

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Media Mayhem: College Football Begins Ahead of Big Changes

College football is in one of the most transformative periods of its storied history, and how the sport is consumed is in the driver's seat of that evolution. There's football to be played, but the overarching uncertainty of its future—and the future of college sports, for that matter—will loom large as fans tune in to watch their beloved teams.

This past offseason has been riddled with realignment rumors anchored by conferences and their respective media rights deals. The first domino fell in summer 2021 with Texas and Oklahoma leaving the **Big 12** to join the **SEC**, and the ripple effects stretched to Wednesday with news of Cal, Stanford and SMU potentially joining the **ACC**. But the catalyst behind these moves is what those media deals give to universities: money.

This move away from more regionalized college sports competitions to a nationwide landscape is less about what fans want and more about the evolution in media distribution. As of July, **Nielsen's** "The Gauge" showed total linear TV usage dipped below 50% as streaming took a segment record 38.7% of viewing.

"The economics in the old system don't exist anymore. Our content costs match that system. The new system doesn't make as much money," media consultant and former **Fox Sports** exec *Patrick Crakes* told **CFX**. "Aggregate content costs must adjust and something like the Pac-12 is an example of content costs adjusting ... the content costs are adjusting even with new digital-only players that make their economics from

things that aren't media and are the most valuable businesses on the planet. So this realignment was driven by a change in how the economics are produced."

Take the **Big Ten** for example. Its new seven-year media deal with **Fox**, **CBS** and **NBC** starts this season and will bring in more than \$8 billion total, making it the most lucrative media rights deal for a collegiate conference ever. All games airing on the NBC broadcast network will be simulstreamed on the conference's new DTC home **Peacock**. Peacock will also have four exclusive games this season, with more potentially coming after Week 3.

Or look at the **SEC**, which has firmly established itself alongside the Big Ten as the "Power 2" conference duo and further separated the two from a previous Power-5 conference moniker. **Disney** nabbed the Saturday afternoon slate of football games from CBS and will pay the conference around \$300 million/year for 10 years. That's nearly six times the \$55 million/year CBS was paying beforehand, but it means all SEC games will fall under the ESPN umbrella starting in 2024.

There's the Big 12 and its \$2.28 billion extension with ESPN and Fox Sports through 2030-31. The ACC is locked into its agreement with ESPN through 2036 thanks to an ironclad grant of rights. The odd one out is (or was) the **Pac-12**, which turned down a deal with ESPN and tried to salvage its survival with a streaming deal with **Apple** that didn't come to fruition. It wasn't enough, and the subsequent fallout included eight schools departing with the aforementioned Cal and Stanford possibly following suit soon.

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From the schools’ perspectives, the scramble to find a conference means finding one with a solidified standing within the established pay TV ecosystem. “[Realignment] was done to try to keep things as general market as possible, take advantage of the pay TV bundle to be the winner in it as it declines over the next five or six years,” Crakes said. “Then by that time, hope the digital distribution side of this has begun to emerge in some way that makes some kind of cogent sense. But make no doubt about it. It’s never going to look like it did before.”

The Pac-12’s demise isn’t being celebrated by any means, even by competitive networks benefiting from schools like Southern Cal, UCLA, Oregon and Washington departing the conference. “As a football fan, I hate to see what’s happening with the Pac-12,” said **NBC Sports** analyst *Todd Blackledge*, who joined the network from ESPN earlier this year, on a press call. “But as somebody that’s now working and representing the Big Ten, I think it’s going to be a fantastic conference to cover. As far as game matchups, you have multiple more possible outstanding game matchups for us on Saturday nights.”

The Big Ten and SEC have cemented themselves as the new promised land for schools, but not everyone can get in. It’s why the Big 12 reacted quickly after losing its two most valuable schools and added four schools that had been clamoring for Power-5 status while also wrapping up an extension of its TV deal. But it goes to show the top conferences will do what they can to acquire the most valuable brands that add to what they offer in the media landscape. The question that looms, however, is what the general college landscape will look like when these media rights deals begin to expire, starting with the Big Ten in 2030.

