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SPORTS EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR:
LUIS SILBERWASSER OF TNT SPORTS

PROUDLY PRESENTS PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

SHARP SHOOTER

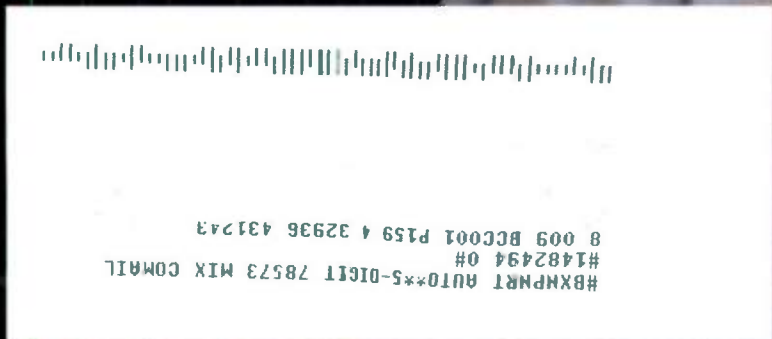
Sharp Entertainment has 22 shows on the air, including *90 Day Fiancé* and *Love After Lockup*. Matt Sharp looks at the unit's 20 years in the business, and what's next for the reality giant.

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CHANGE THE GAME?

FAST FRIENDS: WHY BLACK
VIEWERS LIKE WHAT THEY SEE
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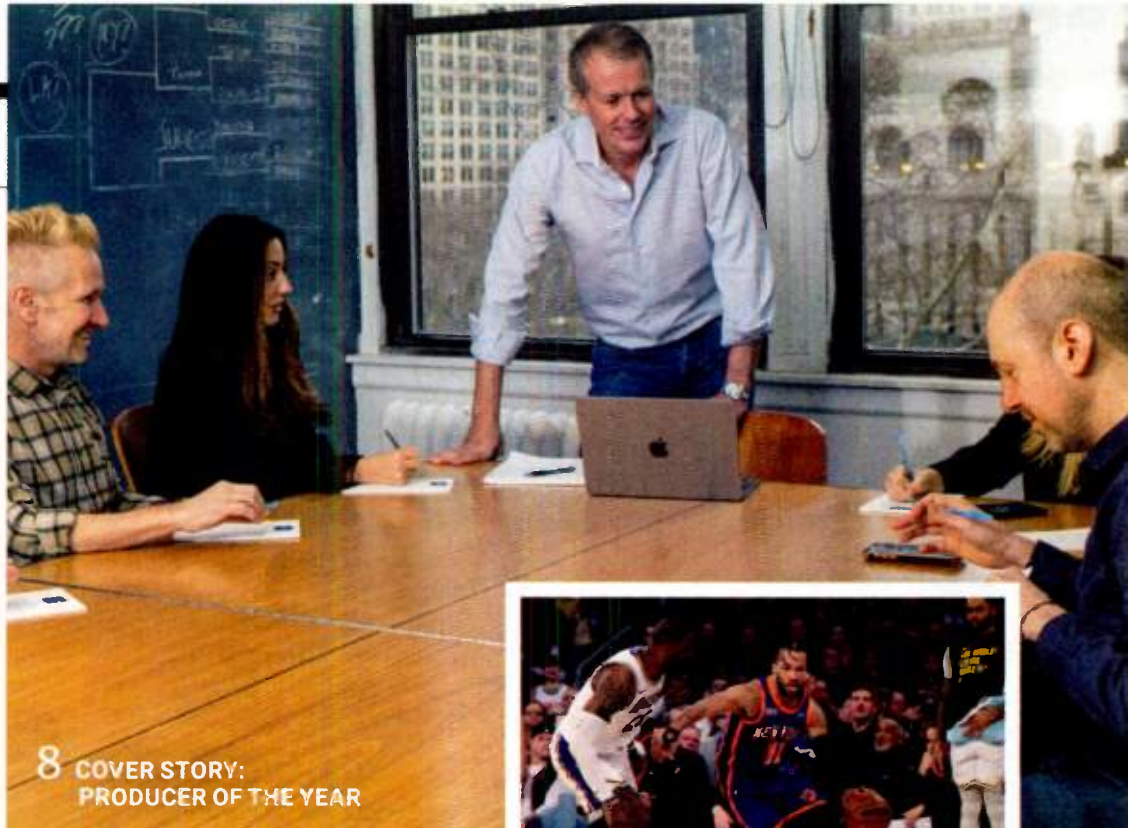
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PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

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8 COVER STORY:
PRODUCER OF THE YEAR
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Producer of the Year Matt Sharp in his New York office.



