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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

New Digs: Monumental Leans on Live Rights as it Opens Studio

The RSN space hasn't been a friendly one in recent years, but D.C.'s **Monumental Sports Network** keeps finding ways to charge forward on its long-term plan for growth.

It's been over 1.5 years since the network's parent company **Monumental Sports & Entertainment** acquired the **NBC Sports Washington** RSN from **Comcast NBCUniversal**, and six months since the network officially switched to its new Monumental moniker. Plenty has happened with RSNs during that 18-month period since the acquisition, with the most prominent being **Diamond Sports Group** weaving through bankruptcy before **Amazon** extended a lifeline and **Warner Bros. Discovery** leaving the RSN space entirely.

Through all the concern is a staunch belief in the value of live rights for regional networks from Monumental. *Zach Leonsis*, President, Media & New Enterprises for MSE, told **CFX** the organization holds those rights in sacred regard, believing they're what the network can rely on for long-term growth even amid a challenging landscape. Currently, Monumental holds the rights to the **NBA's Wizards**, **NHL's Capitals** and **WNBA's Mystics**.

"A lot has been published on the state of the RSN industry, and we shouldn't conflate that with the value of the live rights, which we really view as sacred," Leonsis said. "We made a commitment from the start that we plan to invest back into those live rights and make those live rights as valuable as possible ... we're going to launch alternative feeds and the

like. We're going to be doing more with our rights and what's ever been done before in the future."

The last 1.5 years for Monumental have been about overhauling a vast majority of its infrastructure in a myriad of areas. While the 2023-24 sports season has been about development and building a foundation, Leonsis thinks next season will be the true reflection of what he and MSE leadership want the network to be: a D.C. sports home for fans on linear and direct-to-consumer platforms that'll offer additional channels in the future to help supplement additional studio programming.

What was included in that network overhaul were plans for a new home for Monumental's production team. On Tuesday, Monumental unveiled a new multi-million-dollar studio facility situated right next to Capital One Arena in downtown D.C. It's a two-story space that boasts five control rooms capable of 4K HDR productions, two large studios that can combine on non-conflict game nights, two insert studios, 1,200 square feet of 4K quality LED monitors among several back-end technical features. The studio also comes with a new IP-based media center that allows for higher-quality video.

Speaking of video quality, the new facility is built to upgrade its video quality to 4K in the future. However, Leonsis thinks that's still a few years away, but in the meantime the network is upgrading its video quality from 1080i to 1080p.

"It's going to be a game changer for our network in terms of improving the quality of our air, improving the quality of our actual shows, the quantity of programs, the ability to utilize the

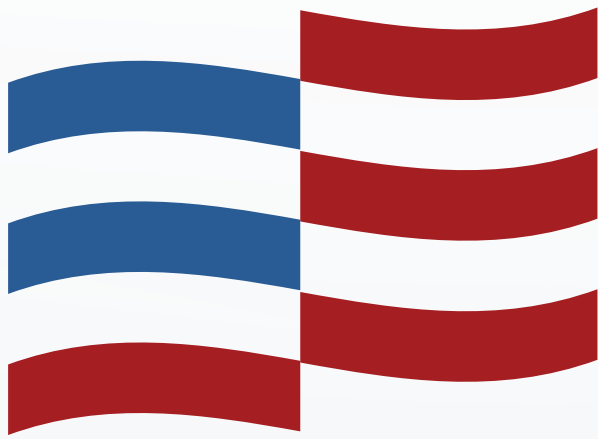
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space and produce new shows for our live linear air outside of live games, to better enhance our direct-to-consumer bundle [and] to better serve our advertisers. There's a lot of upside here that we're really excited to unlock," Leonsis said.

The process of building a new state-of-the-art studio began in June 2022, before any announcement about the network's transition was even made. MSE had a transition services agreement with Comcast NBCU that gave the then-new owner at least 12 months to iron out its production plans. However, with supply chain issues running rampant, the lead time necessary to fit that timeline meant long hours to blueprint what Monumental wanted.

Those long hours have paid off. Now that it's officially taking the next step in its transition, Monumental is ready to continue etching its name in the D.C. and overall sports broadcasting realm.

