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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

SATS Deal: The Ergen-Musk Spectrum Chess Match

EchoStar shares closed up 20% on Monday to \$80.67/share after it revealed that **SpaceX** would shell out \$19 billion for its AWS-4 and H-block spectrum.

It follows **AT&T** agreeing to pay \$23 billion in cash last month to buy certain EchoStar wireless spectrum licenses. And there's likely more wheelin' and dealin' to come, with EchoStar's spectrum portfolio containing 21 MHz of AWS-3—real estate that might be especially attractive to **Verizon** and **T-Mobile** given that they hold AWS-3 spectrum today. AT&T does as well, but we're assuming they got what they wanted in their previous deal.

The SpaceX deal also seems to make it clear EchoStar won't be launching its own low-earth orbit satellite service. Instead, the agreement will allow EchoStar's Boost Mobile subscribers to access SpaceX's next-generation Starlink Direct to Cell service. "This transaction with SpaceX continues our legacy of putting the customer first as it allows for the combination of AWS-4 and H-block spectrum from EchoStar with the rocket launch and satellite capabilities from SpaceX to realize the direct-to-cell vision in a more innovative, economical and faster way for consumers worldwide," said EchoStar President/CEO *Hamid Akhavan*.

Speaking at an investor conference Monday, Verizon CEO *Hans Vestberg* said he sees the transaction creating more opportunities for Verizon to do direct-to-cell connections with satellites, especially in areas it can't build in. "It will just create more opportunities in the market and partners for us to

go to. It's a little bit early to say. But clearly this was in the cards after they sold spectrum to AT&T," he said.

New Street Research figures that the AT&T and SpaceX deals will leave EchoStar with \$24 billion in spectrum proceeds after removing debt repayment, taxes, lease exit costs, etc. Both deals are meant to help EchoStar resolve issues with the **FCC**. But it's unclear what happens to the AWS-4 buildout obligations that EchoStar faced. New Street Research assumes it will either be waived by the FCC, or SpaceX will lease the wireless licenses to the big three carriers while retaining the satellite licenses, but adds that "the uncertainty is likely to leave investors wondering whether SpaceX has ambitions to become a fourth mobile network operator in the US. This will weigh on the wireless carriers' equities."

Meanwhile, **MoffettNathanson** is wondering if *Charlie Ergen* really ever intended for EchoStar to compete as a facilities-based wireless operator. "When DISH Network subsequently bought AWS-3 spectrum in 2014-15, it was either the beginning of Ergen's ambition to start a network... or simply a ploy to create a higher mark-to-market valuation for the AWS-4 he already owned. It was only much later that DISH Network actually began to build anything at all, and even then it was initially just a 'narrowband IoT' (internet of things) network that was explicitly just a placeholder to satisfy FCC buildout requirements," declared a research note in which the analysts mused they may go to their graves never knowing the answer.

The folks over at **Bernstein Research** are trying to figure out the economics behind the SpaceX deal. "The typical math around



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mass adoption of satellite connectivity wouldn't quite add up. But this is Elon Musk we're talking about—someone anything but traditional. With access to cheap capital, could he actually scale this?" they ask in their analysis. "The 'traditional' perspective finds this hard to imagine, especially in the near-term but we leave the possibility open for the long haul. There is a bigger role for satellite connectivity over time as economics improve, driven by technology, scale, and potentially enabled by cheap capital."

