

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Game Time: Are You Ready for Some Football?

Judging by the numbers for Thursday night's **NFL** opener, plenty of viewers are happy football season is back. The Bucs-Cowboys game averaged 26 million viewers on **NBC** and **Peacock**, making it the most-watched show on TV since February's Super Bowl and the most-watched kickoff game since 2015.

It's no wonder then that there is a ton of interest in what will happen to NFL Sunday Ticket once its exclusive arrangement with **DirectTV** expires at the end of the 2022-23 season. While **ESPN** has publicly expressed interest in Sunday Ticket, **CNBC** and others are [reporting](#) that **Amazon** appears to be the frontrunner for the out-of-market package, with estimates that the NFL may seek \$2-\$2.5 billion a year.

Of course, we've been hearing rumors about **Amazon** taking the games for months—with speculation only growing strong after it won the exclusive rights in May for Thursday Night Football starting with the 2022 season.

With cord cutting continuing, live sports has long been viewed as the carrot that's keeping sports fans tethered to traditional pay TV. But as streamers enter the game, will that change? In addition to the upcoming Amazon package, consumers can now watch Sunday Night Football on Peacock Premium and the AFC Sunday package on **ViacomCBS' Paramount+**.

Moffett Nathanson analysts believe that **ESPN** and **FOX** hold the key to an OTT switch, since only 9% of NFL impressions over the past six years have been Thursday night games. And CBS's

Thursday night and Sunday night games have averaged 56% of all viewing time. "A true diehard NFL fan would not cut the cord and miss out on the 44% of NFL game interest that is available exclusively in the video bundle on FOX and ESPN. If anything, in the near-term, those who don't have Amazon Prime will have to add it," the firm said in a comprehensive NFL report Friday.

If either FOX or ESPN decide to shift games to OTT platforms, it could be the tipping point for the linear TV bundle. Moffett Nathanson's report argues there's good reason not to rock the boat—and anyone familiar with the dual revenue stream of advertising and affiliate fees understands. "Given the high fixed cost of their rights payments and their inability to replicate linear network economics, both are dis-incentivized to make that glue less sticky today," the analysts said.

There are still question marks over NFL ratings, with 2020 viewership down 9%, reversing a trend of growth in 2018 and 2019. While Thursday's numbers are a start in the right direction, it's too early to make any prognostications. But given the numbers importance on ad dollars (and driving non-sports programming slates), it just seems to be one more incentive not to blow up the linear video bundle.

In addition to Sunday's NFL games, ESPN will launch its 16th season of MNF. The MegaCast will be back, but one thing you won't see is gambling chatter—despite all the buzz around it and the NFL allowing sports betting ads. At least this season, sports betting talk will be confined to ESPN+'s "Between the Lines."

"The main telecast is still designed for the mass audience,

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and to date, gambling remains a fairly niche audience. We'd be crazy not to think and realize that that niche audience is growing. We recognize that, obviously," *Lee Fitting*, ESPN's svp, production, said during a media conference this week. "I think it's safe to say that we're all moving in a direction to serve the gambling fans, but I can also say that we want to get there smartly. The goal is not to be the first, but it's to be the most successful in this area for the longest amount of time."

CABLE-TEC EXPO OPTS FOR ONLINE

With Delta variant cases on the rise, **SCTE** announced Friday that **Cable-Tec Expo** will be a virtual-only event. Attendees previously had the option to attend the conference online or in person at Atlanta's Georgia World Congress Center October 11-14. This will be the second consecutive year of cable's largest technology show being all virtual. "Our industry rose to the challenge over the past year and a half to keep the world connected safely throughout the epidemic. We are continuing that pledge now by presenting Cable-Tec Expo as a virtual experience," SCTE president/CEO *Mark Dzuban* said in a statement. "As a virtual event last year, Cable-Tec Expo had the largest level of engagement we have ever seen and we look forward to that same level of connection, innovation and education in October." **The Cable TV Pioneers** has held its annual induction banquet in conjunction with Expo for several years. It is still planning on a live event at the Ritz-Carlton Atlanta on Oct 11 with tables sold out. Last year's virtual Expo attracted more attendees than ever before, but participants didn't have to pay to attend thanks to financial support from **Charter, Comcast, Cox** and the **SCTE Foundation**. This year, attendees have been paying differing rates for the in-person vs the online experience. Organiz-

ers said that those who paid the in-person rate will be notified of the shift and will receive a credit once they re-register for virtual. SCTE promised more info will be forthcoming and virtual registration is still open at expo.scte.org. **Cablefax** is the official show daily for Expo. **The NAB Show** is scheduled for the same week as Expo. It's still planning to hold the gathering in-person October 9-13 in Las Vegas, with proof of vaccination required. Exhibitors **Panasonic** and **Sony** announced this week that they are pulling out of the broadcaster show.