"Part of our acquisition strategy was to control and own our own destiny moving forward. We did that, and we're doing that," Leonsis said. "This production experience, because it's scalable, it allows us to have maximum flexibility on how we're going to produce things in the future, and for a variety of different partners too."

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FCC OFFERS ESTIMATES ON PARTIAL ACP SUPPORT IN MAY

While Congressional leaders and President Biden announced an agreement Tuesday that would fund the government through the end of September, Washington insiders expressed little optimism that the deal includes funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program. Congress is expected to release text of the legislation in the coming days. Meanwhile, the **FCC** is releasing more information on how much funding providers should expect from ACP in May, a month that will only be partially funding barring any action from Congress. The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau offered estimated reimbursement ranges for each benefit type within which partial reimbursement amounts may fall. For non-tribal service benefits of \$30, providers are expected to receive \$7-16 for each. For the Tribal lands subsidy of \$75, providers will likely receive \$18-39 and when it comes to the connected device benefit of \$100/device, providers could see reimbursements of \$24-53 each. The Bureau took into account factors including open claims for past service months, recent program activity and claims trends, and it warned that final maximum reimbursement amounts to be announced in April could fall outside of these ranges. It merely wanted to put forth the numbers to assist providers in preparing for the May service month. It expects that it will have enough data to provide the final maximum reimbursement amounts after it closes the September 2023-January 2024 claims window on April 1. Providers have to notify the **Universal Service Administrative Company** of their intent to continue offer-

ing ACP discounts in May by filling out a survey to be distributed by USAC within the next week. Providers will have two weeks to respond. Today was the deadline for ISPs to send their second winddown notice for the ACP program.

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ESPN OFFICIALLY RETAINING COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

ESPN and the **College Football Playoff** revealed a pair of media deals Tuesday that set ESPN as the exclusive, worldwide rightsholder to the event through the 2031-32 season. ESPN will expand its current package for the final two years of its existing deal, through the 2025-26 season, to add all four of the new first round games each year to ESPN's existing "New Year's Six," which will now be the quarterfinals and semifinals, and the national championship. The extension estimated to be worth \$7.8 billion will begin in the 2026-27 season and includes exclusive rights to the entire CFP as well as rights for the expanded playoff. ESPN will also retain exclusive rights to all ancillary programming connected to the playoff. In both the amended two-year deal and six-year extension, ESPN will have the right to sublicense a select number of games.

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PRIME VIDEO VIEWS INDIA AS A CATALYST FOR GLOBAL GROWTH

Amazon has a grasp on the world with its delivery services, but **Prime Video** is embarking on a global journey as well. SVP, Prime Video and Amazon MGM Studios *Mike Hopkins* was in India for the Prime Video Presents India showcase, and he made it clear how important the country is to the platform's growth beyond the U.S. "As we look at the next 250 million subscribers that we're going to acquire, they are definitely going to come from outside of the United States. And we're not going to be able to achieve that unless we do a really good job for customers in India as well," he said. "So obviously, India is a key geographic area for us." Hopkins had the stats to back his claim up. He noted that for the last several years, more people have signed up for Amazon Prime in India than anywhere else in the world barring the U.S. And of those signups, more people in India sign up for Prime Video than any of Prime's other benefits. Additionally, India had the highest percentage of Prime members who streamed Prime Video than any other country in the world last year. The showcase also saw the revelation of nearly 70 series and movies being rolled out over the next two years, spanning several genres in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. Hopkins said in any given week in 2023, Indian content was watched in over 210 countries and territories, adding that Indian programming trended in the top 10 on Prime Video worldwide for 43 out of 52 weeks.

DISH SPEAKS OUT AFTER DIRECTV UNVEILS 'NO LOCALS' PLAN

While **DirecTV** is offering customers options to opt-out of local programming, **DISH** is reminding everyone that it has been offering the same capability for the last seven years. It pushed any DirecTV customers interested in switching to its comparison page and said it has incorporated consumer choice into not only its plans, but its technology as well. "The Hopper DVR platform is built to allow seamless integration of over the air channels directly into the channel guide, allowing for customers to access the local content they love with ease," DISH said in a release.

