

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Footy Fever: DAZN's Club World Cup Strategy to Engage U.S. Fans

The 2025 FIFA Club World Cup kicked off on June 14 in the U.S. While previous editions of this tournament have paled in comparison to the spectacle of the international World Cup, **DAZN** is betting this year's club-level competition will feel different when all is said and done. That's why the British streaming platform paid FIFA \$1 billion for the global broadcast rights to the CWC, which is not only debuting a new, expanded format featuring 32 of the biggest soccer clubs on the planet but also more world-class superstars than ever before, including *Lionel Messi* and *Kylian Mbappe*.

By tapping into that star power and streaming all 63 matches for free around the world, DAZN is betting it can make an impact in markets it hasn't before and hook new audiences to boost sub growth long-term. That strategy includes reaching U.S. soccer fans who might be unfamiliar with the streaming platform and/or the bigger scale of this year's CWC. DAZN has actually been in the soccer business for years overseas, broadcasting matches from top-tier leagues and tournaments in international markets. But in the U.S., the streamer is best known for its boxing programming.

Beyond looping in boxing fans who also like soccer, DAZN put its U.S. production team to work on telling compelling stories about the cup itself, which is being played across 11 American cities, presenting a unique opportunity to speak to the U.S. soccer fan experience specifically.

"The importance was to make a production that engages

people in the U.S.," *Nick Turner*, DAZN SVP, Production & Editorial, tells **CFX**. Step one in that engagement strategy is to inform and entertain the audience, something Turner says "the U.S. does better than anywhere else in the world." That operation includes 32 reporters covering every team in the tournament as well as over 100 influencers and creators making exclusive short-form content for DAZN's social feeds. The goal is to cover the CWC from all angles, both on and off the pitch. That approach is informed by a recent survey DAZN conducted, in partnership with **GW**, which found that 93% of fans want sports content that goes beyond the matches themselves, such as behind-the-scenes access to teams and players, fan-generated content and cultural storytelling.

"When people come, we've got to make them understand why [the CWC] is interesting and why it's entertaining, that the soccer is top drawer and the players are world class. Then you add storytelling to that. I think that's important to have a reason to care about some of these individuals who are playing," Turner says, adding that DAZN is lucky to have a superstar like Messi, who is considered one of the best players of all-time, playing in the tournament for an American team, MLS squad Inter Miami.

DAZN isn't only shining a lens on the players, though. The streamer is also after the viral moments only diehard soccer fans can provide, such as Brazilian supporters taking over Times Square in NYC ahead of a match at MetLife Stadium or Argentinians gathering on a Florida beach to chant for their beloved team.

"The fan stories are everywhere, and especially with South American clubs. Those fans have come in the thousands to sup-

PRESENTED BY CABLEFAX

## VOICES OF IMPACT AND Workplace CULTURE

It's time to nominate for the Cablefax Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture Awards!  
We're celebrating execs who lead with purpose, rising changemakers, standout mentors,  
and teams building workplaces where talent thrives.

Join us in spotlighting the people and companies driving progress in media and broadband.

**NOMINATE NOW**

port their clubs, and some of the pictures that we've been getting from the fans have been outstanding. We're doing our best to share the best that we can find on the broadcasts," Turner says.

The large Spanish-language audience in the U.S. that is also mad for soccer could be key to DAZN's growth in America. DAZN sub-licensed 18 matches to **TelevisaUnivision's** networks and platforms, and sub-licensed games on **TNT Sports** have featured fan-favorite Argentinian announcer *Andres Cantor* on the desk. DAZN also just scooped up the live Spanish-language broadcasting rights to the **UEFA** Champions League in the U.S. through a sub-licensing agreement with TelevisaUnivision, beginning with the 2025-26 season.

Of course, one cannot forget the biggest draw of all when it comes to acquiring new viewers: free. The streamer expects hundreds of millions of viewers to tune into CWC streams because they don't require a paid subscription to watch, and DAZN believes users will stick around after the cup and subscribe to watch other sports content (CWC broadcasts have heavily promoted upcoming DAZN events, such as the Jake Paul-Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. fight on June 28). In DAZN's eyes, that easy accessibility to matches is key to building awareness for its offerings, breaking through in the U.S and retaining viewers.