CARRIAGE

ROOT SPORTS and **fuboTV** made a deal for the sports-first streamer to carry the TV home of the Seattle Mariners, Seattle Kraken and Portland Trail Blazers regional game telecasts. This comes just ahead of the first season for the Krakens on ROOT SPORTS and the return of the Portland Trail Blazers. Other programming and behind-the-scenes content from the RSN will also be available to stream on fuboTV.

REMEMBERING 9/11 THROUGH PROGRAMMING

With Saturday marking the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on NYC, DC and Pennsylvania, there are slew of programs marking the occasion. An **NFL Media**-produced tribute video will be simulcast across **CBS** and **FOX** pregame shows before the start of the nine 1pm ET NFL games on Sunday. **NFL Network** will also air hour-long special "NFL360 Remembering 9/11" Friday at 9pm ET. – **Newsmax** will debut documentary "9/11: The Day That Shook the World" Friday at 9pm ET, including interviews with NYC Mayor *Rudy Giuliani*, former NY Police Commissioner *Bernard Kerik*, former FDNY Commissioner *Tom Von Essen* and more. – AVOD service

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Haystack News launched a streaming channel covering the 20-year anniversary of September 11, 2001, with local, national and global coverage available to stream through Sunday. – **Spectrum Networks** will air live coverage of the annual 9/11 commemoration ceremony starting at 8:30am ET. Spectrum News anchors from NYC, D.C., Shanksville, Pennsylvania; and Texas will appear on “Remembering 9/11: 20 Years Later.” – **NBCU** will air special live coverage from Ground Zero on Saturday across **NBC News, MSNBC, Noticias Telemundo,** and **NBC News Now.**

MEDIACOM 9/11 SCHOLARSHIPS

Mediacom is distributing \$200,000 via its 19th annual September 11th Memorial Scholarship Fund. The fund was established in 2002 to benefit children of Mediacom employees and pay tribute to those who died on 9/11. The recipients, 200 children of Mediacom employees, will be announced before Christmas 2021. To date, the company has distributed \$1.5 million in scholarship funds to 1,450 people through the fund.

PEOPLE

Brian Robbins will replace *Jim Gianopulos* as chairman and CEO of **Paramount Pictures**, a position Gianopulos has held since 2017. Robbins, head of **ViacomCBS's Nickelodeon** and founder of **AwesomenessTV**, will retain his daily oversight of Nick as well as kids and family content for **Paramount+**. Gianopulos will assist in the transition. – *Hakim Boubazine* has resigned as COO, president of telecommunications for **Altice USA**. CEO *Dexter Goei* will assume direct responsibilities for the telecom division, effective immediately, and Boubazine will serve as senior advisor to the CEO until December 31. Altice said the new management structure is designed to accelerate the company's growth initiatives and enhance the day-to-day management decision-making processes. – *Jerry Dow* is joining **MetroNet** as evp and chief marketing officer. He comes from **Suddenlink**, where he most recently served as chief marketing and sales officer. MetroNet also promoted *Kevin Stelmach* to division president of commercial networks. He's been with the provider for 20 years.

CABLEFAX DASHBOARD

Twitter Hits



Research

(Source: [Future Today & Variety Intelligence Platform Streaming Study](#))

- > 67.89% of U.S. consumers prefer choosing individual programs to watch on-demand, while 12.5% prefer pre-programmed linear channels
- > 35.6% of consumers stream more now than they did prior to COVID; 3.9% stream less. Streaming increased the most among 18-29s, with 41.3% streaming more now
- > Nearly 3 in 10 viewers (28%) have used one or more free trials for a streamer in the last 12-months. Of those who have, 41.2% subscribed after the trial ended.

Up Ahead

- SEPTEMBER 15:** [Mid-America Show Kickoff Event](#) (online)
- SEPTEMBER 19-22:** [NTCA 2021 Fall Conference](#), Nashville & Online
- OCTOBER 4-5:** [WICT Leadership Conference](#) (online)
- OCTOBER 5-6:** [The Independent Show](#) (online)
- OCTOBER 5-8:** [NAMIC 35th Annual Conference](#) (online)
- OCTOBER 6:** [Kaitz Virtual Event](#)

Quotable

"I think what stands out to me is how, back then, we all felt vulnerable, for the first time, in our own country. I remember after the layoff, baseball started back up again and ...I remember feeling scared to be in a stadium again, and to be amongst 40,000 fans, oddly enough, it's hard to believe now, felt vulnerable...it felt like, 'Should we be here, should we be in the stadium right now with what's happened and the death and destruction and what this means for our country?' And the answer was a resounding 'yes,' and life returned back, somewhat to normal, albeit with heavy hearts."

Fox Sportscaster Joe Buck speaking this week at a Paley Center event titled "9/11 and the Healing Power of Sports."