4 LEAD-IN

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FUTURE

Connectors
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Questions Surround Blockbuster Sports Streaming Joint Venture

Rivals, stations blitz sports-only approach of Disney-Fox-Warner Bros. Discovery partnership



By Jon Lafayette
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After nearly overshadowing the Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers during Super Bowl week, the joint venture newly kicked off by The Walt Disney Co.'s ESPN and rivals Fox and Warner Bros. Discovery isn't as sure a thing as Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who again emerged as the big game's most valuable player.

Investors and observers were split on the joint venture. Some saw the companies as three wise men, creating their own virtual multichannel video distributor (vMVPD) to carry a skinny bundle of most of TV's most-watched channels, including ESPN, ABC, Fox and TNT. Others thought the venture was formed by three blind mice who failed to see how their leviathan would open the floodgates to accelerated cord-cutting by letting sports escape the historically lucrative pay TV business.

The combination will encourage frustrated sports fans who have cut the cord to come into (or back into) the fast-eroding pay TV ecosystem, which for years has generated big profit margins for programmers, fans of the deal argued. And the JV will pay its founders top rates for their sports programming.

The optimism was met with concerns on Wall Street and elsewhere that the venture would encourage continued cord-cutting, making it easier for consumers to choose a skinnier bundle of programming for about \$50 a month and stop subscribing to still-lucrative channels like CNN, Fox News, Disney Channel, HGTV and FX.

The price the venture would charge distributors was just one of the still unan-

swered questions about the still-unnamed business.

Who will run it? Will other partners be added? Will traditional distributors be able to offer the new bundle to their subscribers? Will affiliates be cut in?

During earnings calls the week the venture was announced, Disney CEO Bob Iger and Fox executive chairman and CEO Lachlan Murdoch both downplayed the risk of accelerating cord-cutting and further damaging their news and entertainment cable channels.

"While there might be some de minimis economic impact on us for us it's very low-risk," said Iger, who responded to pressure from activist investors by announcing that ESPN would go direct-to-consumer next year and that Taylor Swift's concert film will be on Disney Plus next month.

Of the 125 million U.S. TV households, about half, or 60 million, are not in the traditional bundled ecosystem.

"We would not be launching this product if we thought it was going to significantly affect our affiliate partners," Murdoch said, adding, "The opportunity is huge."

Wariness on Wall Street

Wall Street was skeptical. "Fox said they're confident that the sports streaming JV with Disney and WBD won't disrupt the traditional pay TV ecosystem," Wells Fargo analyst Steven Cahall said. "We are not yet convinced and think it's a gamble to give bundle subs additional options."

The news wasn't great for companies impacted by the venture.

The Disney-Fox-Warner Bros. Discovery joint venture would bring both of the NBA's TV partners, ESPN and TNT Sports, under the same umbrella.

Fubo, the money-losing sports-oriented streaming service, saw its stock price fall about 20%. "We're not surprised more sports streaming options are becoming available," Fubo said, "We believe our robust programming and quality product experience cannot be duplicated by what is likely to emerge from this joint venture."

Fubo added that "we have already seen that a consortium born of historical competitors is a difficult undertaking, and streaming joint ventures rarely work."

Paramount Global, whose rights holdings include the NFL, a piece of the men's NCAA basketball tournament (alongside WBD's TNT Sports, see page 16) and college football, downplayed the strategy behind the sports venture.

"What we focus on is a broad strategy," Paramount CEO Bob Bakish told CNBC.

"We've looked at sports-only plays, including in digital, both on a standalone basis and with partners, but we continue to believe broad is better."

More Reach for Stations

Stations, which are increasingly adding local sports to their lineup, could also be impacted but preferred to focus on the bright spots, at least in public.

The venture "could be a significant opportunity to expand the pay TV ecosystem," Gray Television said in a statement. "Gray welcomes any venture that expands the reach of local broadcasting stations, which in turn supports the ability of local stations to maintain trusted local news operations that benefit everyone."

Said E.W. Scripps CEO Adam Symson, "Affiliates are going to be compensated for being carried along."