SNY, WPIX EXTEND AMID NEXSTAR-MISSION OWNERSHIP QUESTIONS

Nexstar's involvement in the New York station **WPIX** has been under **FCC** scrutiny for well over a year, but that's not stopping it from making deals. WPIX renewed its agreement with **SNY** (which **Charter** and **Comcast** have minority stakes in) to carry Mets games on the station through the 2028 season, and it'll soon make games available on Nexstar-owned and operated stations scattered throughout upstate New York and in Hartford, CT. WPIX will continue to televise 30 Mets games per season from 2026-28. Twenty-five of those games will be branded as the "Mets Game of the Week" and primarily air on Fridays, with the other five contests being spring training games. Each regular-season telecast will have a 30-minute pregame show leading into the main event. The New York metropolitan area is covered through the deal, but five of Nexstar's upstate stations—WTEN (Albany), WIVT (Binghamton), WSYR (Syracuse), WFXV (Utica)—and Hartford's WTNH will air Mets games for the first time. WPIX and SNY's partnership dates back to 2006, the same year the station transitioned into a **CW** affiliate. It's no surprise local stations are looking to gain or maintain distribution of live sports, although WPIX, Nexstar and **Mission Broadcasting** stand in a peculiar spot. It was March 2024 when the **FCC** announced it found Nexstar—which operates WPIX through a local marketing agreement—and Mission—who technically owns WPIX—[violated multiple regulations](#) via transactions involving WPIX, including the still-in-place 39% national audience cap. The FCC assessed a \$1.2 million penalty against Nexstar and told Mission to sell WPIX. Nexstar and Mission appealed the decision and there hasn't been much news on the issue since. The potential stagnation might have to do with a new administration and FCC regime, coinciding with a push to deregulate various FCC rules, including the 39% broadcast ownership cap. WPIX, however, isn't the only situation Nexstar is betting that ownership rule changes are on the horizon. Its [proposed deal](#) to buy **TEGNA** has it positioned to smash the 39% cap and rise to reach 80% of U.S. TV households. Nexstar EVP/CFO *Lee Ann Gliha* said Monday at a **Goldman Sachs** conference that the company wouldn't have made an announcement if it wasn't confident it'd gain regulatory approval. In addition

to needing the ownership cap lifted, Nexstar is confident that the FCC will issue a series of waivers in markets where it has overlap with TEGNA stations. Despite still needing approval from TEGNA shareholders, Sook's confident in what Nexstar has to offer—and it sounds like there were multiple routes TEGNA could've chosen.

FCC TO ROLL OUT BROADCAST QUADRENNIAL REVIEW

The **FCC** will vote at its September meeting to kick off the agency's congressionally required quadrennial review of its broadcast ownership rules. This is the 2022 review, because the FCC is always behind on these. It will be seeking comment on the Local Television Rule, which limits a single entity from owning more than two television stations in the same local market; and the Dual Network Rule, which prohibits a merger between or among the Big Four broadcast networks. It also looks at radio station ownership. This is all happening in addition to a separate current proceeding that examines the [39% ownership cap](#) and UHF discount. Broadcasters have big dreams of reform across all areas. In July, the Eighth Circuit vacated key portions of the FCC's 2018 quadrennial review, including the Top Four prohibition or duopoly rule. The court also found the FCC improperly tightened a rule around the Top Four prohibition that prevents a Top Four station from acquiring another Top Four station and circumventing the rules by moving the programming to a low-powered TV station or multi-cast stream. The Sept. 30 FCC meeting also promises some more Delete, Delete, Delete action as well as Build America items, including a Notice of Inquiry looking at Section 253 of the Communications Act, which expressly prohibits state and local regulations that effectively prohibit infrastructure builds.

NFL KICKOFF

And we're underway with the 2025 NFL season. While **NBC** and **Peacock** got things started Thursday (more on that in a moment), a [hefty number of eyes](#) were on **YouTube** as it made its **NFL** debut Friday night. It doesn't seem like the platform had any notable performance-related issues, unless you count the tolerance level for seeing *Mr. Beast* and other popular YouTube creators. Nonetheless, YouTube said it garnered a global average minute audience (AMA) of 17.3 million, with 16.2 million coming from the U.S., per **Nielsen**. The ratings, however, have drawn criticism from some on the linear side of the NFL's distribution. Nielsen used a custom solution that includes first-party data from YouTube. **ESPN** SVP, Research *Flora Kelly* and **Fox** President, Insights & Analytics *Mike Mulvihill* were quick to point out that the custom solution is not

In The WILD

A Cablefax feature highlighting industry doings spotted in the real world.

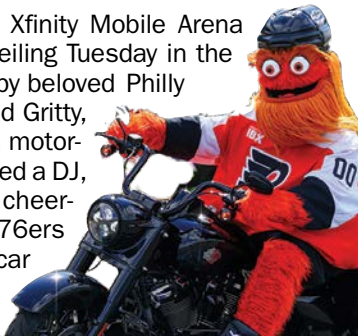
Comcast Parties at the New Xfinity Mobile Arena

Comcast is all-in on the Philadelphia sports scene this week with the debut of Xfinity Mobile Arena, the new name of the sports venue formerly known as the Wells Fargo Center. Home of the 76ers and Flyers, the arena is also getting a WiFi network upgrade offering 10x faster internet speeds, courtesy of Comcast, with premium in-venue speeds on offer for Xfinity Mobile and Comcast Business Mobile customers.



