

Cablefax Daily™

Friday — April 10, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 070

Changing the Game: Fox Sports Embraces Simulation Racing

Sports programmers had their worlds turned upside down when the coronavirus pandemic forced professional sports leagues and the NCAA to effectively cancel all live sports for the foreseeable future. "I've been doing this for over 20 years, and those 72 or 96 hours were unlike anything anybody's dealt with," Brad Zager, Fox Sports evp/head of productions & operations, told **CFX**. But many have pivoted to embrace alternate ways to give fans the sporting experiences they crave, including esports and simulators that mimic a traditional event. On March 22, Fox Sports held its first ever eNASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series race, putting actual pro drivers into simulators for a virtual competition that aired live on **FS1**. It's been continuing it every Sunday since. The idea to dive into iRacing came from Fox Sports CEO *Eric Shanks*. Shanks gave Zager the number for iRacing CEO *Steve Myers*. Zager called him the next morning and the pair quickly came to a deal. "Somehow, six days later on Sunday, we were on the air," Zager said. "We didn't have time to stop and digest anything. It was just constant moving." The motivation for standing up this new programming wasn't just because Fox Sports needed to fill in the gaps left behind from the cancellation of live sports. It was mainly because the network was hearing from fans how much they needed an escape from the feelings of dread they were experiencing when watching news filled with information about the coronavirus's spread. Luckily, Fox Sports announcers and top NASCAR drivers alike bought into the idea of creating a broadcast that would feel as similar to a live sporting event as possible. "The fact that we got [*Dale Earnhardt*] Jr and *Denny Hamlin* racing at the end of that first race gave everyone ... a sense of normalcy for however long they watched, but it was really what they always look for on Sundays: the top guys coming down to the end and having drama," Zager said. "That's what sports has always been about." Still, it wasn't easy pulling the production together. Beyond technology solutions and simulators, the Fox Sports team had to organize a control room that met the **CDC's** guidelines for social distancing. There was the challenge of entering the drivers' homes and installing the iRacing simulators needed to conduct the event. They also had to re-examine how their announcers approached storytelling as they began commentating the simulated races. "We stressed the fun of live racing on that first broadcast. We wanted to make sure that we didn't take it too seriously," Zager said. "We have a tendency to take sports really seriously, and good programming right now is going to be the opposite of that." Along the same lines, the crew had to become comfortable

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with producing an event that likely may not have been as polished as the typical broadcast. Rather than having camera crews and live shots for each driver, Zoom, Skype and other programs were used. "Can we bring the world together the way the rest of the world was being brought together in broadcast?" Zager said. Luckily, the response from Fox Sports' audiences has proven it was well worth the effort. An average of 638K homes and 903K viewers P2+ tuned in to the first iRacing event, and Nielsen declared it the most-watched linear esports broadcast in history. More importantly, the race exposed NASCAR to new viewers. Some 255K viewers watched the iRacing event who hadn't yet watched a NASCAR Cup Series race in 2020. Approximately 1.3mln total viewers tuned in during the second week, according to Nielsen. Fox Sports also has launched a Wednesday night World of Outlaws iRacing event that features a virtual representation of a dirt track. All of this opens up an opportunity for Fox Sports to incorporate more esports or simulation content to supplement its live programming when the coronavirus pandemic is over. "If it's really engaging and it continues to have success, I think you are going to see more and more of this become the norm no matter what happens in the country or when we do get back to a sense of normalcy," Zager said.

Virtual Golden Gloves: The dabbling in creative virtual sports content continues. fuboTV and Floyd Mayweather announced a deal for a jv to bring virtual boxing content to the streaming platform. The partnership will bring Mayweather's digital likeness to virtual boxing matches against other boxing legends. The matches will operate in real-time, factoring in actual performance, velocity, speed of reaction, strategy and stamina. The matches will be exclusive to fubo, and PPV partners yet-to-be-announced. fuboTV was acquired by FaceBank group last week, which manages virtual celebrities.