Speaking of retention, Turner says that CWC coverage has been great in terms of keeping soccer fans on the platform in the summer months, which is usually a slower period on the soccer calendar, since the European season wraps up in May and doesn't start up again until mid-August. That said, there's another international soccer tournament being played in the U.S. at the same time as the CWC: the **CONCACAF** Gold Cup, which is disputed by North American, Central American and Caribbean nations. That competition also includes the U.S. Men's National Team. With only so many hours in the day for soccer fans to focus on their favorite sport, it wouldn't be a stretch to suggest that the CWC is competing for eyeballs with the Gold Cup. But Turner says that isn't really a worry for DAZN: "A soccer fan is a soccer fan. If you're a national team fan, you've caught a Gold Cup game, and then hopefully you'll come and catch one of ours as well. Great that those matches are happening at the same time. That means that there's more football for everybody."

## HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS LOOKS AT NEXT-GEN WARNING SYSTEM

The **House Appropriations Committee** recommended level funding of \$40 million for fiscal year 2026 for the Next Generation Warning System. It's part of the FY2026 Homeland Security Appropriations Act that was approved Tuesday, in which the money will be used to "help public media entities replace

and upgrade aging infrastructure needed to enhance alert, warning and other public safety communications systems to ensure national resilience and the ability to meet the evolving nature of public alerting challenges." **America's Public Television Stations** was quick to applaud the news, emphasizing the importance of public TV in keeping communities informed during emergencies. "The committee's approval of continued funding of \$40 million for the Next Generation Warning System will help ensure public broadcasters are able to continue to meet their public safety missions and provide the highest level of resilient and reliable public safety and homeland security services to communities throughout the country," *Kate Riley*, President/CEO of APTS, said, later adding, "We look forward to working with the full House Congress to ensure that this critical funding moves forward through the appropriations process."

## DISNEY, BET UNDERGO LAYOFFS

Another set of layoffs has hit **Disney** this month. This round impacts the unit overseen by *Adam Smith*, Chief Product & Technology Officer for Disney Entertainment and **ESPN**, with under 2% of the group being affected in an effort to recalibrate the product and technology workforce. It follows the layoffs in early June that involved Disney Entertainment's film and TV marketing divisions, as well as TV publicity, casting and development. – **BET** is also undergoing layoffs this week, with CEO *Scott Mills* informing employees Wednesday that it's reducing staff within the company. It's unclear how many employees will be impacted, but it's part of **Paramount's** plan to lay off 3.5% of its workforce in the U.S. as it inches toward a finalized merger with **Skydance**.

## YOUTUBE STILL KING IN NIELSEN MEDIA DISTRIBUTOR GAUGE

**YouTube** spent a fourth consecutive month in the No. 1 spot of **Nielsen's** Media Distributor Gauge. It took a 12.5% share of total TV usage for May, beating out **Disney**—who held the top place prior to YouTube—and its 10.7% share. **NBCUniversal** overtook **Paramount** for third place with 8% and 7.9%, respectively. **Netflix** didn't trail too far behind at 7.5%. **Warner Bros. Discovery** saw the biggest sequential improvement, adding 0.3 share points from April to finish May with 7% of TV usage. **TNT** and its coverage of the **NBA** Playoffs were a big part of that push, exemplified by the eight Knicks games that generated nearly 7 billion viewing minutes combined. **Fox** also checked into the Media Distributor Gauge with 7%.

## NEXAR USING SPECTRUM'S NETWORK FOR VEHICLE INSIGHTS

**Charter** is looking to enhance vehicle connectivity and road intelligence through a partnership with the AI mobility solutions firm **Nexar**. Nexar will now get access to Spectrum's managed wireless network to help transmit vehicle-generated data in a more efficient manner, helping support safety improvements, autonomous vehicle deployment and data-driven mobility infrastructure. Nexar's platform collects anonymized road data from vehicles and turns it into insights for insurers, cities and mobility providers, and Spectrum's network—which includes over 17 million wireless access points—allows it to scale data collection and processing across the U.S.