"People don't want to go to a buffet where half the steam trays are missing," Symson added. "It calls into question the value of the consumer proposition. If you're a sports nut today and you need access to all the live telecasts of your favorite sports, you're best off maintaining the pay TV bundle as it is." ●



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THE WATCHMAN

Senior content producer Michael Malone's look at the programming scene



By Michael Malone
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This Is Us Now, Says 'Tracker' Guys Justin Hartley and Ken Olin

Tracker has Justin Hartley, last seen as Kevin on *This Is Us*, as lone-wolf survivalist Colter Shaw, who roams the country as a reward seeker while dealing with his own dysfunctional family. The CBS drama was on after the Super Bowl on February 11 and slid into its regular time period a week later.

Hartley and executive producer Ken Olin both worked on *This Is Us*. Summing up Hartley's goals after playing Kevin, Olin quipped at a CBS press event, "Justin wanted to carry a gun and get in fights."

The show is based on the Jeffrey Deaver novel *The Never Game* and initially had that title. The name change was so that the show would not be confused with video games. "I didn't want people to watch and see the guy rescue someone," Olin said, "and wonder when the game would start."

A difficult childhood has influenced Shaw and his odd career pursuits. "He grew up with a very fractured family," Hartley said. "There are secrets."

TV's Colter Shaw is a bit more animated than



Tracker



The Completely Made-Up Adventures of Dick Turpin

his novel counterpart. "Justin is so good with humor," Olin said. "The character in the book was much more of a silent kind of character."

Apple TV Plus Gets Laughs From Heinous Historic Highwayman

The *Completely Made-Up Adventures of Dick Turpin* premieres on Apple TV Plus March 1. Noel

Fielding portrays Turpin, a legendary British highway robber from the 18th century.

Executive producer Kenton Allen said Turpin was made into something of a romantic hero in British novels, but that was not the true dude.

"Dick Turpin was a pretty awful individual," he said, "basically a cutthroat murderer and horse thief."

In the show, Turpin leads a band of outlaws and battles with corrupt lawman Jonathan Wilde, who bears the ominous title Thief Taker. Hugh Bonneville, who played the Earl of Grantham in *Downton Abbey*, portrays Wilde. "He's very skillful, very subtle, with great timing," Fielding said.

Turpin is well known in the United Kingdom, Allen said, thanks to those novels and the Adam and the Ants song "Stand and Deliver." "He's definitely in the popular culture here," he said from London. "Globally, we're about to find out."

Allen and Fielding cited Monty Python and the Holy Grail, *The Princess Bride* and *Blackadder* as influences. "The Holy Grail has quite a good atmosphere," Fielding said. "It's got that spooky British thing about it. We tried to get a little of that."

The *Completely Made-Up Adventures* is set almost 300 years ago, but Allen believes it is timely today. "The world is a challenging place at the moment, with lots of very, very grim things," he said. "Going on adventures with Dick Turpin and his gang is a great escape." ●

WATCH THIS ...



The Regime

Season 46 of *Survivor* starts on CBS February 28, with a new batch of contestants and Jeff Probst as host. Episodes once again go for 90 minutes. ■ On March 3, HBO unveils *The Regime*. Kate Winslet stars in the story of one year within the walls of a palace of a modern European regime as it begins to unravel. ■ *Hot Wheels Let's Race* premieres on Netflix March 4. The animated show follows the



Hot Wheels Let's Race

newest generation of racers as they take on new races, stunts and challenges. Also on March 4, *MasterChef Junior* begins season nine on Fox. Gordon Ramsay, daughter Tilly Ramsay, Daphne Oz and Aaron Sanchez are mentors to the diminutive chefs. The winner takes home \$100,000. ■ And on March 12, *Password* returns on NBC with season two. Keke Palmer hosts and Jimmy Fallon stars, and the guests include Chance the Rapper, Laverne Cox, Jimmy Kimmel, Howie Mandel and Joel McHale.



