

UP AHEAD

- **Aug. 24-25:** [Mid-Atlantic Broadband Summit & Fiber Expo](#), Richmond
- **Sept. 13-16:** [NTCA Fall Conference](#), Nashville
- **Sept. 28:** [Cable TV Pioneers Diamond Jubilee](#), Atlanta
- **Sept. 29-Oct. 1:** [SCTE TechExpo 26](#), Atlanta

HBCU GO EYES WHAT'S NEXT

When **HBCU Go** kicks off its fifth season airing football next week, co-Founder and President *Curtis Symonds* will be able to point to something he spent more than a decade trying to create: a functioning media platform with long-term sports rights, national distribution and ambitions well beyond live games. Now he wants the cable industry to help determine what comes next.

The free streaming platform has OTA distribution in 95% of U.S. TV households. Its digital footprint spans **Amazon Fire TV**, **Roku**, **Prime Video** and **Plex**, as well as its website. What it lacks, though, are carriage agreements with cable distributors.

“My biggest thing, as I’ve done over my whole career, is begin to start convincing the cable industry, along with what we’ve already got, to support this service,” Symonds said in an interview with **CFX**. “I believe very strongly that this is a service that deserves a few pennies because we are bringing something into that television household that they need to support.”

It’s a fitting next step for the recent Cable Hall of Fame inductee, whose career moved through **ESPN** and **BET** before HBCU Go, and it’s a personal one as well. He grew up near the campus of Central State University, an HBCU in Wilberforce, Ohio, where his mother taught physical education for 40 years and his father



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worked in the maintenance department for 50 years. Symonds eventually played basketball and graduated from Central State. When he moved into the media industry and looked back at the HBCU world, he saw a gap that no one was filling.

Now he helms a service dedicated to Black college sports, news and entertainment, a model he likens to **CBS** and **CBS Sports**. But as HBCU Go prepares for Year 5 of football, that number doesn't reflect the 12 years it took Symonds to find someone willing to fully invest in the idea. His original concept was a production company built around football classics and bowl games, for which he had already secured rights from several programs. Then came a meeting with the late cable dealmaker *Leo Hindery* where Symonds first pitched an HBCU-centric platform.

"He said, 'Curtis, you don't need a production company. You need to build a channel.' I said, 'Leo, I don't have that kind of money,'" Symonds recounted. "But he did give me some good tutelage on some direction, and so I went out on the street trying to get someone to invest in this channel."

What followed was a decade of pitches and growing pains. That was until 2021—nine years after HBCU Go officially went live—when *Byron Allen's Allen Media Group* purchased the streamer and subsequently gave it the capital needed to scale.

"Even my wife was saying, 'How much longer are you going to do this thing?' And I just kept believing, and [Allen] made the dream come true," Symonds said. "... One thing I tried to impress on Byron when I sold the company to him, I said, 'I'm willing to sell my company to you, but I want to show the world that two Black men can work together and make something happen,' and that's always been my theory."

What quickly followed were 10-year rights agreements with three of the four major HBCU collegiate conferences: the SWAC, SIAC and CIAA, but the content strategy Symonds is focusing on extends beyond sports. He views HBCU Go as the main brand, and the sports on it are one piece of the puzzle—not the other way around, something Symonds admits he's had to correct before.

The platform is now pushing into what Symonds describes as the "culture is calling" phase, expanding content around fraternities, sororities, the arts, education and the broader HBCU experience across the 107 that span the U.S. Recently, HBCU Go announced a partnership with Procter & Gamble to bring back the P&G HBCYOU Tour, showcasing campus life, back-to-school celebrations, Homecoming festivities and more. The Tour hit the road Aug. 10 and is set to make stops at schools such as Texas Southern University, Morehouse College and Florida A&M.

Symonds thinks HBCU Go has been making a slow climb up the ladder, but the job is far from finished. "We're not where we need to be. We're way away from where we need to be. But we've made a good presence in the way that we've grown the brand," he said.

