

FOOTBALL FRENZY

With college football up and running, Nielsen released its Local College Football Fandom Index to highlight the most fervent markets. Ranked on several metrics including event attendance, TV/streaming viewership and engagement, leading the way is Birmingham (thanks to Alabama and Auburn), followed by Des Moines/Ames (Iowa and Iowa State), Columbus (Ohio State), Omaha (Nebraska) and Knoxville (Tennessee). See the full top 20 [here](#).

NEXSTAR ON NEXT ROUND OF TEGNA FIGHT

The ongoing **Nexstar-Tegna** legal fight saw some movement to start the week. Oral arguments in Nexstar's appeal of a preliminary injunction that prevents it from fully integrating with Tegna will be heard by the **Ninth Circuit Court** on Nov. 17. The court date and the \$6.2 billion merger were the big topics of discussion during a Nexstar fireside chat at **Citi's** annual TMT conference Tuesday.

"We are trying to do a couple of different things. The first thing we're trying to do is we're trying to narrow the scope of the preliminary injunction," Nexstar EVP/CFO *Lee Ann Gliha*, who recently celebrated five years at the broadcaster, said of the appeal. "The core argument from the plaintiffs is about the markets where we have a Big 4 television station and Tegna has a Big 4 television station, yet the preliminary injunction applies to the entire operation of Tegna. If we can narrow the scope of the preliminary injunction to be focused just on those overlap markets that potentially could have some benefit in terms of our ability to execute our plan on the non-Big 4 overlap markets and then on the corporate synergies and the like."

In August, the states and **DirecTV** clinched [another big win](#) when a U.S. District judge found that Nexstar violated the preliminary injunction by appointing its own execs to Tegna's board. The broadcaster was ordered to reconstitute the board without any current or past Nexstar employees and submit monthly status reports on the Tegna board's actions. Nexstar continues to argue that being unable to fully integrate with Tegna is causing irreparable harm to both businesses.

"The other thing we're trying to do with the appeal is to really dismiss the states from the case. If we're able to do that, then it becomes just a lawsuit between DirecTV and Nexstar. Now, there is no sort of date in terms of when the appeals court needs to actually rule after they hear the argument, so we'll have to just see how that plays out," Gliha added. Nexstar CEO *Perry Sook*, who was also at the conference, suggested that successfully getting the state case against the Tegna merger dismissed could have a "larger implication potentially for down the road M&A."

"If the states are not given standing as the second layer of federal approvals, that could remove a somewhat chilling effect on M&A, right? We have to go through a second layer of approval state by state depending on what any particular state is thinking at that point in time, so I think there could be a larger read-through beyond our transaction to downstream" Sook said, although he clarified that "may be on a case-by-case basis."

The hurdles faced by Nexstar have stopped an industry craving consolidation cold, including fellow broadcaster Sinclair, which attempted to acquire Scripps last year and has continued to rev its merger engines on earnings calls this year. But even with the FCC voting to nix the 39% national ownership cap in August, it's been largely

crickets on other broadcaster combos.

Asked how Nexstar would proceed if its appeals fail, Sook said “there could be an appeal to the appeal. It depends how close we are to the actual trial and what else has happened in the intervening time.” He added that “whoever loses may appeal and we may get to relitigate another time.”

Also still pending is the antitrust case in the **U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California**, which won’t go to trial until next July. In other words, the companies still have a long wait ahead before the combo’s fate can be resolved.

Charter’s \$34.5 billion merger with **Cox**, which closed in August, also came up during the M&A discussion, specifically whether the cable mega-deal would create retrans headwinds for Nexstar or Tegna. Sook said no. “I would say it’s a lot more nuanced than that, whether the distributor has after-acquired clauses and/or the content holder and how those marry with one another. But I don’t see it as a headwind per se,” he said. Charter [has sued](#) Scripps, claiming its trying to get out of applying its retrans conditions to the newly acquired Cox systems.

“Obviously, one of the reasons that we are doing M&A is because look at the counterparties that we negotiate with,” Sook continued. “I think we’ve been kind of the poster child for scale M&A in our particular sector, but it has a sense of urgency now as those we do business with are scaling at the same time.” The CEO assured Nexstar will “continue to look to grow our company’s size, scale, footprint [and] sphere of influence for all of those reasons.”

COMCAST REBUTS APCO’S POLE DISPUTE

Comcast filed a reply brief Friday in its ongoing **FCC** back-and-forth with **Appalachian Power Company**, telling the Commission that the utility’s pole attachment charges continue to violate a February 2026 order and are holding up network expansion. Comcast filed the FCC complaint against APCo in July over how much it owes to fix a preexisting safety violation when replacing a pole. While Comcast pointed to the FCC’s order limiting it to incremental costs, APCo countered that the operator is [underestimating](#) the numbers in the argument against a 20% minimum charge to help replace a pole. Comcast is continuing to contend that its actual liability should be no more than \$200 per pole, citing APCo’s own concession that installation costs don’t rise with pole height or strength. Comcast also challenges APCo’s practice of billing 100% of replacement costs if an existing violator removes its attachment before a new pole is installed, calling it a way to sidestep the incremental cost rule. “APCO’s arguments ignore the key rulings in the FCC’s February Order. Our focus remains on expanding affordable, reliable, and secure broadband connectivity to reach more homes, businesses, and communities,” a Comcast spokesperson said in a statement. “We appreciate the Commission’s focus on these important matters and look forward to the Bureau’s resolution of the remaining straightforward legal issue in this case.”

