

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Time Out: FCC Takes a Swing at the State of Sports Broadcasting

The growing number of ways sports are distributed to the masses has put a strain on the fan experience, and with leagues putting more games behind streaming paywalls, it's left broadcasters, cable networks and MVPDs in a state of flux. Now, the **FCC** wants to take a closer look at the existing live sports marketplace and how consumers—as well as local broadcast stations—are being impacted by it.

On Wednesday, the Commission's Media Bureau issued a public notice seeking comment on "the current and emerging trends in the distribution of live sports programming." The notice hopes to address questions such as how the present marketplace benefits or harms consumers and how fragmentation helps or hinders local broadcasters' ability to meet public interest obligations, as well as the ways recent developments in the marketplace have impacted broadcasters' capabilities to obtain sports rights and whether there are implications with the 1961 Sports Broadcasting Act (SBA) from games distributed on non-broadcast channels.

"For decades, Americans enjoyed turning on their TV & quickly finding the game they wanted to see. Yet watching your favorite team play isn't as easy these day (sic). Many games are still on broadcast, but an increasing number are on a range of different online platforms," FCC Chairman *Brendan Carr* wrote on X. "We want to understand the marketplace today, the experience of consumers and how the changes impact

the ability of broadcast TV stations to continue delivering local news, information and other programming."

The news drew quick applause from **NAB**, which reiterated the stance that over-the-air access "has long been a cornerstone of the American sports fan experience." Unsurprisingly, it used the notice as a segue to advocate for the relaxation of broadcast ownership rules, which it thinks would "ensure that local stations have a fair opportunity to compete for premium sports rights."

"We look forward to participating in this proceeding and providing real-world insight into how disruption in the media landscape is affecting viewers and local stations," NAB President/CEO *Curtis LeGeyt* said in a statement.

It's a topic that's generated more discussion as rumors swirl around the **NFL** and what the league may do if (or when) it opts out of its deals following the 2029-30 season. Currently, the NFL's distribution resides among **Fox** and **CBS** for daytime coverage, **NBC** for Sunday Night Football and **ESPN/ABC** for Monday Night Football. However, **Prime Video** began hosting Thursday Night Football in 2022 and has since obtained a Black Friday game and a Wild Card telecast. **Netflix** began streaming a pair of Christmas Day games in 2024, and in September, **YouTube** aired its first live game without a paywall. Not to mention that it's the home of **NFL Sunday Ticket** after the out-of-market game offering left **DirecTV** following the 2022 season.

NFL Commissioner *Roger Goodell* has said talks to renegotiate deals could start as early as this year, given the size and magnitude of the agreements. Last week, *Puck* reported that

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Wall Street analysts anticipate new packages of five games apiece for Netflix, Prime Video and YouTube, including the four international games previously held by **NFL Network** (now owned by ESPN) and Netflix's pair of Christmas games (that deal expires after 2026). At the same time, the cost of the NFL's next deal could skyrocket as much as double its existing 11-year, \$110 billion framework signed in 2021.

It's not just the NFL sitting at the center of media rights upheaval. The **NBA** is in the [first season](#) of an 11-year, \$75 billion deal with **Disney**, **NBCUniversal** and Prime Video. **MLB** has been angling to reset its local and national distribution as it navigates **Main Street**-induced RSN turmoil and got a head start when it restructured its ESPN agreement, which paved the way for NBCU and Netflix to step in. However, the full reset won't come until after the 2028 season when those deals are up.

The Media Bureau's notice points out that the SBA granted antitrust relief to sports leagues as they negotiate media rights, meaning the NFL, MLB, NBA and **NHL** were able to pool together teams' rights and sell them as a package. It also enabled the leagues to implement blackouts within the territory of a franchise on days they're playing home games. However, that antitrust relief wasn't extended to college sports, which have since evolved and commanded multi-billion-dollar media rights agreements, led by college football, the **SEC** and **Big Ten**.

"Just as communities turn to their local TV broadcasters for news, weather and emergency information, they do the same for coverage of their local sports teams. Many sporting events that were previously available through free broadcast and traditional pay-TV packages, are now only available through a myriad of stand-alone subscription streaming services. This shift has led to notable frustration among many consumers and sports fans," the Media Bureau's notice read.

The deadline for comments is set for March 27. Reply comments are then due April 13.