“The pool of money has flattened inside the established pay TV bundle or gone down, but if you can assemble enough content that is highly appealing to who’s left in the pay TV bundle, of that stable pie—soon to be declining pie—you can get a bigger share of it because if things shrink down, the things that have the most value become more valuable,” Crakes said.

GOP DEBATE RATINGS

The first Republican primary debate was on **Fox News** Wednesday night, and it became the highest-rated non-sports cable telecast of the year in total viewers with an average of 12.8 million, according to Nielsen. That’s better than 70% of all presidential primary debates in the last two cycles and eclipses the network’s previous debate from Jan. 2016 that was without then-candidate Donald Trump. Wednesday’s debate recorded 2.82 million viewers A25-54 as well, beating out the broadcast networks combined. Fox Business Network had 1.7 million viewers and 401,000 A25-54 during its simulcast of the event.

CNN MAX ARRIVES NEXT MONTH

After months of teases from leadership, **CNN** is officially re-entering the streaming sphere. **Max** will launch a 24/7 news feed in the U.S. on Sept. 27 and it will be fittingly dubbed **CNN Max**. The currently branded **CNN Originals** hub will be renamed **CNN Max** and will house the livestream, **CNN Originals**, additional news content and legacy programming. As part of the announcement, **Warner Bros. Discovery** said **CNN Max** will be part of an open beta for news to enable experimentation

Cablefax Executive Round Up

With the college football season coming up, how are programmers evolving their coverage to better engage with fans?



Rick Cordella
President, Programming
NBC Sports/Peacock Sports

“With 31 FBS games this fall—a record for NBC Sports—we’re excited to begin our landmark Big Ten partnership and continue our storied, three-decade partnership presenting Notre Dame Football. With comprehensive coverage across

NBC and Peacock, including the first time that Big Ten Football will have a dedicated weekly primetime game on a national broadcast network with “Big Ten Saturday Night,” 10 exclusive games on Peacock, bringing our weekly studio show live to campuses, and much more, NBC Sports will provide the pageantry and energy of college football’s premier games to fans across the country.”



Nick Dawson
SVP, Programming & Acquisitions
ESPN

“What still matters most is using flexibility week to week to put the best game in the best window for fans across the country, which remains core to our strategy at ESPN. That said, ESPN is consistently raising the bar with our game productions, whether that’s with new and innovative access and technology or alternate presentations, including our signature MegaCast, to provide fans more compelling reasons to tune in. Additionally, the ESPN App allows us to meet fans and viewers where they are, so whether they choose to consume via phone, tablet, connected devices, traditional TV, at a bar or restaurant, etc., we have them covered.”



Dan Weinberg
EVP, Programming
CBS Sports

“College football’s popularity criss-crosses the country, and this year CBS Sports offers nearly 100 national games featuring the biggest programs. In 2023 we’ll showcase the Big Ten and SEC, plus deliver triple and quadruple headers all season. Our games are supported by best-in-class studio shows, first-rate editorial coverage and a greater digital and social presence than ever before. We are blanketing our platforms with all things college football. National pigskin passion runs high, and CBS Sports’ multi-platform coverage will meet fans and viewers wherever they are.”

with different product features and content offerings based on feedback from Max users. Programming on CNN Max will be largely familiar to viewers of the linear network, with “Amanpour,” “Anderson Cooper 360,” “The Lead with Jake Tapper” and “The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer” all being featured in the lineup. New programming will also be introduced exclusively for the Max streaming audience like “CNN Newsroom with Jim Sciutto.” CNN Max will be available on all Max tiers at no additional charge.

STATION STEPS UP FOR MAUI

A Nexstar fundraising effort led by Honolulu-based KHON2 has raised nearly \$1.188 million to assist victims affected by the wildfires that recently struck Maui. Highlights from the fundraising were an additional \$134,253 in donations from a telethon hosted by KLAS-TV in Las Vegas and a \$20,000 donation from the Nexstar Media Charitable Foundation. Contributions were designated to the Hawaii Wildfires Relief Fund of the Hawaii Red Cross.