NAB 2024 ELECTION TOOLKIT

The **National Association of Broadcasters** released its 2024 edition of its online election resource for broadcasters. The Election Toolkit provides local television and radio broadcasters with tips and resources to combat misinformation, drive voter registration and cover local, state and federal elections. The assets are designed to help identify false statements online, pinpoint local polling places and more.

THE NETWORK AIMS TO CUT OUT STREAMING SLOG

A new ad-supported premium streaming platform is hitting the scene. **The Network**, a platform that claims to be targeted at decluttering the streaming experience, will launch on April 30 exclusively in the U.S. It will release two originals each week, dramas on Tuesdays and comedies on Thursdays. It also doesn't plan to license catalogs of old content or build a large library to justify monthly fees. The Network was created by *Aram Rappaport*, who founded creative ad firm The Boat-house, and the service will be available on all devices across Apple, Android, Roku, Amazon Fire and online.

ROKU EXPANDS MEASUREMENT DEAL WITH CROSS SCREEN

Roku and CTV activation managed service provider **Cross Screen Media** announced an expanded partnership that will give the agency's customers greater accuracy in measuring spend across Roku's inventory and through Roku's ad platform. Agencies can also use Roku's ACR viewership data to target precise audiences on household-level consumption of ads across linear TV and CTV.

MARCH MADNESS DEALS

DirecTV is getting its head in the game and offering new subscribers sports-inspired deals in the spirit of March Madness. New DirecTV satellite and via internet customers will earn a \$200 reward card and seven months of its Sports Pack for

free. New **DirecTV Stream** customers will save \$30 and get a month of Sports Pack for free.

WEEKLY RATINGS

Fox News stayed put at the top of the weekly primetime and total-day ratings among cable networks. It took the primetime crown after averaging 2.06 million viewers P2+, which easily beat a close battle between second and third with **ESPN** (1.36 million) and **MSNBC** (1.21 million). **HGTV** followed with 763,000, while **History Channel** checked in with 751,000. Fox News also had a sizeable gap in total day with 1.26 million viewers. That beat MSNBC's 789,000 and ESPN's 640,000, and **CNN** and **HGTV** came in at 432,000 and 398,000, respectively. – **Telemundo** continued its primetime momentum for a third consecutive week, recording an average of 356,000 A18-49, 117,000 A18-34 and more than 1.1 million total viewers in the 7-11pm window the week of March 11. That beat Univision by 18%, 26% and 14%, respectively. For the 7-11pm frame during the week, the network averaged 398,000 A18-49, 133,000 A18-34 and nearly 1.3 million total viewers. That was driven by popular shows "La Casa de los Famosos" and "El Señor de los Cielos."

FIBER FRENZY

Shentel's Glo Fiber service is available in initial neighborhoods in Salisbury, Maryland. Construction began in late 2023 and is expected to take 18-24 months to complete. The project will provide more than 14,000 homes and businesses with high-speed broadband. – **Ritter Communications** will soon be serving residents in Rogers and Lowell, Arkansas, with speeds of up to 5 Gigs thanks to a \$5.4 million fiber infrastructure project. Ritter also plans to announce an additional expansion in northwest Arkansas in the coming months.

CARRIAGE

Curiosity is expanding its Smart Bundle with **Kidstream**. The Smart Bundle also includes **Curiosity Stream**, **Tastemade+**, **SOMM TV**, **Topic**, **Da Vinci** and **Curiosity University**. Full access to the bundle is currently priced at \$69.99 annually.

PROGRAMMING

Warner Bros. Discovery and the **Professional Fighters League** signed an exclusive U.S. media rights agreement for the new Bellator Champion Series debuting Friday. The mixed martial arts championship will be available on all plans and begin at 1pm ET. Additionally, **TNT Sports** will televise a slate of Bellator content throughout the year on the TNT Sports on **truTV** programming block. – **Fox Nation** renewed "Crime Cam 24/7" for a second season. New episodes will begin rolling out every Friday, beginning on March 29 at 6pm ET.