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## CHARTER TAPS FRONTIER'S JEFFERY AS COO

**Charter** hired former **Frontier** CEO *Nick Jeffery* as its COO, a position that's been vacant since *Chris Winfrey* moved into the President/CEO seat in December 2022. His time running Frontier was punctuated with accelerated fiber buildouts, revenue growth and a successful turnaround that ended with **Verizon's** purchase of the company last month. We're looking forward to seeing Mr. FYBR sing the praises of DOCSIS when he starts the role with Charter on Sept. 1. He'll lead Marketing and Sales, Field Operations, and Customer Operations across Spectrum's residential and business segments. When Jeffery

joined Frontier in 2021, he was a fixer—guiding it through bankruptcy and building it into a crown jewel with a \$20 billion price tag for Verizon. He doesn't have the same mess to clean up at Charter—though the company will soon have to deal with the integration of the **Cox Communications** systems. There is room for improvement at Charter, **New Street Research** notes, citing low cNPS for customer support and price. "We are bullish that Nick can make enough of a difference to Charter's price/value equation and customer care to make a noticeable impact to overall operating trends. We think Nick believes the same. Why else would he join the company?" the firm mused in a research note. We're assuming the paycheck at least played a small part. Under a contract running through 2029, he'll receive an annual base salary of at least \$1.5 million with a target annual bonus opportunity of 225% of his base salary, according to an **SEC** filing. There are also stock options with a grant date fair value of \$20 million. We found Jeffery's recent appearance on **McKinsey & Co's** "Inside the Strategy Room" [podcast](#) enlightening as he discusses the cultural shift he ushered in at Frontier. Elements included the employee-led "Frontier 50" program, where the entire employee base was tasked with helping to find \$50 million in cost savings and regular "Listen Live" call-ins for everyone to dial in to hear company updates every few weeks. Jeffery, 58, has more than 30 years of telecom leadership, including as CEO of **Vodafone**, where he led the turnaround of Vodafone UK and as CEO of Cable & Wireless.

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## PSKY'S DTC, UFC MOMENTUM

**Paramount Skydance** CEO *David Ellison* made it clear at the top of the company's 4Q25 earnings call that he wouldn't be taking questions about ongoing negotiations with **Warner Bros. Discovery**, which said Tuesday that PSKY's revised \$31 per share in cash offer, plus sweeteners, could turn out to be superior to **Netflix's** \$27.75 per share cash deal. Ellison said only that he looked forward to continuing to engage with WBD leadership. PSKY spent more time highlighting its DTC efforts, including **Paramount+**, which saw revenue growth of 17% YOY in 4Q25. DTC revenue increased 10% YOY in the quarter, with the company's total rev coming in at \$8.1 billion, a 2% YOY uptick. Paramount+ also increased its sub count by 1 million vs 3Q, finishing the quarter with 79 million subs. Ellison is particularly bullish about PSKY's **UFC** exclusive streaming deal. The debut event on the streamer, UFC 324, reached approximately 7 million households across the U.S. and Latin America and was the biggest exclusive live event ever on the platform. Ellison said PSKY has "seen the advertising demand for UFC be strong" and that UFC fans are engaging with other Paramount+ content,

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including outside the sports genre. “They’re watching ‘Landman,’ they’re watching other series, so we’re really seeing that flywheel work for us,” he added. PSKY shared its 2026 guidance, saying it expects total rev of \$30 billion in FY26, 4% growth vs last year, with DTC expected to be the primary driver of that growth.

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## BRAVES EMBRACING SOLO FIELD