FCC’S POLL WARNING AND SEPTEMBER PLANS

Over the weekend, **FCC** Chairman *Brendan Carr* said the agency may soon warn broadcasters over “fake polls” ahead of the midterms, stirring another controversy tied to the agency’s oversight of content on broadcast TV. Speaking on

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Intelligence, LLC.
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EDITORIAL

Editor

Noah Ziegler, 301.354.1704,
nziegler@accessintel.com

Senior Editor

John Saavedra, 908.477.1758
jsaavedra@accessintel.com

Editorial Director

Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760,
amaclean@accessintel.com

Editorial Director, Ad Tech & Convergent Media

Sarah Sluis, 212.621.4706,
ssluis@accessintel.com

ADVERTISING/BUSINESS

Chief Revenue Officer

Dave Colford,
dcolford@accessintel.com

VP Ad Tech/Convergent Media

Gordon Plutsky,
gplutsky@accessintel.com

Advertising and Sponsorship

Vernesa Merdanovic,
vmerdanovic@accessintel.com

MARKETING

Senior Marketing Director

Jessica Dombrowski,
jdombrowski@accessintel.com

PRODUCTION/CLIENT SERVICES

Sr Production Manager:

Joann Fato,
jfato@accessintel.com

Group Subs: Vernesa Merdanovic,
vmerdanovic@accessintel.com

Subscription Questions:

Client Services: 301.354.2101,
clientservices@accessintel.com |
Annual subscription price:
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Access Intelligence, LLC,

9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor,
Rockville, MD 20850

Fox News' "The Sunday Briefing," Carr said the agency "may put guidance out soon" to remind broadcasters of their public interest obligations and refrain from publicizing fake or misleading polls. Carr noted "a lot of interest" in election polls as the midterms grow closer. One person who's been vocal about alleged polling inaccuracies has been President *Donald Trump*. In late August, Trump called on the FCC to take action against networks and their election coverage, [writing](#) on **Truth Social**: "THE FAKE POLLS USED BY OUR CROOKED MEDIA ARE OUT OF CONTROL, AND SOMETHING MUST BE DONE ABOUT IT. FCC TO THE RESCUE!" Fourteen minutes after that post, Trump reiterated his call by targeting "Meet the Press" host *Kristen Welker* over claims of inaccurate reporting regarding Trump-endorsed candidates and their primary election results. "Because of this purposeful inaccuracy, she will be reported to the FCC for rebuke or punishment. Unfortunately, she is not the only one," Trump [wrote](#). "... The Press is a Disgrace to our Nation, and I hope that Chairman Brendan Carr, and the fine people of his Commission, will take this Threat to our Country very seriously." It's no surprise lone Democratic FCC Commissioner *Anna Gomez* is opposing a potential notice from the FCC. She warned the Commission against meddling in an election "through intimidation" and said it's another example of censorship. "Polls can be wrong. That's no surprise to anyone who has followed politics over the last decade," Gomez said. "The FCC faces a very high bar to prove news distortion, and it requires clear evidence of an intentional effort to mislead the public. Without it, this is all political theater." -- The comments come as FCC officials previewed items headed for a vote at its open meeting on Sept. 30. Chief among them is a NEPA rules overhaul that the FCC said will cut more than \$30 million in annual administrative costs, in addition to clarifying that environmental review doesn't apply to satellites or other space operations. Those changes won't impact BEAD rollouts since those are handled by **NTIA**. Also on the agenda is a spectrum abundance order that would free more than 1,000 MHz in the 12.7 and 42 GHz bands for satellite broadband, in-flight and maritime connectivity and ground-network traffic routing. There's also a companion NPRM that proposes the first full rewrite of ultra-wideband rules since 2002.

