

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Spring Fever: New Football League Tries to Break Mold

The **USFL** is preparing for kickoff of its inaugural season Saturday in the latest attempt to bring spring football to the U.S. Backed by **Fox Sports** as a minority owner and a unique media rights deal with both **FOX** and **NBC Sports**, the league positioned itself for a big television presence, but the question remains: how will the USFL avoid the same fate as spring football leagues in the past?

Eight teams will play a 10-week regular season containing 40 total games—21 to be broadcast across **NBC**, **USA Network** and **Peacock**, and 22 on **FOX**, **FS1** and **FS2**—and all will take place in Birmingham, Ala., to reduce travel costs. The four-team playoff semifinals and final will take place in Canton, Ohio, at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium. The league has several rule changes such as trying for three points after scoring a touchdown, an alternative to onside kicks and clock stoppages in the final two minutes, all meant to make the game more enticing for fans.

“I think that there are some ingredients that we’ve discovered over the last three years of doing spring football that is going to inform us on how to make this league successful,” Fox Sports SVP of Field Operations *Mike Davies* told **CFX**. “Making it accessible, making sure that the product on the field is fantastic, keeping the games as exciting as possible and maybe short as possible, these are things that we’ve learned.”

Telecasts will feature two sky-cameras, drone footage, two helmet cameras, two referee cameras and virtual technology

to measure first downs through a chip implanted in the ball itself. Eventually, the USFL hopes to introduce a football that glows once it reaches the goal line—reminiscent of the glowing puck Fox Sports used for NHL telecasts in the late 1990s. But what Fox and NBC Sports want to achieve is ingraining viewers in an immersive experience that entices them to remain interested in the league.

“We wanted access to the players, we wanted access to the coaches, we wanted access to the referees,” Davies said. “We wanted to put [the viewers] behind the scenes, and understand kind of what was actually going on in the field, to hear everything.”

The USFL will present 14 selected games and the playoffs in over 130 countries and plans to add more. NBC Sports President of Programming *Jon Miller* said to *Cablefax* that making games available to a wide audience is an important long-term goal, but the USFL also has another aspect going for it that spring football leagues in the past didn’t have the luxury of: sports gambling. So far, 16 states approved the USFL as a betting market.

In December, FOX CFO *Steven Tomsich* [noted](#) the benefits of owning a sports property instead of borrowing it like other sports leagues, and since FOX has a stake in league ownership, advertising revenue goes to the network instead of toward a media rights fee. “I think there’s a lot in here that the fans are going to be interested in,” Miller said. “I give credit to Fox and the USFL for really being innovative and thinking outside

## Guide to Your Online Cablefax Daily Issues

The screenshot shows the Cablefax Daily website. At the top, there are navigation links for 'THE DAILY', 'AWARDS & EVENTS', 'THE MAGAZINE', 'SPECIAL REPORTS', 'THE LISTS', and 'JOBS'. A search bar is located in the top right corner. On the left side, there is a sidebar with the title 'The Daily' and the date 'Wednesday—September 15, 2021'. Below this, there are several article headlines, including 'Still Assisting: Charter Looks to Aid Community Centers, Job Training'. A 'FULL ARCHIVES' link is also visible. On the right side, there is a section titled 'Featured in this Issue:' which lists various companies and organizations. Below this, there is a 'SHOW FEATURED' section with a featured article titled 'Still Assisting: Charter Looks to Aid Community Centers, Job Training'.

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the box and bringing us on as a partner.”

Despite broadcast enhancements and technological innovations within the game, the answer to how a spring football league can survive and grow remains elusive. In the 1980s the USFL—not affiliated with the current one—tried to compete with the NFL and failed. The **XFL** folded after one season in 2001 and revived itself in 2020, but the season was halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the league subsequently suspended operations. Fox Sports had the rights to the XFL in its second iteration. However, the XFL has current plans to return to the gridiron in Feb. 2023. With USFL’s kickoff on the horizon, fans will tune in to see what the league is all about and how it stands out. Only time will tell if it can overcome various obstacles as seen by its predecessors.