NCTA: ENERGY SAVINGS RACKING UP FOR CONSUMERS

Consumers saved more than \$3 billion in energy costs in 2022 thanks to a voluntary agreement between the pay TV industry and energy advocates to improve the energy efficiency of set-top boxes, NCTA announced Thursday. The effort has been led by NCTA, CTA and Cablelabs and has cut the aggregate energy use of set-top boxes by 63% in the U.S. since its launch in 2012. Major drivers of savings under the program has been the transition from traditional DVRs with hard drives to non-DVR IP devices. Participants in the program include Altice USA, AT&T, Charter, Comcast, Cox, DISH, Frontier, Verizon and manufacturers including CommScope, Sagemcom and Vantiva.

BREEZELINE BRINGS STREAM TV TO THREE MORE STATES

Breezeline is continuing its rollout of its Stream TV product, bringing it to the operator’s Delaware, Maryland and Virginia service areas. The cloud-based service is already available to subscribers in Breezeline’s Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Florida and Ohio footprints. It features live TV, on demand, DVR and streaming app content; voice command capability and up to 300 hours of DVR space.

NOTRE DAME INKS DIRECTV SPONSORSHIP

As Notre Dame football gets ready to kick off its season Saturday in Ireland, the Notre Dame athletics department signed DirecTV to a multi-year sponsorship deal. DirecTV will have the ability to include official Notre Dame athletics designations, have involvement with the Notre Dame Radio Network and access to VIP hospitality at home games.

CARRIAGE

Four NBCUniversal FAST channels are being added to Google TV and Android TV devices in the U.S. Murder, She Wrote, Universal Crime, Lo Mejor de Telemundo and Historias de Amor are now available on the two platforms, joining other NBCU channels like NBC News NOW, Dateline 24/7, Telemundo al Día and Sky International.

LIFE WITHOUT SPECTRUM

Sponsored content can be hit or miss, but comedian Daniel LaBelle’s spot for Charter had us thoroughly entertained. We aren’t alone. His “Life without Spectrum” video has topped more than 900,000 views on YouTube Shorts and amassed more than 800,000 on TikTok, while garnering comments like “Best sponsored [sic] video I’ve ever seen” and “I wish all ads were this entertaining!”. In the 52-second video, LaBelle imitates what it would be like “if Spectrum’s fast internet was a person,” running around the house at top speed, opening doors, sliding out chairs and anticipating the homeowner’s every need. He also shows life without Spectrum internet by moving much slower, running into walls and hilariously (and painfully) glitching. Worth the watch!

FIBER FRENZY

TDS launched its fiber service in Watertown, Wisconsin, on Friday. Approximately 9,300 residents and businesses will have access once construction is fully complete. – Comcast announced that 50% of Spring Hill, Kansas, residents can sign up for its gigabit network. This expansion of the operator’s network will bring speeds faster than 1 Gbps and business speeds of up to 100 Gbps to 3,400 more area homes and businesses by early 2024. Comcast is also investing \$9 million over two years to expand its network infrastructure over 75 miles in the surrounding area.

PROGRAMMING

The new season of “Rick and Morty” premieres on Adult Swim on Oct. 15 at 11pm. It will be available to stream in 2024. – After departing from FS1’s “Undisputed” in June, Shannon Sharpe is joining ESPN’s “First Take.” He’ll be a weekly guest on Mondays and Tuesdays starting Sept. 4.– EarthxTV greenlit “Texas Gator Savers,” a docuseries featuring conservationist and alligator wrangler Gary Saurage. It will air on the network in the U.S., U.K., Europe and Mexico.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Cablefax Daily will not be publishing on Friday, August 25. Your next issue will arrive in your inbox on Monday, August 28. In the meantime, keep an eye on Cablefax.com for any breaking news updates.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

