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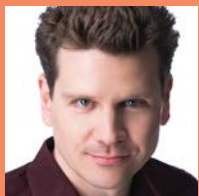
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Game Time: Soccer Brings Sports Back to Programmers

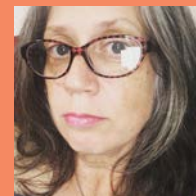
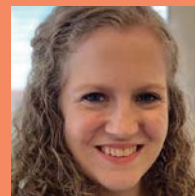
For programmers who have been starved of sports, relief is on the horizon by way of soccer. Beginning Saturday, the **National Women's Soccer League** will be the first professional contact sports league to return to play in the US, kicking off the Challenge Cup in Salt Lake City. There will be no spectators, and teams will quarantine in the "NWSL Village" and undergo frequent testing. One of the nine teams, Orlando Pride, has already been forced to pull out of the tournament after six players tested positive for COVID-19. Before the coronavirus forced sports to shut down, the league had struck a historic rights deal with **ViacomCBS**. Now, the opening game and the championship air on the broadcast net, and all other games will be streamed live on **CBS All Access** and replayed on **CBS Sports**. This will be the first time a women's club game will be shown live on a national broadcast network. "We're thrilled that CBS All Access is the home of the entire NWSL Challenge Cup and can't wait to bring this tournament, featuring an exciting format and some of the best athletes in the world, to the passionate women's soccer fan base around the country," said *Jeff Gerttula*, evp & gm of CBS Sports Digital. "This is a key step and significant opportunity for CBS All Access and CBS Sports as we build out our soccer coverage across platforms, and we will use the full reach of our assets to help grow visibility for women's soccer in the US and Canada." Following the NWSL's lead, the **MLS** announced its "MLS is Back Tournament" is slated to begin on July 11 at 8pm, taking place in Orlando at **ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex**. ESPN will oversee all game production for MLS broadcast partners, and all 54 matches will be televised nationally on ESPN, **ESPN2**, **FOX**, **FS1**, and **TUDN**. ESPN will have 22 matches including the opener and the final, and Fox will have nine group stage matchups, four knockout stage matches, two quarterfinals and a semifinal. Players will be tested every other day the first two weeks in Orlando, and then tested regularly going forward. **ESPN+** is set to stream 23 professional European soccer matches through the last week of June, including the FA Cup quarterfinals Saturday and Sunday, as well as EFL, Italian Serie A, Danish Superliga and more. The streamer is set to show nearly 70 matches in July. Mexican soccer is returning to **Univision's TUDN** with the inaugural Copa por Mexico tournament, featuring the top teams from Liga MX. That eight-team tournament kicks off July 3 at 7pm. In a pretty surprising twist, **Turner Sports** opted out of its UEFA Champions League contract, first [reported](#) by *SBJ*. The decision will take effect immediately, and Turner will not show any league matches when play resumes. Turner

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had the rights through next season, but Univision will retain the Spanish-language rights through 2024. SBJ reported that UEFA isn't in conversations yet for American media rights, but CBS is viewed as the likely favorite. There's definitely already a taste for one of the fastest growing sports in the US, with the June 17 return of the Premier League in the UK and the June 11 return of La Liga in Spain. **beIN** holds the exclusive rights to La Liga in the US and Canada, and the league's first weekend back reached 1.6mln unduplicated viewers on **beIN Sports** and **beIN Sports en Español** across the first days of play (June 11-June 14). "Live soccer is a cornerstone of beIN SPORTS' world-class content," said *Antonio Briceño*, deputy managing director of beIN SPORTS North America. "Over the last week, we've seen millions of viewers tune into beIN SPORTS to get their live sports fix. Most striking is the three times increase in viewership on our 24/7 free English-language channel, beIN SPORTS XTRA," he said. On **Telemundo**, the Spanish-language broadcast of the Premier League's Liverpool vs Everton on Sunday at 2pm drew in 272K total viewers. After soccer, the **MLB** is set to be the next North American league to return, eyeing an Opening Day on July 24.

Marquee-Comcast Update: Comcast is (once again) reportedly close to a deal for **Chicago Cubs-Sinclair RSN Marquee Sports Network**. "I would expect we do reach an agreement with Comcast, in particular as we see the potential for some spring training games, potentially with the White Sox, coming even ahead of the July 23 or 24 Opening Day," Cubs business operations pres *Crane Kenney* told the "Dan Bernstein Show" on **WSCR-AM 670** on Thursday. "The pace has picked up, and we're optimistic we'll get something done soon."

