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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Déjà Vu: MLB Opens Another Season in Distribution Flux

Some things change, but the perpetual state of uncertainty that **MLB** resides in with how it distributes games seems to stay the same. And with the 2025 season fully getting underway, it seems to hold true—at least for now.

Thursday's Opening Day festivities didn't get off to a flying start as fans called a balk on **MLB.TV**. Around 3pm ET before the Orioles vs Blue Jays got started, fans took to social media to post network error messages they received when trying to access MLB.TV via its app or browser. MLB Fan Support said it was aware of the issue and expected a quick resolution, but didn't provide any further update. MLB's official account also acknowledged the situation in a now-deleted post on X, but it seems the fiasco was solved shortly before 5pm. MLB attributed the outage to a technical issue.

No word on whether MLB.TV will roll out refunds, but one user on Reddit claimed they received [one](#) upon asking. MLB.TV offers its all-team yearly plan for \$149.99/year or a single-team option for \$129.99/year. Monthly plans run at \$19.99/month for a single team and \$29.99/month for all teams.

Beyond the MLB.TV mishap, regional and national networks entered the season as the league ponders its short- and long-term vision for distribution. While most franchises made strides in expanding local game distribution options this offseason through direct-to-consumer unveilings, there's still the gray cloud from the **MLB-ESPN opt-out** that went public last month. **NBC**,

Netflix and **Amazon** headline potential replacements, but if you ask ESPN Chairman *Jimmy Pitaro* or "Sunday Night Baseball" commentator *Karl Ravech*, the network appears to remain optimistic it can find a way to stay in MLB's media rights portfolio.

"I think I'm just optimistic because of the platform that ESPN is, and will be with their Flagship," Ravech said on a call with media. "When you think about the entities that are on that Flagship, I don't want to say it requires, but my goodness, if you're a sports fan, you're going to want to have it. And if the sports fan in general, largely wants to have it—whether it be for the Super Bowl, whether it be for the NFL, the NBA, tennis, golf, college championships, the NHL, Stanley Cup, basically every single color in the crayon box—it would behoove, I think, any other sport to want to be on that platform." Ravech then equated ESPN's DTC product launching without MLB to trying to get on Noah's Ark before it leaves and seeing every other animal on board.

But for now, at least until the conclusion of the 2025 season, ESPN and MLB's other media partners **Fox Sports**, **TNT Sports** as well as the RSNs will remain in place. One player that remains on the roster after emerging from a bankruptcy process this offseason is **FanDuel Sports Network** and its portfolio of RSNs. The networks formerly known as Bally Sports and owned by Diamond Sports Group (now **Main Street Sports Group**) have hit the ground running since undergoing a rebrand. All nine teams engaged in telecast rights agreements with Main Street Sports Group introduced DTC products for fans to watch games without the worry of blackouts. Plus, the FDSN networks

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are now available as an add-on option through **Prime Video**.

“We have to be everywhere the fan is. Some of those fans are on Prime Video, some of those fans buy us directly [and] some of them buy through a Roku device. But what Prime Video and FanDuel give us is they give us reach ease of access,” *Eric Ratchman*, President, Distribution and Business Development for Main Street Sports Group. “FanDuel [has a] highly engaged sports betting audience ... Prime Video is an always-on environment with reach, really, into just nearly every digital home in this country ... So that’s a massive funnel, just for awareness and conversion for us.”

On the linear side, Ratchman said they’re not hoping to convert people out of cable and into DTC (sound familiar to **Venu Sports?**). He noted ratings generally hold up in a way entertainment content doesn’t, but because of the new generation of sports fans who are accustomed to digital viewing, it brings more importance into expanding how folks can watch their teams.

FDSN is looking to improve the production aspects of its RSNs as well. Main Street hired *Norby Williamson*, who spent nearly four decades at ESPN, as its President, Production and Programming in January. While he’s looking to keep the local touch that fans grow to love with their respective teams’ networks, there are opportunities to improve on a national scale.

“There are opportunities that Norby is bringing to the table in looking at how we go to market overall, from a production standpoint, to bring efficiency, scalability and raise the bar on overall quality through that lens,” Ratchman said.

Other RSNs got a boost this season too. **Peacock** launched in-market streaming of **NBC Sports Bay Area**, **NBC Sports Boston**, **NBC Sports California** and **NBC Sports Philadelphia**. MLB teamed up with **SNY** to create a DTC product for Mets fans, and **Chicago Sports Network** made its introduction in early October and now carries the White Sox. **Rangers Sports Network** also was released for Rangers fans. Plus, MLB remains wearing the production hat for the Diamondbacks, Guardians, Rockies, Twins and Padres.

At the end of a tumultuous offseason, only three teams—the Nationals and Orioles (**MASN**) and the Astros (**Space City Home Network**)—remain without a DTC streaming option. Though it’s a step forward for MLB as it long lagged in the digital department, time will tell how the league moves forward once its remaining national media contracts expire in 2028.