We’ve got a way to go until 2029, when **MLB’s** media rights expire, but plenty of folks are thinking about it. Commissioner *Rob Manfred* has made it clear the league would like to make this new media rights package a sea change that would include local team rights. While he’d like to have all 30 teams’ local rights, he has said he doesn’t need them to accomplish his vision. Last week, *The Athletic* [dug](#) into the issue, noting that the Chicago Cubs chairman loves the team’s independence that allows them to co-own **Marquee Sports**. This week, the Atlanta Braves announced that it will roll out its own broadcast venture, **BravesVision**, given the decline of **Main Street Sports**. “We have one of the largest television territories in baseball, spanning multiple states, which affords us the opportunity to optimize our financial outcome, a factor that provides us an advantage that no other Main Street team has,” Atlanta Braves Chairman *Terrence McGuirk* said on the team’s earnings call Wednesday. Management repeatedly stressed that it has the in-house experience to cut out a third party. So what does this mean when Manfred comes knocking? McGuirk didn’t really signal, but Manfred would only need a majority of owners to vote in favor of any media rights moves. However, he’d need 75% (or 23) of votes regarding changes to revenue sharing. “Our next national media opportunity is 1-1-29. That will be the next time all of our national rights come up. Rob Manfred, the commissioner, has been quoted, I think, in saying that our possible best opportunity would be to aggregate all of our rights, like the **NBA**, like the **NFL**, like hockey. That is still a strategy that is not clear yet as to how we’ll play that,” he said. “But the commissioner will be leading that negotiation and that strategy discussion among the owners, and we will surely keep our shareholders and our analysts up to speed when that happens.”

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## FCC FINE FOCUS

With the **U.S. Supreme Court** to [review](#) the **FCC’s** authority on imposing civil fines on April 21, the amicus briefs are flowing. In a joint filing, the **Manhattan Institute for Policy Research** and the **Rutherford Institute** argued that “like the SEC in *Jarkesy*, the Federal Communications Commission acted as investigator, prosecutor, judge and jury,” citing the Supreme Court’s 2024 ruling that the SEC violated the Seventh Amendment by imposing civil penalties for securities fraud without a jury trial. At issue here is the FCC’s nearly \$200 million in fines in 2024 against **Verizon**, **T-Mobile**, **Sprint** and **AT&T** for allegedly failing to protect customers’ geolocation data. Verizon appealed to the Second Circuit, which rejected its arguments that the FCC overstepped its authority. But AT&T appealed to the Fifth Circuit, which found

AT&T’s right to a jury trial was violated. Both the FCC and Verizon filed petitions for certiorari with SCOTUS, which agreed to hear the cases, consolidating the petitions for oral argument. T-Mobile and Sprint paid the penalties and petitioned for review, but the D.C. Circuit denied the petitions. “The context of these cases further demonstrates why it is essential to protect the constitutional right to a jury trial overseen by an independent Article III judge that resolves questions of law,” T-Mobile said in its brief Wednesday. Think tank Tech Freedom also filed, urging SCOTUS to intervene in the FCC’s fining process: “Authority to regulate is not authority to punish first and adjudicate later (if at all). The FCC must pursue its enforcement objectives through procedures that respect the constitutional rights of the parties before it—including the right to a timely resolution of the charges the government has seen fit to bring.”

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## CHARTER PLEDGES SAVINGS FOR BIG 3 CUSTOMERS

In a new [promo](#), **Charter** highlighted \$1,000 in guaranteed savings in the first year for new customers if they switch their mobile service from **AT&T**, **T-Mobile** or **Verizon** to at least two unlimited lines of **Spectrum Mobile** and move their internet service to a Spectrum Internet Advantage plan. New customers can secure a two-year price lock: \$30/month for each mobile line, plus \$30 for internet. Charter said that if switching from the Big 3 and their internet provider doesn’t save a customer \$1,000 in the first year, the operator will cover the difference. Customers can use Charter’s [savings calculator](#) to check how much they could save by switching to Spectrum.

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## PROGRAMMING

As [mentioned](#) on **CFX Download**, **HBO** is on a hot streak at the moment with “A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms,” “The Pitt” and “Industry” all airing and reeling in viewers. While the latest “Game of Thrones” spinoff wrapped its first season last week, it’s Industry’s turn to take the spotlight Sunday with its own season finale, which will air an hour earlier on linear and **HBO Max** at 8pm. The show, which is up 30% in global viewing and averaging 1.7 million viewers per episode in Season 4, has been renewed for a fifth and final season. – **AspireTV** is gearing up for its first-ever original scripted series, “Savannah State of Mind,” which focuses on freshmen at a fictional HBCU. The multi-camera sitcom executive produced by *Bentley Kyle Evans* (“The Jamie Foxx Show,” “Martin”) will premiere later this year.

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## PEOPLE

**TV One** Networks named *Keith Hopkins* as VP, Content Distribution & Marketing. He was most recently part of **Roku’s** content distribution team, and has also held senior leadership roles at **Nexstar**, **Pac-12 Conference** and **NBCUniversal/Comcast**.