Closing the Broadband Gap: During a fireside chat with **Internet Innovation Alliance** founding co-chmn *Bruce Mehlman*, FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* reiterated that there's plenty left to be done to incentivize operators to continue closing the digital divide. "It begins with a recognition that there are parts of this country... that are never going to be economical to serve," he said. "The population is too sparse or the average income is too low, and no company is going to be able to build a case to go to a bank and say hey, can you loan me several million dollars for us to lay a few fiber lines to a part of the country that has one person per square mile, or less than that." As a start, Pai discussed additional reforms should come to the USF program and the Commission should find additional ways to streamline regulations to give providers the maximum business incentive to pursue those buildouts. Pai also said additional government partnerships are being explored to inform more consumers and get them connected via the Lifeline program. That sentiment was also voiced by Democratic commish *Geoffrey Starks* during a **Senate Commerce** hearing Wednesday. "The FCC must coordinate with agencies like SNAP or Medicaid that determine eligibility for the Lifeline program to ensure low-income communities learn about it and avail themselves of its benefits," Starks



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said in his testimony. “We should also increase the voice and data offerings Lifeline covers to meet the connectivity needs of our low-income subscribers during this public health crisis. These discussions are occurring as a number of broadband bills are being introduced in Congress. Reps *Greg Walden* (R-OR) and *Bob Latta* (R-OR) unveiled a package of 26 bills Thursday targeted at streamlining the deployment of broadband infrastructure.

Cox Bundles Elite Gamer Service: Cox launched an updated version of its Elite Gamer offering Thursday. The service, which promises lower latency by routing PC game traffic through the most efficient online path to gaming servers, will now be included at no additional cost for its Panoramic WiFi customers. All new and existing Panoramic WiFi customers will receive one Elite Gamer active game connection and have the opportunity to purchase up to 3 additional connections at \$4.99/month each. Cox Internet customers without Panoramic WiFi can purchase an active Elite Gamer connection for \$6.99/month and up to 3 additional connections at \$4.99/month each. Cox first began trialing the service in April 2019, offering two simultaneous connections for \$15/month.

FCC Releases Robocall Report: The FCC found that call blocking tools are now substantially available to consumers at no or low cost. The FCC staff report is based on survey data submitted by commenters, including cable companies such as **Comcast** and **Cox Communications**. At the Commission’s July 16 open meeting, commissioners will vote on an order that would among other things, give voice service providers a safe harbor from liability for the unintended or inadvertent blocking of calls so long as such action is based upon reasonable analytics indicating that such calls were unwanted and therefore should be blocked. Notably, the staff report released Thursday found few instances of blocking potentially wanted calls and commenters were unaware of any instances in which their programs have blocked an emergency call or a call-back from a Public Safety Access Point to a caller who dialed 911. Comcast told the FCC it blocked at the network-level more than 158mln robocall attempts in December without charge. It offers a free “anonymous call rejection” as an opt-in feature, but plans on offering this to all Xfinity Voice subscribers as an opt-out feature in the future. The feature blocked nearly 37mln calls in December. Cox said it blocks approximately 15% of incoming call attempts to residential customers through a combination of edge blocking, anonymous call rejection, blocking service **Nomorobo**, and selective call rejection. Edge blocking accounts for 65% of call attempt blocks and anonymous call rejection accounts for 29%—both are standard with Cox voice service. All of **Charter’s** call-blocking services are free features, with about 9% of its residential subs signing up for Nomorobo. By the end of 2020, Charter plans to allow its customers to opt in to white list call blocking. The FCC was required to prepare the report as part of its 2019 call blocking declaratory ruling.

RDOF Update: The FCC released an updated list of nearly 5.4mln unserved locations deemed eligible for bidding in the \$16bln Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Phase I auction scheduled to begin on Oct 29. Following the release of a preliminary list, the Commission conducted a limited challenge process allowing carriers to identify census blocks that have been served, been awarded funding by a federal or state broadband subsidy to offer service at 25/3Mbps or better and blocks within a rate-of-return carrier’s service area where it does not expect to extend broadband to satisfy universal service deployment obligations. Among others, the Commission denied a challenge filed by **Frontier Communications** for nearly 17K blocks where it claimed to provide service. That challenge prompted Sen *Shelley Moore Capito* (R-WV) to send a letter to FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* to take a closer look at the blocks Frontier claimed, and the provider admitted to misfiling data in June 2019. The FCC also denied challenges from **Arrowhead Electric Cooperation**, **Inland Telephone Company**, **Northwest Fiber**, **Edge Broadband**, **Mobius Communications Company**, **LakeNet LLC** and **FD Communications**. In a separate order, the Bureau granted Charter’s waiver request to exclude 2,127 census blocks in New York from the eligible areas list because the company will deploy broadband in those locations pursuant to a settlement reached with the state related to its **Time Warner Cable** acquisition.

Programming: **HBO Max** reached an overall deal with *Marlon Wayans* that includes a number of projects in the works, such as a stand-up special and a first look deal for a half-hour comedy. -- **MTV** renewed “*Jersey Shore Family Vacation*” for Season 4, after the S3 finale last Thursday brought in the highest ratings in two years, pulling in 1.7mln total viewers.