## SPORTS RIGHTS ROUNDUP

Looks like **ESPN** is doubling down on lacrosse. Not only did the network announce a five-year rights deal with the **Premier Lacrosse League**, but it also made a minority equity investment in the league. No word on how large ESPN's investment is or what the league is valued at, but PLL President *Paul Rabil* said the money will be used to help strengthen the PLL's operations, increase players' salaries, schedule expansion and marketing. The media rights deal, which will begin ahead of the 2026 season, includes all PLL regular-season, All-Star, Playoff and Championship games, in addition to **Women's Lacrosse League** games and future PLL and WLL drafts. All PLL and WLL games will stream on **ESPN+**, with select games airing across **ABC**, **ESPN** and **ESPN2**. – ESPN also struck a deal to obtain the media rights to the 2025 **UEFA** European Women's Championship across Spanish-speaking Latin America, as well as the rights to UEFA's men's and women's youth and futsal competitions through 2028. Taking place July 2-17 in Switzerland, the Women's Euro 2025 will be aired through ESPN's linear networks and **Disney+** in Mexico, Central America and South America. The other side of ESPN and UEFA's agreement includes the UEFA Men's and Women's Under-17 and Under-19 Championships, the Men's Under-21 Championship and the Men's and Women's Futsal Euros. – **Tennis Channel** will remain the home of **WTA** tennis in the U.S. after the two shook hands on a new, six-year media rights deal that's good through 2032. That means events like the Hologic WTA Tour will be available through the flagship network, **TennisChannel 2**, the Tennis Channel app and its website. The agreement spans all WTA 1000, 500 and 250 events (sans tournaments in the U.S.) through to the WTA Finals.

## FIBER FRENZY

Minnesota-based **Nuvera Communications** is expanding into Howard Lake. The company will begin construction within the next several weeks, bringing symmetrical speeds of up to 5 Gig to residents. Nuvera is currently navigating more than

30 fiber projects in 13 Southern Minnesota communities. – **unWired Broadband** will deploy its NextGen Fiber network in Wasco, California. The \$10 million investment will bring symmetrical speeds of up to 5 Gigs to nearly 6,000 addresses in the city. First installations will be in July, with completion of the project set for February 2026.

## RATINGS

The fifth and final NASCAR Cup Series race on Prime Video this season reeled in an average minute audience of 1.87 million viewers P2+ from Pocono Raceway. That's essentially flat compared to the New Hampshire race that took place the same weekend in 2024, but there were YOY improvements across P18-34 (227,000), P18-49 (502,000) and P25-54 (673,000), which translates to 94%, 43% and 49% increases, respectively. Additionally, the post-race program "NASCAR Live from Victory Lane" averaged 797,000 viewers, retaining 43% of the race audience. Across all five of Prime Video's races, the streamer averaged 2.16 million viewers. For comparison, Formula 1's season-to-date average is 1.45 million, while IndyCar's is 2.05 million. – According to **NBCUniversal**, the Day 1 audience for new episodes of "Love Island USA" Season 7 has quadrupled since the season premiere last month, with the June 23 episode—which kicked off the show's yearly Casa Amor week that always brings loads of juicy drama to the show—being the most-watched of the season so far. The reality show is also doing an impressive job of attracting new viewers, with 39% of this season's audience tuning into the series for the first time.

## PROGRAMMING

"Vibe Check," the female-led sports studio show that's exclusive to **Disney+**, will make its debut Monday at 5pm. New episodes will be released every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. – Conservative podcaster *Brett Cooper* joined **Fox News** as a contributor. She'll provide cultural, social and political commentary across the network's platforms, with her debut already taking place today during "The Will Cain Show."

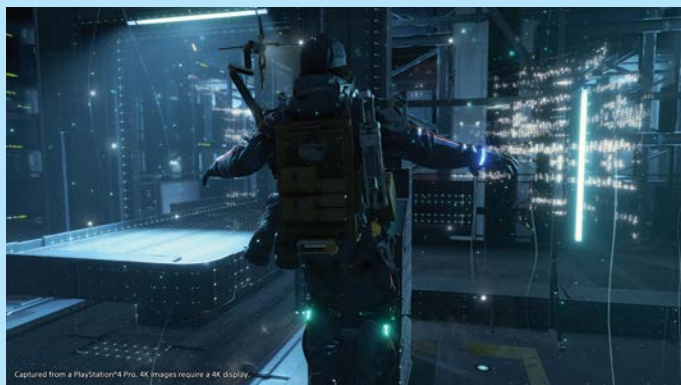
## PEOPLE

**Blue Stream Fiber** has a new CEO. *Gavin Keirans*, who was previously the company's President/COO, will now lead the company as it continues expansion across Florida and Houston. He replaces *Joe Canavan*, who departed Blue Stream back in January. Keirans played a key part in expanding Blue Stream's product portfolio, including the launch of Total Tech Care, which provides customers with support across their devices. Keirans is also credited with spearheading efforts to boost the company's operational efficiency as well as increase ARPU.