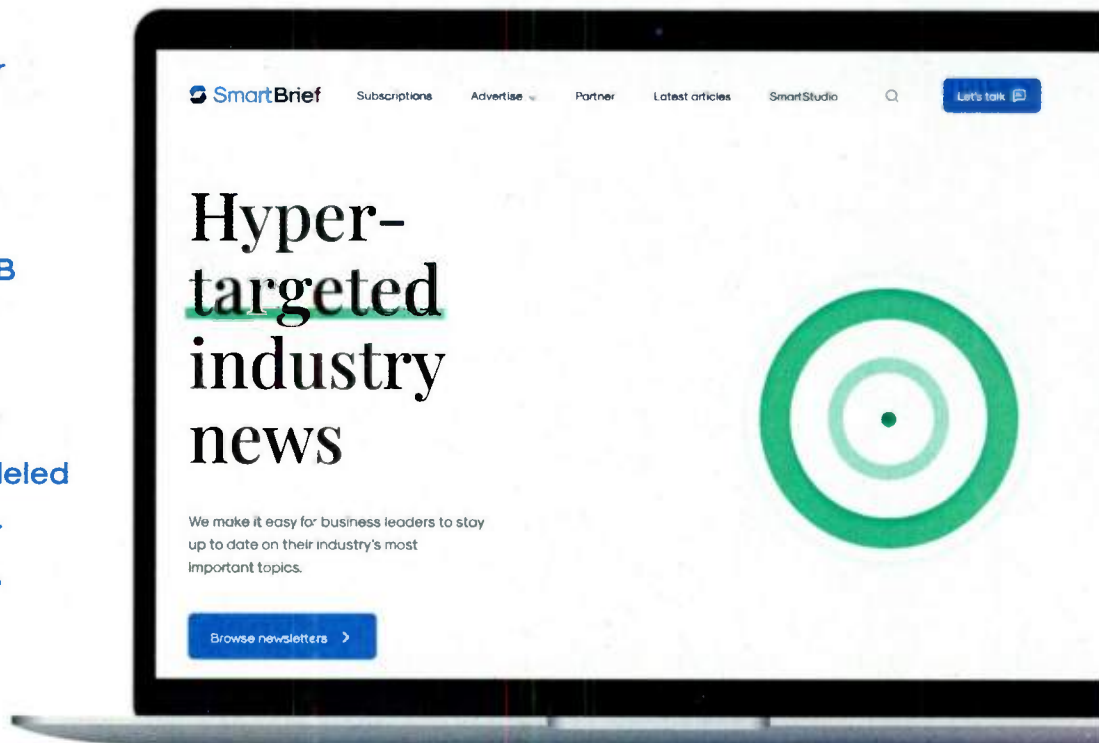
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MATT SHARP

Hones Reality Hits That Last



From '90 Day Fiancé' to 'Man v. Food' to 'Love After Lockup,' Sharp Entertainment chief crafts sturdy franchises that resonate with viewers



By R. Thomas Umstead
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In 2023, Sharp Entertainment, a part of Sony Pictures Television, marked its 20th anniversary by producing episodes for an eye-popping 22 new and returning nonfiction shows for multiple television networks including TLC, MTV and Bravo — a noteworthy achievement in an otherwise turbulent and unpredictable business environment.

New York-based Sharp Entertainment, under the leadership of founder and CEO Matt Sharp, has found the right formula for memorable, genre-shaping reality content for more than two decades, with credits including TLC's *90 Day Fiancé*, Cooking Channel's *Man v. Food* and WE tv's *Love After Lockup*. Sharp's ability to capture unique, true-life characters and stories originating from Middle America to remote destinations around the world for viewers puts him on solid footing within a shifting landscape.

"Matt Sharp has this extraordinary knack for finding great ideas that lend themselves to long-running series," Sony Pictures Television president, nonfiction Eli Holzman said. "His golden gut never steers him wrong,



I believe that people want to see diversity in their programming and they want to learn about other people. I really think *90 Day Fiancé* is the most culturally and ethnically diverse show on television.”

— **Matt Sharp**, founder and CEO, Sharp Entertainment

and it's really, really impressive. He's a real producer that loves the thrill of the hunt in making the shows that pull on the viewer's heartstrings, as well as making them laugh and think.”

The Syracuse, New York, native, who started a home window-washing business while in high school and later sold T-shirts while attending the University of Vermont, turned his entrepreneurial skills to television in 2003 after a short stint as a producer at VH1. Sharp Entertainment launched that year with a show he initially produced for VH1, *The Fabulous Life*. The big hit, which focused on the lifestyles of such celebrities as Jennifer Lopez, Michael Jackson, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Hugh Hefner, put Sharp on the map.