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T-MOBILE ADDRESSES DEI WITH FCC, DISNEY REMAINS UNDER FIRE

T-Mobile has a few transactions looming before the **FCC**, including the formation of a jv to acquire **Lumos**, and it has reached out to the agency in an attempt to assuage any fears related to its policies around diversity, equity and inclusion. In a Thursday letter

to the Commission, T-Mobile EVP/General Counsel *Mark Nelson* said the provider is conducting a comprehensive review of its DEI policies, programs and activities. That review will include an examination of the company’s training programs and materials, HR processes, supplier programs and more. “As a result, our new supplier development program no longer focuses on specific categories of diverse businesses and instead is directed at fostering opportunities for small businesses,” Nelson said. The company has also eliminated specific targets or goals for diverse spend in its procurement policies instead making it clear that purchases and contracts are awarded based on the best qualified and most competitive suppliers to support T-Mobile’s success. The wireless operator also dissolved its External Diversity & Inclusion Councils, which it created five years ago in partnership with civil rights organizations to advise the company on workforce recruitment, procurement, community investment and corporate governance. “At the same time, T-Mobile remains committed to the principle that we can best serve our customers, employees and shareholders through a diversely talented workforce and supplier base that comes from all walks of life,” Nelson said. “T-Mobile excels when its workforce and its suppliers bring a multitude of skills and backgrounds to our collective effort to be the nation’s best wireless company. We will remain committed to these principles.” T-Mobile’s letter comes after FCC Chair *Brendan Carr* confirmed that companies looking to receive regulatory approval for M&A activity should work to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion policies. He also [sent](#) a letter to Disney Friday to ensure it has ended all “discriminatory initiatives” in substance, not just name. He wrote that while Disney recently made changes to how it brands some efforts, it is not clear that the underlying policies have changed fundamentally nor that past practices complied with relevant FCC regulations. Practices cited included the company’s Reimagine Tomorrow initiative, which created a digital destination to share stories and talent from diverse communities. “It also implemented mandatory ‘Inclusion Standards’ across ABC, requiring, for example, that ‘50% of regular and recurring characters’ be drawn from ‘underrepresented groups.’ These standards may have forced racial and identity quotas into every level of production—demanding that ‘50% or more’ of writers, directors, crew and vendors be selected based on group identity,” Carr said. “It appears that executive bonuses may also have been tied to DEI ‘performance,’ and ABC has utilized race-based hiring databases and restricted fellowships to select demographic groups.”

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UFL STRIKE?

The **United Football League** is set to kick off this weekend. Or will it? Ahead of tonight’s season-opener between the **Battlehawks** and **Roughnecks** that’s scheduled for 8pm ET on **Fox**, the UFL

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and its Players Association stand without a collective bargaining agreement, and players aren't ruling out a strike if an agreement isn't reached by kickoff. If that happens, *Front Office Sports* reports Fox and fellow UFL broadcaster ESPN are figuring out how to fill potential empty spots of programming. Fox is also set to air a game Saturday at 4pm ET, while ESPN will televise a doubleheader on Sunday at noon and 3pm ET. FOS, citing sources, writes that Fox will air re-runs of entertainment programming while ESPN will have its library of evergreen content like "30 for 30" documentaries ready to go. If the strike extends into the longer term, other live sports could make their way into the empty lineups. The 2024 UFL season finished with an average of 850,000 total viewers per game.

FIBER FRENZY

Blue Stream Fiber is partnering with the community of Sandoval in Cape Coral, Florida, to bring service to over 1,425 residents. The company already began the fiber construction process ahead

of activating services throughout the area in April 2026.

PROGRAMMING

Adult Swim renewed animated comedy "Common Side Effects" for a second season. The finale of Season 1 airs Sunday at 11:30pm. – ESPN, Disney+ and Skydance Sports are partnering to develop an original series focused on the history of the Kansas City Chiefs. The six-episode docuseries is expected to premiere later this year.

PEOPLE

TEGNA made a pair of appointments, naming Melissa Zimyeski as VP, Product and Mat Yurow as VP, Growth. Both will report to Chief Experience Officer Dhanusha Sivajee. Zimyeski joins from being SVP and Chair of Product and Experience for the Mayo Clinic. Yurow arrives from the marketing organization Thrasio.

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Social Media Hits



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- APRIL 7-8:** [Mid-America Show](#); Kansas City
- APRIL 16-17:** [Pennsylvania Broadband Summit](#); Gettysburg
- APRIL 28-MAY 1:** [CableLabs Interop Labs CPMP XGS-PON](#); Louisville, CO
- MAY 6:** [WICT Network Signature Awards Luncheon](#); Los Angeles