## What We're Playing: 'Death Stranding' Is a Tale of Connectivity

On June 26, Japanese video game designer Hideo Kojima, the medium's foremost auteur, will release "Death Stranding 2: On the Beach" on the PlayStation 5. That may not sound like it relates to the broadband industry, but hear me out. This is the big-budget sequel to the buzzy 2019 original, which saw Norman Reedus working as a delivery man connecting the underserved regions of the post-apocalyptic remains of the continental U.S. to the "chiral network" (read: the internet).



In other words, if you wanted to, you could interpret Kojima's game as a timely metaphor about fiber deployment. Especially once you experience just how challenging, time consuming and taxing that work can be for Sam Porter Bridges (Reedus), who sets out from the East Coast, crossing a barren, hostile wasteland to bring scattered outposts and walled cities back online so that they can once again share information and resources with each other like the old days. This, the game posits, is how America can rebuild civilization. To push the fiber deployment metaphor further, the increasingly unfriendly and often rocky terrain that Sam must navigate to make it to the other side of the continent becomes the game's own unique obstacle. While most video games set on large open maps tend to challenge players via enemy placements, a myriad of quests and labyrinthine dungeons, Death Stranding turns the land itself into Sam's primary opponent. He must make his way up and down steep mountains, cross raging rivers and constantly contend with harsh weather conditions, all of which slow his journey down, shred his boots and degrade his equipment and sometimes force him to backtrack and find an alternate path towards his goal.

Operators in extremely cold or hot parts of the country, such as Alaska or Nevada, who were both found to be trailing in fiber-to-the-home availability in a recent study by the FBA, might be able to relate to Sam's ordeal. Alaskan operator GCI, for example, has

talked at length about the connectivity hurdles it has to overcome in the state, where icy conditions cause fiber outages for months at a time or become a barrier to deployment in rural areas. True to life, Death Stranding really ramps up the challenge when Sam arrives in a snow-covered region later in the game, where every step forward feels heavier than before and outposts are fewer and farther in between, making this area more difficult to connect to the network than any other.

While not all gamers understood what Kojima was going for back in 2019, many have warmed to the concept of a game about building a network in the years since, especially after the pandemic made the internet an even more crucial part of our everyday professional and personal lives. It's hard to imagine what life would've been like in 2020 without a virtual way to connect with loved ones or quickly access vital knowledge. In Kojima's world, when Sam brings new regions online, he can unlock valuable resources to construct highways in the area, as well as blueprints for vehicles and alternate ways to traverse the map, including bridges and ziplines he can build. You're actively improving the game world as you connect more places, and it's that reward system that keeps you going, even in moments when the journey ahead feels like a slog.

With Death Stranding, Kojima is saying that connectivity, as difficult as it sometimes can be to achieve, is a path to progress. Just look at how far online gaming has come since 2019, which coincidentally happens to be the year Google's Stadia innovative cloud gaming service released to the public. While that particular platform died on the vine—in part because the service didn't offer the exclusive titles needed to entice players to jump into the new ecosystem—it brought to market a few concepts that we now take for granted in 2025, such as the ability to play graphically demanding games on a web browser and seamlessly switch between multiple devices during the same play session. A version of one of Stadia's neatest little tricks, a feature that allowed players to invite their friends into their games by simply sending them a link, just rolled out on Xbox Cloud Gaming in February.

I've spent the last few weeks replaying Death Stranding on different screens via NVIDIA GeForce Now, a paid cloud gaming service that requires 25 Mbps download speeds to stream at 1080p and 60 frames per second. At 45 Mbps down, users can reach up to 4K resolution and 120 fps on PC. I couldn't stream Kojima's world this way a few years ago, but with better access to high-speed broadband networks, the barrier to these cloud experiences is lower than ever before. That, Death Stranding would say, is progress.

- John Saavedra