HARMONIC WEAVES NEW AI FABRIC FOR OPERATORS

Having [sold](#) its video business to **MediaKind** earlier this year, **Harmonic** is staking its broadband-focused future on a new product it's calling a "second engine" for growth. On Tuesday, it unveiled cOS SensAI (pronounced "sensei"), a vendor-agnostic intelligence fabric that meshes data from broadband networks into a single information layer. It comes as Harmonic looks to establish a new, recurring revenue stream on top of its existing infrastructure portfolio. SensAI ingests data from across an operator's network—such as back-office systems, network elements and in-home WiFi—into what Harmonic calls a "network graph," before utilizing AI agents to automate workflows for subscriber care, network management and field operations. It's designed to work on non-Harmonic infrastructure, which opens a path to operators that don't currently use Harmonic's cOS platform. "This is critical to our strategy," *Yaniv Ben-Soussan*, Harmonic's SVP, Cloud and Intelligence Platforms, told **CFX** ahead of the launch. "We have the connectivity layer that we've been developing for more than a decade with the infrastructure, software and hardware solutions. That's why I call [SensAI] a second engine of an intelligent, recurring revenue platform that is really unlocking a new market for us." **GCI** and **Hotwire Communications** are among those already deploying SensAI, along with 13 additional customers in North America, Latin America and Asia that reside in the proof-of-concept phase. Alaska's GCI is using it to help field technicians on HFC repairs, while Hotwire rolled out a customer-care agent to reduce truck rolls. "Things that took them weeks to fix, or even months to identify... once we implemented SensAI and we understood the context of all the data, things are coming and surfacing in hours," Ben-Soussan said. Citing research from the analyst firm **Analysys Mason**, Harmonic estimates that the total addressable market for SensAI is around \$2.2 billion annually among Tier 2, 3 and 4 operators alone. Harmonic anticipates a \$1-2 billion market that will be priced per sub against the reduced costs brought by SensAI. Ben-Soussan added that Harmonic's own modeling, based on roughly 500 million subscribers worldwide (sans China and India), puts total ISP operating costs at \$72 billion per year, with SensAI potentially capable of driving 20% savings.

CORNING CONTINUES TO SIGN AI PARTNERSHIPS

Corning has been teaming up with the likes of **Amazon**, **Meta** and **Microsoft** to tackle AI's rapid growth and demand. It scored another partnership Tuesday, signing a multibillion-dollar agreement with **Verizon** to provide

more than 80 million miles of high-density optical fiber and connectivity solutions. The deal will begin next year and will run through 2032. Verizon is hoping the multi-use fiber will speed up broadband expansion while also establishing a long-haul framework that can support AI hyperscalers. The operator is currently targeting 40-50 million broadband passings “over the medium term,” according to CEO *Dan Schulman* earlier this year, though he never specified how long “medium term” could be. Corning—which has collaborated with Verizon for three decades—noted that the agreement should help the manufacturer continue scaling its U.S. footprint. On the AI front, Verizon has been deploying ultra-dense cables throughout major long-haul corridors that connect directly to data centers.

MS NOW MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

Versant's MS Now DTC product, simply called the MS Now Membership, launches Wednesday. When it does, it won't just give users 24/7 access to live TV programming but also the opportunity to speak directly with the news brand's on-air talent. The service will host exclusive twice-daily interactive Q&As on *ms.now* and the MS Now app at noon with anchors and 6 pm with newsroom reporters. Each day, members can submit questions ahead of each session or ask them live through the comments, with some members able to join over live video on Mondays with *Rachel Maddow* and Tuesdays with *Joe Scarborough*. On Wednesdays, *Ali Velshi* and *Stephanie Ruhle* will answer questions about politics, money, business and power, while Thursdays will see *Michael Steele* share an insider perspective on the goings on in D.C. *Jen Psaki* will answer questions on Fridays, one of the hosts of MS Now's “The Weekend” will chat with members on Saturdays and Rev. Al Sharpton will talk about activism and community on Sundays. In the evenings, MS Now will host live conversations with reporters covering the day's biggest stories, featuring additional reporting and behind-the-scenes context. MS Now Membership is priced at \$7.99/month or \$79.99/year, with an introductory price of \$39.99/year for the first full year also on offer through Sept. 30.

WTGL SIGNS MEDIA RIGHTS DEALS

In 2025, the **TGL** broke onto the scene with a hyper-realistic indoor golf competition. With its third season looming, so is the debut of the women's iteration **WTGL**, and last week it announced who will carry the new golf league on its airwaves. **ESPN** and **Scripps Sports** signed multiyear agreements with the WTGL, which will begin Nov. 8 from Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. ESPN—a rights partner with the TGL through its first two seasons—will air matches and shoulder programming across the flagship network, **ESPN2** and **ABC**, while Scripps' Ion will provide OTA distribution throughout the U.S.

FIBER FRENZY

Fiber provider **Wire 3** passed the halfway mark on its network buildout in Palm Bay, Florida, with customers in initial construction areas now connected to multi-gig speeds of up to 10 Gigs. The project is expected to be completed as early as winter 2027.

PEOPLE

Mediacom appointed *Anthony Bowling* as SVP, Field Operations Strategy & Operational Excellence. In the role, Bowling will establish and oversee Mediacom's operating framework, governance, standards and performance management processes supporting field operations. He will also work closely with area directors and VPs to drive greater standardization, operational discipline, service assurance and improvement across the org. Bowling previously held senior positions at **Comcast**, **Charter** and **Dish Network**. – *Jessica Uhl* is set to succeed *Peter Osvaldik* as **T-Mobile** CFO in February. The former Shell CFO and GE Vernova President will first join the uncarrier as CFO Designate in mid-September, while Osvaldik will remain as a Strategic Advisor post-succession until his planned retirement on July 1. Osvaldik joined T-Mobile in 2016, serving in the CFO role since 2020.

OOPS!

An early version of an article about pole attachment complaints in Sept. 3's edition incorrectly identified the complainant. It is “**Wired or Wireless**” (WOW), not broadband provider **WideOpenWest** (WOW!).