O'Rielly Asks for Help With Midband Spectrum : FCC commish Michael O'Rielly sent a letter to President Trump Wednesday encouraging him to ask the US Department of Defense to reduce its spectrum footprint. O'Rielly stressed the importance of midband spectrum for the widespread deployment of 5G and blamed political tactics and other techniques for the reason why there are delays in spectrum repurposing. There has also been an agreement, O'Rielly said, that should a federal band be reallocated, there must be a multi-year process for allowing wireless providers to use it. "The US does not have the luxury of waiting years to provide spectrum for 5G services," O'Rielly wrote. "It is clear more can be done to improve spectrum efficiency within DoD. Indeed, the reallocation of spectrum from DoD is not mutually exclusive with national security and must be pursued for the betterment of the American people and to ensure the continued success of our military under your leadership."

Media Groups Call on Congress: A coalition made up of the NAB, the News Media Alliance, National Newspaper Association and America's Newspaper are calling on Congress to include "critical support" to local news media in

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Amy Maclean, Editorial Director, amaclean@accessintel.com or 301.354.1760

The Collapse of Theatrical Windows?: With theaters shuttering, will day-and-date releases become the new normal? Universal Pictures is the first out of the gate, announcing "Trolls World Tour" will be available April 10 for a rental. Other in-release movie titles are set to be available as soon as this Friday. The movies will be available on Comcast, Sky and a "broad range of on-demand partners." Titles to be made available include "The Man" and "Emma" with a suggested retail price of \$19.99 in the US.

Tuesday — March 17, 2020 What the Industry Reads First Volume 31 / No. 050

For Now: Providers Set Aside Disputes During Coronavirus Outbreak

As they face the common enemy that is the coronavirus pandemic, Cox Media Group and DISH have set aside their retrans dispute for now so that DISH can resume its carriage of 10 CMG stations in New York, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Louisiana, California, Mississippi and Idaho. No word on how long the truce will last.

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Friday — March 13, 2020 What the Industry Reads First Volume 31 / No. 050

New Normal: Companies Roll Out Contingency Plans in Face of Covid-19

With a growing number of students and employees working from home, it's mission critical for the nation's broadband providers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Operators big and small are up-ending their day-to-day operations to ensure service remains uninterrupted.

Wednesday — March 18, 2020 What the Industry Reads First

Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts

Programmers are shuffling schedules to respond to the coronavirus crisis. The Weather Channel is airing live programming at 50 minutes past the hour to share educational content. Pledge Entertainment is due to school closure. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form and more. Scheduled for Friday at 2pm.

From the Commission: Another 116 broadband and telephone service providers have taken the FCC's Keep Americans Connected Pledge, agreeing to take specific steps to keep Americans connected during the coronavirus pandemic. Some notable names taking the pledge include Hotwire Communications, Midco

the next stimulus package designed for businesses getting hit by the coronavirus pandemic. A joint summary from the four organizations asks Congress for the ability for local media to seek relief under the Paycheck Protection Program and to fund federal ad spending on local media by directing government ad campaigns to local news and media outlets. The coalition is asking for \$5-\$10bln for the Department of Human Health and Services, the Small Business Administration and other relevant agencies. "In communities across America, local broadcasters and local newspapers provide an indispensable source of credible journalism and community focused information that simply cannot be replaced by other media platforms," said NAB pres/CEO *Gordon Smith*. "We urgently request that policymakers support our effort to preserve advertising-supported local media outlets that are so important to the fabric of daily life."

