MMA Junkie. TiVo+ is available exclusively to TiVo customers.

Netflix Leads NAACP Noms: The nominees for the 51st NAACP Image Awards were announced Thursday, in advance of the two-hour live event airing on BET Feb 2. Netflix leads the way in the TV categories with 30 noms (a total of 42 including motion picture categories). The streamer’s series “When They See Us” about the Central Park Five has a total of nine nominations. OWN’s “Queen Sugar” received five noms, and HBO had eight total. Showtime earned six, and BET Networks has 12 total noms (including BET+). The awards will air on BET Networks for the first time, honoring people of color in TV, music, literature and film as well as individuals and groups who promote social justice through creative endeavors. The Image Awards previously aired on TV One, which had a five-year deal that expired last year. Before TV One, the event aired on NBC. The broadcast coincides with BET’s 40th anniversary.

People: Discovery promoted Josh Kovolenko to svp, marketing for Discovery, Animal Planet and Science Channel. Kovolenko joined Discovery in 2008 as a member of the global events and brand activation team, before rising to svp, marketing strategy and operations in 2017. -- Elliot Jacobson was named evp, programming and chief content officer for Newsmax TV. Jacobson was previously with the now defunct RLTV, serving as evp, chief content officer. EW Scripps acquired the carriage contracts from RLTV in 2017 to launch its Newsy network.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Owl House Ready to Take Flight

Disney Channel's newest animated series, "The Owl House," takes viewers into a magical realm. But instead of a Disneyesque fantasy land full of rainbows and unicorns, we see the seedier side of magic—witches and the demon realm. Creator and executive producer *Dana Terrace* told **CFX** she was inspired by stories about black magic as well as *Hieronymus Bosch* and *Pokemon*. "I wasn't pitching this show to make a Disney show. Disney just happened to pick it up because they were interested in the concept, but I think they were more interested in me as an artist and creator." Terrace has worked on Disney's "Duck Tales" and "Gravity Falls," but Owl House is the first series she's created. "Disney was a little worried about how much horror and gore would be in my show, but I think once they saw the actual episodes coming out and how much heart was in the show and the characters, and how the comedy balanced out the scary parts, they were more receptive," she said. That seems true, with *The Owl House* already greenlit for a second season. The series tells the story of Luz, a teen who ends up in the demon world where she befriends a rebellious witch and serves as her apprentice. "I think the stories we tell are very universal—friendship, trust, expressing yourself. Stories like that can play on any channel," Terrace said. Art director *Ricky Cometa* ("Steven Universe") wanted to shine a different light on the demon world that gives it less spookiness. "There's always this perception that demons, all they want to do is tear your skin off and torture you. But I think we try to share in this world, that these are people to," he said. "They have to go about their lives the same way we have to go about our lives. They have to shop at the grocery store, send the mail, check out the convention center." Owl House premieres Friday at 8:45pm ET on Disney. — *Amy Maclean*

Reviews: "Spinning Out," **Netflix**. It's a surprise that ice skating hasn't had a drama series before "Spinning Out," which debuted on Netflix on New Year's Day. There are outrageous costumes, dramatic music and kabuki-like movements, not to mention backstage drama. While **USA's** "Dare Me" won't teach aspiring cheerleaders much about that sport, *Spinning* lacks deep insights about Salchows, Lutzes and Axels. Still, it gets many details correct, and there cameos from real skaters. That there are a couple of TV series about female athletes is a good thing. At its best, *Spinning* offers compelling storylines, though it tends to get overly dramatic (even for figure skating) and, at times, silly. A plus is "Mad Men" alum *January Jones*, who has mastered playing mothers with serious psychological issues. Similar to *Mad Men*, when Jones' TV daughter, Sally Draper (the wonderful *Kiernan Shipka*), sometimes was more of an adult than her parents, in *Spinning*, Kat (*Kaya Scodelario*) also realizes that her mother is fighting mental illness. It's one of the best parts of the show. -- "Schitt's Creek," 9pm, Tuesday, **Pop TV**. Some of the best series get better with age. That's the case with this sitcom, which began its 6th and final season last Tuesday. Based on the four eps sent to us, this final season will end on a hilarious high. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (12/30/20-01/05/20)		
Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA AA% (000)
ESPN	1.159	3,561
FNC	0.690	2,119
HALL	0.415	1,277
A&E	0.404	1,241
HGTV	0.379	1,165
MSNBC	0.375	1,151
TLC	0.353	1,084
CNN	0.346	1,064
DISC	0.316	971
USA	0.298	915
TBSC	0.293	901
HISTORY	0.276	849
TNT	0.267	822
ID	0.265	814
FOOD	0.261	802
HMM	0.238	733
NICK	0.215	662
LIFE	0.209	643
BRAVO	0.207	637
INSP	0.206	632
ADSM	0.203	624
FX	0.174	535
TVLAND	0.173	533
SYFY	0.169	521
NAN	0.154	472
AMC	0.153	469
FRFM	0.145	446
TRAVEL	0.144	443
CRN	0.142	436
NGW	0.135	415
DSNY	0.132	406
APL	0.132	405
WETV	0.129	397
NKJR	0.129	395
GSN	0.125	385
MTV	0.121	373
BET	0.108	333
DSJR	0.107	330
VH1	0.106	327
LMN	0.104	320
PARA	0.104	319

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

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