### CHARTER, SINCLAIR SHAKE HANDS ON DEAL

Multiple extensions signaled that a deal was likely. On Thursday, **Charter** and **Sinclair** made it official, announcing a distribution agreement for the 19 **Bally Sports** RSNs as well as **Marquee Sports**, **YES Network**, **Tennis Channel** and the Sinclair broadcast stations. Terms weren’t disclosed, natch. All RSN negotiations are being watched carefully these days, but this one has really been under the microscope due to the upcoming Bally Sports direct-to-consumer streaming app. Sinclair previously said it plans to launch the sports streamer in five markets where it has MLB rights this quarter. Presumably, it needed the greenlight from Charter before it was ready to press go—and certainly having guaranteed MVPD dollars for the linear nets will help as it tries to figure out the right price point for sports streaming. Getting the Charter deal out of the way should also reassure investors in the DTC plan. The deal also is important because **DISH** and Sinclair failed with their renewal in November to add the RSNs back to the satellite provider’s lineup. **DISH** and **Sling TV** dropped the nets in 2019, before Sinclair owned them. They’ve also been dropped by **YouTube TV**, **Hulu** and **fuboTV**. Given all that, we’re going to guess Charter had the upper hand at the negotiating table, but Sinclair is known to drive a hard bargain.

### AMAZON PRIMING THE PRIME PUMP

Fresh off its **MGM** acquisition, **Amazon** CEO *Andy Jassy* told **CNBC** Thursday to look for the company to continue to invest a lot of money and resources into entertainment. “What we find is, so many people are starting Prime because they see some show that they love in Prime Video. And then they oftentimes once they start Prime, they use the shipping benefit and buy retail products and vice versa,” he said during a “Squawk Box” interview. “So I think that today, it really connects that Prime value proposition and I think people get a lot of value from those collected pieces. As we keep adding more and more content as you see what we’re doing with sports and

we’re pretty early in what we’ll add. It’s possible we’ll explore other models as well, but today it’s part of Prime.”

### WICT NETWORK SIGNATURE LUNCHEON

**The WICT Network** let out a collective sigh of relief Thursday at 2:01pm following the conclusion of a successful Signature Luncheon celebrating 50 years of Title IX. The Plaza Hotel’s third floor ballroom was noticeably full with **NBCU**, **ESPN**, **Charter**, and **Paramount** having strong presences. Only a limited number of seats were left empty due to COVID-related cancellations. There was also a limited presence from the newly-forged **Warner Bros. Discovery**, in part perhaps because of a town hall that was also scheduled for Thursday. During the companywide event, *Oprah* interviewed CEO *David Zaslav* on how the deal ultimately came together and how he plans to evaluate the workforces of WarnerMedia and Discovery

## Cablefax Executive Round Up

### Is there room for sports to break into the ad-supported streaming environment?



**Jason Cohen**  
Co-Founder, CEO  
**MyBundle.TV**

“While major sports leagues need the large affiliate revenue that comes from MVPD or DTC subscriptions to maintain (or grow) revenues, I see three ways for sports content to grow on FASTs:

1. A library of games that can compete for attention with other content found on FASTs, already used for filler on current sports cable networks
2. Smaller niche sports with low production costs
3. ‘News’ apps looking for more distribution (i.e. CBS Sports HQ)”



**Pamela Duckworth**  
Head of Fubo Sports Network and Original Programming  
**fuboTV**

“There is tremendous demand for ad-supported sports content and we’ve seen it firsthand. Viewership of fuboTV’s free-to-consumer network, Fubo Sports Network, has increased nearly 120% over the last year. We’ve seen success

across live events like Shawne Merriman’s ‘Lights Out Xtreme Fighting’ and original programming that highlights the voice of the athlete with stars like Terrell Owens, Gilbert Arenas and Julie Stewart-Binks. Fans have an appetite for a wide array of sports content and that’s where ad-supported platforms like ours stand out.”



**Jason Gurwin**  
CEO  
**Streamable**

“Major sports rights will remain in the cable bundle or via a subscription service for some time. However, ad-supported streaming services provide a good opportunity to bring viewership to niche sports, alternative feeds or additional reach to coverage that is available over-the-air. Not every game has to be behind a paywall, there is certainly room and benefit for consumers and distributors to offer some sports content for free.”

and future layoffs. Those that did have a chance to attend WICT Network's luncheon were treated to a program that honored the progress that's been made in gender equity in the workplace and educational institutions while also highlighting where more work still needs to be done. "I think it's really important to understand what Title IX is, how it works and to spread that around," *Nicole Newnham*, Director of upcoming **ESPN** documentary "37 Words," said during a fireside chat about the programmer's Fifty/50 initiative. "It's kind of like using Thor's hammer. It's this incredibly powerful tool, but only if you know how it works."