Good to Be Cable?: It's a good time for **Charter**, according to a research note from **MoffettNathanson**. Or maybe it isn't? Using Charter as a model, MoffettNathanson tested a variety of recession scenarios on how COVID-19 could affect cable. The group believes Charter's broadband growth will be helped by increased demand for higher speeds as students and knowledge workers hunker down. Then again, the firm added it could be hurt "by the stasis induced by a near-national lockdown. We're not sure." Charter's ARPU could be boosted by voluntary speed upgrades, or it could be hurt by a surge of non-pay defaults. "There should be no ambiguity here. Charter and other pure-play cable operators will be far, far less impacted by the current crisis than will most companies. Every company will be impacted. Charter is no exception. It's just that we don't know precisely how," the note reads. Overall, MoffettNathanson reached the conclusion that it is good to be cable, and even in its new moderate recession scenario, with significant cuts to broadband subscriber growth, video sub and ARPU growth, business services and local cable advertising, the group still projects that Charter's EBITDA will grow in 2020 and beyond.

Disney+ Passes 50mln: **Disney+** hit another milestone, reaching 50mln paid subs globally, with approx 8mln coming from India where Disney+ launched atop streaming service **Hotstar** last week. In the last two weeks, Disney+ rolled out in eight European countries. Disney had previously reported the streamer had 28mln subs in February. **Bernstein Research's** model had estimated 40mln paid subs for Disney+ by the end of the fiscal year, but buy-side expectations were higher, expecting 40mln subs at the end of the March quarter (when Disney still planned to launch across all of Europe before the end of March, prior to COVID-19). "When Disney+ was launched in India, our understanding is that all Hotstar subscribers were converted to Disney+ subscribers automatically. Since the Disney press release specifically references 50mln "paid" subscribers, we believe only the Hotstar paying subscribers were included in that count, which apparently was 8mln," a research note reads. "It doesn't seem to us this announcement is actually much different/better than buy-side expectations, when adjusted for Hotstar."

Doing Good: ViacomCBS set up a \$100mln relief fund to help those impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, particularly those in production. Funds will also support grants by the Motion Picture & Television Fund and The Actors Fund. -- **Liberty Global** created a \$4mln COVID-19 employee assistance fund, with \$2mln coming from senior execs and the board (\$1mln of that is from CEO *Mike Fries*). The additional \$2mln has been contributed by the company. All 27K Liberty Global employees will be eligible to confidentially apply for assistance across eight countries.

On the Circuit: SCTE-ISBE created a special workshops track for Cable-Tec Expo 2020. "Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic" will look at new strategies for managing workforces and how cable and new partners can foster cross-industry innovation to leverage new health and safety applications during public emergencies. The due date for all abstracts has been extended to May 8. -- The **Media Financial Management Association** is hosting its [April Distance Learning Lunch & Learn](#) "WFH: Tips and Tactics for Successfully Working on a Remote Basis" on April 14 at 1pm.

Programming: Revolt TV is hosting a live town hall on Thursday at 11pm, moderated by *Sean "Diddy" Combs*, looking into how the coronavirus has affected black Americans. Two-hour discussion "Life or Death: The State of Black America & The Coronavirus. Its United Effect but Unequal Burden" includes segments dealing with the public health issues, the low-income effect, incarceration, economic relief and the mental toll of quarantine. Guests include *Angela Rye*, Congressperson *Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez*, *Meek Mill*, and Sen *Kamala Harris*. -- This Sunday, **Fox News** will present "America Together: Keeping the Faith." Beginning at 5am, Fox News will broadcast live Easter Sunday services from Vatican City.

People: Hulu's head of ad sales *Peter Naylor* has departed for **Snap**, where he will take on the new vp, Americas position. -- Longtime public affairs exec *Ed Gillespie* is joining **AT&T** as senior evp, external and legislative affairs, effective April 22. He replaces *Jim Cicconi*, who is retiring after returning to AT&T last fall to lead the team on a temporary basis. Gillespie was Counselor to the President for *George W. Bush* in his second term, and chaired the Republican National Committee in 2003-2004.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Hollywood Gives Back in 'Celebrity IOU'