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CFX DOWNLOAD BREAKS DOWN WHAT'S NEXT FOR CHARTER-COX

Charter and **Cox** finally closed their \$34.5 billion merger this week. The deal makes Charter the largest broadband provider in the country. **CFX Download** dives into what's ahead for the combined company, how Charter is rolling out Spectrum services in Cox's footprint and what the new leadership structure looks like. Plus, a look at how the deal ties into Spectrum's RSN business. Tune into the new episode on [YouTube](#), [Apple](#) and [Spotify](#) now.

JUDGE SETS DISNEY-FCC HEARING TO OCTOBER

Disney/ABC was hoping to get a hearing as early as next week on [its lawsuit](#) accusing the **FCC** of violating its First Amendment rights and retaliating against the company over its license renewals. Instead, a judge will hold a hearing on the pending motions the week of Oct. 5. The FCC has to file its opposition to Disney's request for a restraining order, along with any motion to dismiss, by Sept. 3. Disney will then have until Sept. 17 to respond, and the FCC gets until Sept. 24 to reply on its motion to dismiss. The judge built in a safeguard: if the FCC moves forward with a hearing designation order targeting Disney's licenses before then, the court will hold an emergency hearing the very next business day.

DIRECTV, CIRCLE CITY SPAR OVER CARRIAGE

When **Circle City Broadcasting** [agreed to buy](#) Indianapolis **ABC** affiliate WRTV from **Scripps** last year, the retransmission consent writing was on the wall. Neither **Dish** nor **DirecTV** has carried Indianapolis **CW** affiliate WISH and **MyNetwork TV** WNDY since Circle City acquired the stations from **Nexstar** in 2019. With DirecTV's retrans deal for WRTV set to expire Monday night, Circle City has come calling with a renewal deal that would—surprise—also include carriage for WNDY and WISH. DirecTV said it's working with Circle City on a long-term renewal for WRTV, but it's claiming the offer on the table would be nearly double what WRTV's previous owner charged and bring back channels its subs have lived without for more than six years. And then there's the matter of Circle City [laying off](#) the majority of WRTV's 60+ newsroom employees in late March. "These higher costs come after Circle City laid off most of WRTV-ABC's newsroom just hours after taking control of the station, replaced its local newscasts with ones produced by WISH-CW, and put both stations under a single news director," DirecTV said. "As a result, Indianapolis went from three independent local television news operations servicing six stations down to just two—meaning fewer reporters, fewer independent voices, and less local coverage for the community. When fewer companies control more local TV stations, viewers end up paying higher prices for less local programming and fewer independent news choices, costing Indianapolis." Circle City paints this as DirecTV being unfair to smaller broadcast owners: "DirecTV continues to treat smaller broadcasters like us differently and appears to place less value on our stations and the local content we provide than it does on larger broadcast groups. They have a track record of showing animus towards Hoosier's video content and appear to value our community less. We believe that is unfair to both our locally based company and the Hoosiers who rely on our programming." There's a lot of history here, with Circle City formed in 2019 by veteran broadcaster *DuJuan McCoy* after he bought WISH and WNDY for \$42.5 million from Nexstar. In 2020, Circle City filed separate racial discrimination lawsuits against DirecTV and Dish, claiming they offered the majority Black-owned media company retransmission consent fees believed to be only a tiny fraction of what the providers paid to Nexstar. But a federal court and the 7th Circuit found Dish and DirecTV presented race-neutral reasons for not striking a retrans deal with Circle City and the stations never gained carriage.

THE 2026 TCA AWARD WINNERS ARE...

The **Television Critics Association** announced the winners of the 42nd TCA Awards. "Heated Rivalry," the Canadian sports romance series from **Crave** and **HBO Max**, took home Program of the Year. **Apple TV's** horror-comedy "Widow's Bay" lead series with three wins, including for Outstanding Comedy, New Program and an Individual Comedy Achievement award for *Kate O'Flynn*. HBO Max medical series "The Pitt" clinched Outstanding Drama for the second consecutive year. **NBCUniversal's** **Peacock** hit "The Traitors" won Outstanding Reality for the third straight time. **Disney's** "Percy Jackson and the Olympians" got Outstanding Family Programming. *Stephen Colbert* is also being honored with the Career Achievement Award, recognizing his nearly four decades of excellence in comedy, television and film. "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" wrapped earlier this spring. "In Living Color," the '90s **Fox** sketch comedy series, received the Heritage Award.