"Xfinity Mobile Arena's new supercharged WiFi is a living showcase of our brand and the opportunity we have to power connections that bring our community together," said Matt Lederer, Comcast VP, Brand Partnerships & Engagement.

To celebrate the glow up, Xfinity Mobile Arena hosted an official name unveiling Tuesday in the arena parking lot, officiated by beloved Philly mascots Franklin the Dog and Gritty, who rode into the event on a motorcycle. The shindig also featured a DJ, an enthusiastic drum line, cheerleaders, several Flyers and 76ers players and a NASCAR race car adorned in Xfinity Mobile livery that performed tricks for attendees.



This was just the kick off of a week of events and activations in and outside the arena, including an immersive social media photo opp. WMMR's morning radio show "Preston and Steve" also broadcast live from the arena's rooftop Wednesday. A gathering to cheer on the Eagles, who play just across the street at Lincoln Financial Field, will be held ahead of their season opener Thursday. The celebration will be attended by former players Nick Foles and Fletcher Cox.



Comcast's Xfinity Rewards program is also offering additional sports-themed perks for its members, including access to tickets and events sweepstakes. Customers have a chance to win Flyers and 76ers tickets during their 2025-26 seasons as well as club level seats for upcoming concerts and a Flyers merchandise pack featuring various team gear. There's also discounted registration for the Gritty 5K run/walk on Oct. 4. Hopefully it provides another opportunity for the quirky Flyers mascot to show off his motorcycle skills.

-John Saavedra

accredited by the **Media Rating Council** and the methodology is different than what's used for Nielsen's other partners. "Nielsen's measurement of tonight's YouTube game will not be made available to other Nielsen clients, a flagrant departure from Nielsen's history of transparency and a slap in the face to long-standing clients. When it comes to streamers the rules simply don't apply," Mulvihill [wrote](#) on X. He added in a separate [post](#), "Nielsen's strength isn't in perfect accuracy, and I don't say that in a snarky way. Their value comes from impartiality and transparency." While Mulvihill, Kelly and other linear folks don't think YouTube's ratings are fair to compare to others, there are still some streaming metrics to use as a barometer. Last season's Eagles-Packers game in Brazil had a total audience delivery (TAD) of 14.2 million viewers on Peacock, certain local NBC stations and **NFL+**. **Netflix** had Chiefs-Steelers and Ravens-Texans post global AMA of 30 million and 31.3 million, respectively, with the two Christmas games averaging 26.5 million in the U.S. **Prime Video's** third season with Thursday Night football finished with an AMA of 14.23 million viewers P2+. We're still waiting on other ratings notes from this weekend's games, but NBC/Peacock reported their audience figures for Thursday's Cowboys-Eagles bout. Before being interrupted by a weather delay, the game averaged a TAD of 31.9 million viewers from 8:23-10:15pm. That dips to 28.3 million when including the remainder of the game from 11:24pm-12:18am (TAD of 20.2 million during that period). **NBC Sports** said it was tracking to set the most-watched NFL kickoff game ever before the stoppage, though it did achieve the largest peak audience for a season-opener with 34.3 million from 9:30-45pm. It still scored the second-most-watched NFL kickoff contest as well, only trailing last year's Ravens-Chiefs game (29.2 million).

HELLO TO CBS NEWS' OMBUDSMAN

Paramount named *Kenneth Weinstein*, the former President/CEO of conservative-leaning public policy think tank **Hudson Institute**, as the ombudsman for **CBS News**. He will "serve as an independent, internal advocate for journalistic integrity and transparency, reviewing concerns raised by employees and viewers, addressing questions about news coverage, and upholding the organization's longstanding commitment to accuracy and accountability," Paramount said. Weinstein, who was also previously Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (now the **U.S. Agency for Global Media**), will report to Paramount President *Jeff Shell*. Complaints concerning the news org will be directed to Weinstein, who will determine whether to escalate the matter to Shell and Chair of TV Media *George Cheeks*. Weinstein, Shell and Cheeks will decide whether to address the complaint with CBS News President *Tim Cibrowski*. Weinstein's appointment follows through on the pledge **Skydance** made to **FCC** Chair *Brendan Carr* in a letter in July, committing to install an ombudsman for at least two years following the merger. Democratic Commissioner *Anna Gomez*, who voted against the merger, [wrote](#) on X Monday that "the job of this FCC-imposed 'truth' monitor must not be to judge whether independent reporting conforms to this Administration's views and priorities. That's a clear violation of the First Amendment and the law."