Even after Sharp sold his company in 2012 to Core Media — which eventually rebranded to Industrial Media before its 2022 purchase by Sony Pictures Television — he kept up his hands-on approach and the company's prolific development of successful original content across multiple reality genres. Sharp-produced shows like *Man v. Food*, National Geographic's *Doomsday Preppers* and TLC's *Extreme Couponing* offered viewers rare and fascinating looks inside unusual, charming, authentic and, in some cases, alarming stories about the lives of real people.

“The first thing about Matt that I really appreciate is, he's not just a seller of TV shows,” Howard Lee, president of Discovery Networks and TLC, said. “He gets his hands really dirty and gets involved creatively with his team. He makes sure that the storytelling is accurate, defined and incredibly authentic.”

In 2013 Lee and Sharp teamed to develop TLC's juggernaut franchise *90 Day Fiancé*. Sharp's simple but brilliant concept — following U.S. citizens looking for love overseas within the boundaries of a then-relatively unknown K-1 visa process that gave them three months to marry their foreign loves — has piqued viewer interest since its debut. Ten years and more than 30 spinoffs later, the *90 Day Fiancé* fran-

chise has garnered more than 68 billion viewing hours across 150 countries, according to Sharp Entertainment.

Not resting on laurels, Sharp Entertainment remained busy in 2023, producing episodes for more than a company-record 22 nonfiction series and specials, including season 10 of the original *90-Day Fiancé*. High on this year's agenda are returning franchises on networks and new upcoming series for The CW, WE tv, A&E and TLC.

Sharp's reputation as a master series producer and hit-maker also has networks like WE tv bringing series concepts to his front door. WE tv in 2018 turned to Sharp to produce signature series *Love After Lockup*, following the romantic lives of recently released felons. It became one of WE tv's highest-rated programs and has generated several spinoffs, including *Love During Lockup* and *Life After Lockup*.

“*Love After Lockup* was an idea born in the halls of WE tv, but we knew instantly Matt Sharp and Sharp Entertainment were the perfect team to develop it out and make it a reality,” Angela Molloy, ALLBLK and WE tv senior VP of development & original production, unscripted, said. “Their ability to bring these truly real, original human stories to life with such authenticity has been one of the many reasons *Love During*, *Love After* and *Life After Lockup* continue to captivate viewers.”

As for the future, Sony's Holzman said Sharp's production talents and instincts will sustain and carry his company through the TV industry's volatile evolution. “Of all the things that we worry about, Sharp Entertainment is not one of them,” Holzman said. “Matt's shows, apart from the consistent quality, creative output of the organization, are really made responsibly. Matt's well-positioned for the change in our business.”

Sharp's ability to remain relevant with nonfiction content that appeals to a wide segment of viewers in a crowded and uncertain television environment has earned him *B+C Multichannel News Producer of the Year* honors for 2024.



In an interview, Sharp described his reality TV journey and the inspiration behind some of his company's biggest hits while looking toward the future for video content creators. Here's a version of that conversation, edited for space and clarity.

B+C: How did a young entrepreneur from upstate New York end up becoming one of the most successful and prolific television content producers of the past 20 years?

Matt Sharp: So my first job, I was an intern at MTV before becoming a page at CBS, where I wore a uniform and showed people to the bathrooms at the Ed Sullivan Theater during *The Late Show [With David Letterman]*. Then I worked at CBS News for a while and realized that my heart was really in entertainment. I went over and I started working at VH1 as a writer, and I worked there for about three or four years. What was cool about that time was that the industry was really the Wild West, where people were just trying stuff and no one understood what nonfiction was. I mean, there was *The Real World* and maybe two or three other shows. VH1 was a very cool place to be at the time because they were very

innovative in trying all these different things super cheap. My boss at VH1 said to me, 'We're really interested in doing a show about celebrity wealth,' so he tasked me with developing that.

Ultimately we did a show, *The Fabulous Life of Jennifer Lopez*, which was a special. The network just threw it on the air and it was instantly one of the highest-rated shows of the year. So we got an incredible offer order from that, but really what I wanted to do was start a company.