There's no better feeling than giving back to the people that extended a helping hand to you when you needed it the most. Premiering on Monday at 9pm, HGTV's "Celebrity IOU" gives celebrities like *Brad Pitt* and *Viola Davis* an opportunity to express their gratitude to influential individuals in their lives by surprising them with home renovations. Rather than being left to their own devices in terms of design and construction, the celebrities are able to call on the expertise of the Property Brothers *Drew and Jonathan Scott* every step of the way. HGTV svp, programming & development *Loren Ruch* told **CFX** the show humanizes A-level celebrities in a way that viewers rarely have the chance to see. "It's just one of those shows that dives a level deeper to focus on the dynamic relationships between the celebrities and the people they are surprising," she said. Creating a shoot and construction schedule that worked for both the Property Brothers and the celebrities was a major lift in itself. Equally as challenging was keeping the projects a surprise from the homeowners who had no idea anything was happening. And while the show is plenty uplifting, it also has its moments of pure comedy. Ruch said to keep an eye out for *Rebel Wilson's* shoot as the actress wanted to be involved in every single aspect of the demolition process, including operating the backhoe. "It was at least 100 degrees in Burbank that day, but nothing stopped her from getting down and dirty with the Brothers and the crew," Ruch said. *Michael Buble* also became deeply involved in his project, and had a clear vision for what he wanted to preserve in the home and what needed changing. "This was more than an appearance on a television show to him—it was an opportunity to give a beautiful gift to the woman who took care of his grandfather in his old age," Ruch said. — *Sara Winegardner*

Reviews: "Run," series premiere, 10:30pm, Sunday, **HBO**. This new series might work well as homebound viewers counter bouts of wanderlust. The title, "Run," is a giveaway. Wonderfully quirky *Merritt Wever* (best known for her role as nurse *Zoey Barkow* in **Showtime's** hit "Nurse Jackie") stars as a suburbanite whose equally quirky former college boyfriend (*Domhnall Gleeson*) texts her out of the blue. She discards her yoga mat (the quintessential symbol of a certain kind of suburban existence, right?) and jumps on a flight to meet him. Oops. She forgot to mention her impromptu trip to hubby. She meets the boyfriend, as she expected, on a cross-country **Amtrak**. (Of course, traveling on Amtrak might make several homebound viewers appreciate their current lot.) We can't wait to see learn the backstory. — "Mrs. America," series premiere, Wednesday, **FX** on **Hulu**. There's so much to like about this new series, which tells the story of the women's movement in the US. First, there's the all-star cast. *Cate Blanchett* is marvelous as ERA foe *Phyllis Schlafly*. *Margo Martindale* is terrific as *Bella Abzug* and *James Marsden* is handsomely smarmy as Rep. *Phil Crane*. Next is the music. Not covers, but 70s originals. The best part, of course, is that FX is relaying a great piece of history, especially timely in this 100th year of women's suffrage. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (03/30/20-04/05/20)		
Mon-Sun	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA% (000)	
FNC	1.323	4,066
CNN	0.720	2,211
MSNBC	0.707	2,174
TLC	0.381	1,172
HGTV	0.381	1,172
TBSC	0.351	1,079
HIST	0.347	1,065
HALL	0.345	1,061
FOOD	0.300	922
USA	0.274	843
DISC	0.269	825
INSP	0.253	778
TNT	0.249	767
A&E	0.228	700
AMC	0.218	670
HMM	0.208	638
ID	0.206	633
TVLAND	0.192	590
BRAVO	0.189	579
GSN	0.176	540
ADSM	0.168	515
LIFE	0.166	510
E!	0.155	476
NICK	0.147	451
FX	0.147	451
NAN	0.147	451
WETV	0.141	432
VH1	0.138	424
SYFY	0.136	418
MTV	0.136	417
COM	0.133	410
NKJR	0.132	406
BET	0.130	399
PARA	0.129	396
FRFM	0.129	396
TRAVEL	0.123	379
NATGEO	0.120	368
LMN	0.119	366
NGW	0.110	339
APL	0.110	339
DSNY	0.109	334

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

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