WGA Holding the Line After AMPTP Proposal

More than 100 days after the **WGA** began striking, it doesn't seem like we're any closer to seeing a deal between the union and the **Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers**. For the first time this week, AMPTP released its Aug. 11 proposal to WGA, a package the studios said addressed all the issues the Guild identified as its highest priorities. The use of generative AI to produce scripts has been a hot-button issue for the Guild, and AMPTP offered some protections on that front in the new proposal. Written material produced by generative AI would not be considered literary material and a writer's compensation, credit and separated rights would not be affected by the use of material produced by the AI. Other features of the proposal include wage increases, residual increases for high-budget SVOD productions and high-budget AVOD programs would be generally subject to the same terms and conditions that apply to a program made for basic cable. But WGA is sharing its [perspective](#) on what happened before the studios decided to share the proposal, and why the offer doesn't go far enough. It proposed a counteroffer and the week following Aug. 11 saw the two sides discussing the issues at hand. Its negotiating team received an invite to meet with **Disney** CEO *Bob Iger*, **Universal Pictures** Chief Content Officer *Donna Langley*, **Netflix** Co-CEO *Ted Sarandos*, **Warner Bros. Discovery** President/CEO *David Zaslav* and AMPTP President *Carol Lombardini* and met with them Tuesday. WGA said many of the deals put forth are from a deal negotiated with the **Directors Guild of America** and aren't yet sufficient, and the CEOs threatened to go public with their deal. "This should be seen as what it is: simply a tactic in the middle of an ongoing negotiation," WGA said. "The counteroffer is neither nothing, nor nearly enough. We will continue to advocate for proposals that fully address our issues rather than accept half measures like those mentioned above and other proposals not listed here." – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

"Drops of God," streaming, **Apple TV+**. When the title is "Drops of God" it had better be good, right? Fortunately, this under-the-radar series is as satisfying as a great Bordeaux. A global thriller, it begins with the death of a businessman who owned the world's most important wine collection. His will stipulates his daughter *Camille (Fleur Geffrier)*, whom he hasn't seen in 20 years, inherits the \$100mln collection if she emerges victorious in a contest where competitors name wines after tasting them. *Camille's* opponent is *Issei (Tomohisa Yamashita)*, a young man with a keen talent for, you guessed it, identifying wine. Does *Camille* have an advantage? After all, her father tutored the youngster years ago in identifying wines using her highly developed sense of smell. But *Issei* also learned wine tasting from *Camille's* father. Moreover, *Issei* deploys his educated nose and palate when guessing a wine's identity. Owing to a childhood trauma, *Camille* hasn't touched alcohol since she was a youngster. Still, she's determined to win. As such, she spends a month at a French vineyard, gorgeously filmed, re-learning wine's smells. More than the plot, which includes the competition as well as family dramas of *Camille* and *Issei*, *Geffrier's* and *Yamashita's* performances are excellent. Props also to the camerawork, which features glowing shots of France and antiseptic ones of Tokyo. Cheers! – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(08/14/23-08/20/23)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.517	1612
MSNBC	0.501	1564
HGTV	0.257	802
NFL	0.255	798
CNN	0.248	773
TLC	0.232	724
HALL	0.222	694
INSP	0.215	672
ESPN	0.203	634
USA	0.194	606
DISC	0.179	558
TBSC	0.176	549
HIST	0.173	542
FOOD	0.167	522
ID	0.153	477
TVLAND	0.147	460
TNT	0.126	394
HMM	0.121	378
REELZ	0.118	367
BRAVO	0.117	366
A&E	0.114	357
AMC	0.112	349
WETV	0.108	336
LIFE	0.105	329
FX	0.102	319
OXY	0.090	281
GSN	0.090	280
BET	0.088	274
NWSMX	0.085	265
COM	0.082	255
NAN	0.075	233
SYFY	0.072	226
FXX	0.070	218
FRFM	0.069	216
NICK	0.068	214

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



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