Even though I had some job offers to

Above, 90 Day Fiancé, an idea Matt Sharp got from a newsmagazine show, has become a megahit for TLC. Below, Casey Webb is the second host of reality stalwart Man v. Food.

move to L.A. and to work there, I approached my boss and mentor at VH1 at the time, Michael Hirschorn, about starting a company. Michael was totally supportive of that, and *The Fabulous Life* was so great, he supported me taking that show with me and starting a company with that order. So that's how we started. At the time, people were like, what are you doing, particularly in New York and in nonfiction? We were one of the early ones.

B+C: What characteristics do you look for in developing a series?

MS: If you look at the history of Sharp Entertainment, we've done lots of different types of shows. Where some production companies focus in one area, we started really as a pop culture clip-show shop, and that's what people came to us for. Then we created *Man v. Food* and moved into food programming, and then into subcultures with *Extreme Couponing* and *Doomsday Preppers*. Now with *90 Day Fiancé* and *Love After Lockup*, we're the love guys.

My theory has always been that it's really fun to make a show but it's really fun to make a hit, and that's what we're interested in doing. If you can create something that's cool and different that you're proud of — and the country and maybe even the world is also really appreciating and loving it — I think



90 DAY FIANCÉ
WHAT NOW?

90 DAY FIANCÉ
DIARIES

THE FAMILY
CHANTEL

90 DAY FIANCÉ
HAPPILY
EVER
AFTER?

90 DAY
FIANCÉ

90 DAY FIANCÉ
THE OTHER
WAY

90 DAY
THE
SINGLE
LIFE

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**MATT
SHARP**

90 DAY FIANCÉ
BEFORE
THE 90 DAYS

Love &
Tránslation

MATCH Me
ABROAD

90 DAY
THE LAST
RESORT

YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS AT



90 DAY FIANCÉ
PILLOW
TALK

LOVE
GAMES

90 DAY FIANCÉ
LOVE IN
Paradise

Darcey
&
Stacey

90 day
foody call

90 DAY FIANCÉ
SELF-QUARANTINED

90 DAY
BARES ALL

90 DAY FIANCÉ
JUST LANDED

david & annie
AFTER THE 90 DAYS

90 DAY
STRIKES BACK!

loren & alexei
AFTER THE 90 DAYS

that's the cherry on top for the business. We have lots of ideas, but not every idea is a great show. So, someone will pitch us an idea, and while that's maybe a really interesting thought, we'll ask ourselves, 'What leads you through a segment? Why are you watching that?'

A great example is when we constructed *Man v. Food*. We had a great, charismatic host in Adam Richman and the concept was, he's going to travel to some of the best mom-and-pop restaurants in the country and we thought people would want to see that. But then we asked ourselves, 'How are we going to make this a hit?' Well, the hit is he's going to do a food challenge once an episode. If that food challenge piece worked and people cared if Adam wins or loses, we felt like we had a hit. And then that show turned out to be, at the time, Travel Channel's top-rated show.

B+C: By 2012, Sharp Entertainment had several hits under its belt, but then you ended up selling the company. Why did you feel that was the best time to sell and what were your expectations for the company under new management?

MS: You never know where the industry is headed. We were doing very well at the time and were approached with an offer that we felt was really compelling, which was to keep control of Sharp Entertainment in New York and to be a partner in this business, but to also bring in partners that allow us to really grow the business. The expectation is that every time you do a deal, the great work that you're doing continues on, which is what happened.

Since that first deal, we've done another deal and continued to grow the business. I'm happy to say that 2023 was the most successful year we've had, and they're not all successful. There were moments along the way where we had a show canceled and we looked up and realized that we don't have any other shows. There were those moments, but over the course of 20 years, we've continued to grow and I think we will continue on that trajectory this year.



Love After Lockup, which tracks relationships between incarcerated people and their love interests on the outside, has been a big hit for WE tv.

B+C: How have the current owners, Sony Pictures Television, enhanced the Sharp Entertainment brand?

MS: Sony is obviously an incredible brand and incredible company. It allows us to tap into their infrastructure to multiply and magnify what we're doing. It's also great that we have partners that trust us — we're in New York City, we're successful and they're not messing with that formula. They're there to make that call when we've got a great idea that we're thinking about as the perfect Sony project that they could help blow up.