On the (Virtual) Circuit: With COVID-19 drastically changing the workforce, this may be **C2HR’s** most important annual conference yet. Like most other associations, the industry HR group is taking the event **virtual**. It was originally planned for Brooklyn on Aug 4, but will now shift to Nov 10-17 with 10 interactive, 60-minute sessions. C2HR CONFERENCE sponsorship opportunities, online registration and speakers will be announced soon at www.C2HR-Conference.org. -- *Multichannel’s* annual Wonder Women event on Sept 30 is also moving to a virtual presentation.

People: **Charter** is shuffling around some executive positions, elevating *Adam Ray* into the newly created position, evp, multi-dwelling unit (MDU) markets and *Magesh Srinivasan* to evp, network operations. The two are succeeding network operations evp *Scott Weber*, who plans to retire in 2021. Their new roles are effective as of July 1.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

BET Ready for Awards

The 20th annual BET Awards are going full-steam ahead, despite a pandemic. The event, Sunday at 8pm on **BET**, will be virtual for the first time, but don't expect it to be your standard video conference call. "I don't like the word virtual, only because it's so new people automatically think that it's Zoom or people in their living room holding an iPhone, and this is not that," said *Connie Orlando*, evp of specials, music programming & music strategy. "We have some really epic performances, we utilize green screens and stages, it's a great mix of creativity." The Awards will be pre-recorded, but shooting won't wrap until late Saturday night/early Sunday morning. "It will be as close to live as we would've gotten anyway. Safety's our first priority, and it just takes so many more bodies and people to pull off anything live," said Orlando. BET has the benefit of already airing a virtual event with the "Saving Our Selves" COVID relief special in April. "We learned a lot, and we can take those learnings and apply them to the Awards," said Orlando. "We looked at it as an opportunity to do things a little bigger, things that we couldn't do within the four walls of the venue. We really tapped into what we can bring this year that under any other circumstances we wouldn't have even been thinking about it." This is also the first year the BET Awards will take place under the combined **ViacomCBS**, and will be simulcast on **CBS**—the first time the event will air on a broadcast network. "I'm super proud of this year's show, and it's such an important show during this time," said Orlando. "For the last 20 years the BET Awards has always been at the forefront of culture and celebrating Black excellence and potential and music, and also just a platform to amplify our voices. We're really looking forward to delivering a show that hits on everything, and hits on it in a really impactful way." — *Mollie Cahillane*

Reviews: "Welcome to Chechnya," premiere, 10pm, Tuesday, **HBO**. This is a must-see doc for those interested in international relations, civil rights and Pride issues. It's incredible how much access filmmaker/journalist *David France* had to a group that bravely smuggles LGBTQ+ people out of Chechnya. Some of the footage, also smuggled, of Chechen police and others beating and arresting LGBTQ+ members is terrifying. The Chechen government not only looks the other way, it tacitly encourages these activities. The young Chechen leader, *Ramzan Kadyrov*, an ally of Russia's *Vladimir Putin*, is seen telling an HBO Sports interviewer there are no beatings of LGBTQ+ people in Chechnya, but if there are, they are deserved. Gays and lesbians are an abomination and should be eliminated, he says. It's chilling. — Notable: **Amazon Prime Video** is hosting a virtual Pride Festival Saturday and Sunday at primevideoprideinside.com featuring musical performances from *Betty Who*, *Vincint*, *The Aces* and *Greyson Chance*. There also will be dance- and makeup-instruction sessions. "Pride Inside" will be a virtual 360-degree environment where visitors create their profile to experience the event. — Remember *Christopher Cooper*, the bird watcher who now-former **Franklin Templeton** exec *Amy Cooper* falsely accused of accosting her in Central Park? He will host "Birding While Black" (Tues, 2pm ET) on the **YouTube** channel of **PBS's Nova**. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (06/15/20-06/21/20)		
Mon-Sun	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	1.196	3,675
MSNBC	0.647	1,987
CNN	0.535	1,645
HGTV	0.409	1,256
TLC	0.383	1,177
TBSC	0.332	1,020
HALL	0.284	873
HIST	0.274	842
FOOD	0.273	838
USA	0.253	778
PARA	0.249	765
DISC	0.219	672
TNT	0.216	664
INSP	0.207	636
ID	0.206	633
HMM	0.186	571
TVLAND	0.173	533
ADSM	0.171	526
SYFY	0.164	505
GSN	0.157	483
BRAVO	0.152	467
A&E	0.146	448
AMC	0.140	429
NAN	0.138	425
LIFE	0.136	417
APL	0.134	413
WETV	0.130	399
NICK	0.129	397
TRAVEL	0.128	395
MTV	0.128	392
ESPN	0.127	389
FRFM	0.124	381
NATGEO	0.123	379
FX	0.120	368
BET	0.113	346
OXY	0.106	326
COM	0.106	325
DSNY	0.102	313
NKJR	0.098	302
HBO	0.097	298
SCI	0.097	297

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

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