**TWITTER DRAWS ELON IN THE SAND**

While there's talk of **Twitter's** board mulling over a poison pill to block *Elon Musk's* \$43 billion takeover offer, **MoffettNathanson** is encouraging the social media giant to "take the money and run." The firm reiterated its "Neutral" rating on Twitter and raised its target price to \$46 (vs. \$38 previously) assuming a 50/50 probability between Musk's offer of \$54.20 and the firm's "no-deal" target price for Twitter of \$38. "With revenues of only \$5 billion in 2021, Twitter's challenge is affording the high-quality engineering talent needed to compete with bigger and better funded rivals, the analysts wrote in a research note. "If Twitter becomes private, Twitter, absent a public equity and now with a sky-high equity valuation, will need to pay their most talented people with a much greater mix of cash-based compensation, which should further pressure margins and free cash flow until Twitter can build a better monetization engine." During an appearance at a TED Talk conference Thursday, Musk admitted he's not sure he'll be able to buy Twitter. He said he'd like to bring along as many shareholders as possible, though he added he has "sufficient assets." There's also a Plan B, but he's keeping that to himself. Musk spoke about how he believes Twitter needs to be a strong platform for free speech, adding he thinks it needs to open-source its algorithm.

**RECORD ADAPTIVE SPIRIT AUCTION**

**Adaptive Spirit's** 2022 silent auction raised a record \$172,000, with all that money going to Paralympic athletes. The nonprofit just wrapped its annual networking gathering in Vail, with 800 attendees. It's already 50% sold out for 2023. Money raised by the group goes to the U.S. Paralympic Alpine, Nordic, Snowboard and Biathlon teams. More than 20,000 telecom execs and guests have participated over the years, with Adaptive Spirit (formerly SkiTAM) raising more than \$11 million.

**IT'S ALMOST PEABODY TIME**

The **Peabody** jurors narrowed down more than 1,200 entries to 60 nominees across television, radio/podcast and the web. **PBS** and **HBO** lead with 13 and eight noms, respectively, followed by **Hulu** and **Netflix** (five each), **The New York Times** and **NBC** (four), and **ABC**, **Amazon Prime**, **BBC**, and **Showtime** (two each). The winners will be named during a multi-day virtual celebration June 6-9. See the full list of nominees [here](#).

**What You're Saying...**

**Elon Musk** @elonmusk  
I made an offer [sec.gov/Archives/edgar...](https://sec.gov/Archives/edgar...)  
7:23 AM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

**Tom Brady** @TomBrady  
If you buy twitter can you delete the combine photo? @elonmusk  
11:55 AM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

**Mark Cuban** @mcuban  
Every major tech company , Google, fb, et al is on the phone with their anti trust lawyers asking if they can buy Twitter and get it approved. And Twitter is on the phone with their lawyers asking which can be their white knight. Gonna be interesting

**Bloomberg** @business · 6h  
BREAKING: Elon Musk offers to buy Twitter for \$54.20 per share in cash

**Reed Hundt** @rehundt  
Dreamed I had to choose: do I buy #Nationals or #Commanders or #Twitter? Decided instead to capitalize the national climate bank and help save planet. Hope that is not just me.  
7:49 AM · Apr 14, 2022 · Twitter Web App

**PEOPLE**

*Evan Feinman* has been named Deputy Associate Administrator for **NTIA's** Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Feinman, previously Chief Broadband Advisor to Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D), will lead the \$42.45 billion initiative. – **A+E Networks** Global Content Sales promoted *Lori Hall* to VP of International Programming. Hall joined A+E in 2016, initially working with the company's domestic **Lifetime** and **Lifetime Movie Network** brands. Before that, she was VP of Program Planning, Scheduling and Acquisitions at **Ovation TV**. – *Loren King*, Co-Chair of the **Mid-America Cable Association**, joined **Wisper Internet** as VP, Business Development. He previously was with **Sparklight** and **Fidelity Communications**. – *Rachel Ozias* was named VP of Xfinity Consumer Services for **Comcast's** Big South regional HQ. The 17-year Comcast veteran was most recently VP, Marketing for Comcast Business for the Central Division.

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

**Cablefax Daily** will not publish on Friday, April 15. Your next issue will arrive Monday, April 18. We'll keep you up-to-date on any breaking news at [Cablefax.com](http://Cablefax.com).

# PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

## New Details Emerge in Tubi Titanic Doc

Hubris, bad luck and tragic coincidences. Those elements contributed to the sinking of the seemingly indestructible Titanic, but questions still swirl even over a century later. In "Mysteries from the Grave: Titanic," which debuted April 8 on **Tubi**, the puzzling details that remain at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean are investigated to find out more about what happened and why the events unfolded the way they did. The documentary begins by painting the context surrounding the Titanic—noting its symbol as a major advancement for mankind—but quickly goes into how there was no saving the ship after impact, bringing chaos from the passengers and ship's crew who were ill-prepared to carry out a large-scale evacuation. Instead of re-hashing commonly known details about the ship, the documentary interviews descendants of passengers to recount in-person anecdotes of what it was like on the ship when the unthinkable happened. "I felt like we got really nice access, but that is a harder thing when you're doing a story that's over 100 years old," Executive Producer *Robert Twilley* told **CFX**. "There's also not the kind of visuals that you would expect in a more recent story ... But when you're trying to cover an 85-minute doc, you've got to make sure that you have the right visuals to pair with your storytelling." The personal aspect derived from the stories of those on board allows viewers to establish an emotional connection, which was a sentiment found by the group that discovered the wreckage after 73 years. "There was so much excitement and celebration around finding the boat that had been lost for [73] years," Twilley said. "Then all of a sudden it hit them that boy, these are lives that were lost, and in that they quickly sort of reset their outlook about what they had done." – *Noah Ziegler*

### REVIEWS

"The Flight Attendant," Season 2 premiere, **HBO Max**. It's inevitable that viewers want to watch a series from the beginning. Sometimes it's essential. With "The Flight Attendant," it's not. That's because the previous season, a dark-comedy hit and a terrific vehicle for *Kaley Cuoco*, has little bearing on Season 2. In fact, having viewed Season 1, you might find it difficult to accept Season 2's set-up. Since **HBO** has urged critics to refrain from spoilers, we'll remain mum. Still, Season 1 viewers will need to take a long leap of faith to accept flight attendant *Cassie Bowden's* 'side job' for the federal government. On the other hand, the gig sets her up for a lot of action. Couple that with her full-time work and you have myriad storylines. Actually, that's a minor criticism of this sophomore season. There are too many plotlines and lots of cameos. Fortunately, *Cuoco* shines as a nervous, fish-out-of-water character. It's a fun watch, though not on par with a stupendous freshman year. – "Frontline: The Power of Big Oil," three-part series, Tuesday, **PBS**. An excellent look behind the scenes of climate change and fossil fuel. – Notable: "Dance for Ukraine," through Apr. 24, streaming on **Marquee TV**. A great idea way to enjoy a wonderful ballet and support the citizens of Ukraine as they work to recover their lives. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(04/04/22-04/10/22)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
<b>FNC</b>	<b>0.746</b>	<b>2324</b>
<b>TBSC</b>	<b>0.545</b>	<b>1698</b>
<b>TNT</b>	<b>0.406</b>	<b>1264</b>
<b>HGTV</b>	<b>0.374</b>	<b>1166</b>
<b>ESPN</b>	<b>0.323</b>	<b>1005</b>
<b>MSNBC</b>	<b>0.323</b>	<b>1005</b>
<b>TLC</b>	<b>0.296</b>	<b>924</b>
<b>HALL</b>	<b>0.273</b>	<b>852</b>
<b>INSP</b>	<b>0.252</b>	<b>784</b>
<b>FOOD</b>	<b>0.245</b>	<b>764</b>
<b>HIST</b>	<b>0.226</b>	<b>703</b>
<b>CNN</b>	<b>0.220</b>	<b>684</b>
<b>DISC</b>	<b>0.216</b>	<b>674</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>0.202</b>	<b>630</b>
<b>ID</b>	<b>0.186</b>	<b>580</b>
<b>TVLAND</b>	<b>0.172</b>	<b>537</b>
<b>LIFE</b>	<b>0.172</b>	<b>536</b>
<b>HMM</b>	<b>0.161</b>	<b>501</b>
<b>AMC</b>	<b>0.144</b>	<b>449</b>
<b>A&amp;E</b>	<b>0.141</b>	<b>439</b>
<b>WETV</b>	<b>0.138</b>	<b>429</b>
<b>GSN</b>	<b>0.118</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>NATGEO</b>	<b>0.117</b>	<b>366</b>
<b>APL</b>	<b>0.114</b>	<b>356</b>
<b>BRAVO</b>	<b>0.108</b>	<b>338</b>
<b>TRUTV</b>	<b>0.106</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>SYFY</b>	<b>0.106</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>TRAVEL</b>	<b>0.106</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>ESPN2</b>	<b>0.105</b>	<b>326</b>
<b>COM</b>	<b>0.102</b>	<b>319</b>
<b>PRMNT</b>	<b>0.100</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>OXYGEN</b>	<b>0.100</b>	<b>310</b>
<b>NAN</b>	<b>0.097</b>	<b>304</b>
<b>NICK</b>	<b>0.095</b>	<b>295</b>

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



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