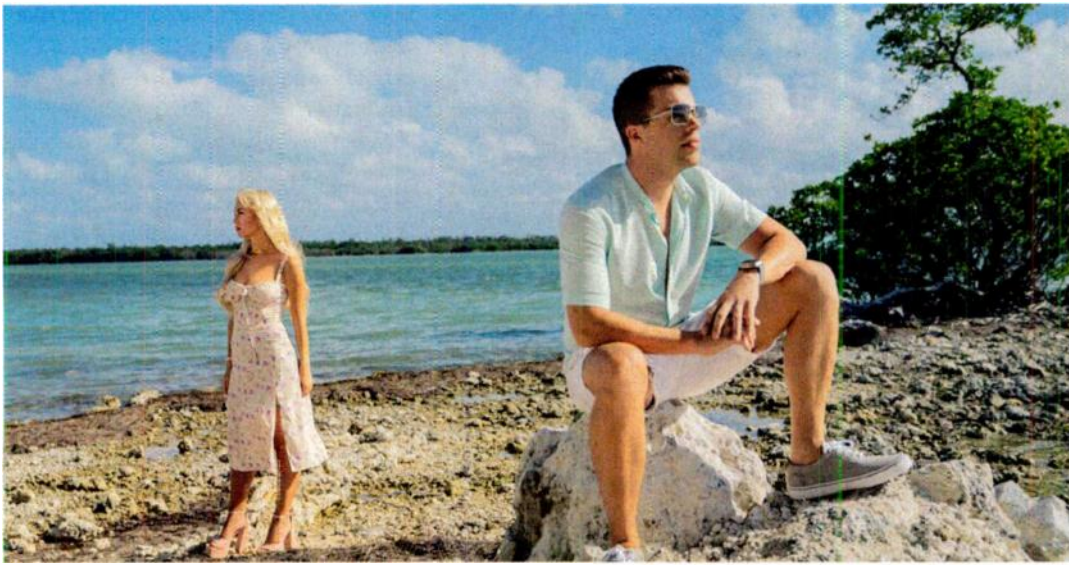
B+C: You mentioned that there were times when you weren't sure what the company's next show would be, but that couldn't have happened much over the last 10 years because you've had a successful hit with *90 Day Fiancé* and its multiple spinoffs. Why did you think the show's concept would work on television?

MS: There was a newsmagazine show in 2011 that was talking about Americans who were going abroad to meet a foreigner for love, and it was following a group of guys going over to Odessa, Ukraine, to meet women. I was fascinated by the magazine piece. We thought we had a great concept and we quickly wrote up a pitch and we brought it

around. We pitched it to all the networks and immediately got rejected everywhere, as you do. But I'm passionate, so we brought it back in and really thought about the concept. One part of the pitch we decided to play up more, because it wasn't the main focus of the pitch, was this K-1 visa. It was the fiancé visa that allowed these guys or girls to go overseas, bring back a foreign love interest, then apply for a K-1 visa or the fiancé 90-day visa. So we brought it all around again, knowing that this was definitely going to sell, and once again everyone across the board said pass.

It is now a year and a half into everyone passing, so we were done with it. But I brought the pitch with me to the 2013 Realscreen conference, and I was sitting in the big ballroom there talking to longtime friend, colleague and partner Howard Lee at TLC. And I wasn't planning on pitching this, but I ended up playing him a sizzle reel. Three minutes into the sizzle reel, Howard took off his headphones and said, 'I want to buy that.' We immediately did six episodes for TLC, and now we do 250 episodes a year [for the franchise].

B+C: Industry observers have pointed to the *90 Day Fiancé* franchise's diverse casts as an



Important part of its success. How important is diversity and inclusion to you in terms of your business philosophy and developing and creating content?

MS: Diversity in our programs is massively important and that's across the board. If you look at it from a pure business perspective, I believe that people want to see diversity in their programming and they want to learn about other people.

I really think *90 Day Fiancé* is the most culturally and ethnically diverse show on television. When that show first aired, I think the conventional wisdom for most networks was that people want to see other people just like them and any time you get someone speaking a different language or from a different culture, people turn off, unless you're watching something like the Discovery Channel. And when it comes to love in particular, the assumption was that people wanted to see other people like them. I think we completely changed that thinking.

Our most diverse shows, like *Before the 90 Days* and *90 Day Fiancé: The Other Way*, the entire show takes place in different cultures. When we did the original show, the episodes were taking place in America, which was really relatable, and then we had this foreigner coming in. Those other shows were a leap of faith for

us — would the audience follow along if it's totally led by someone who's not from our culture, in their world and where the American was the fish out of water? But they proved to be some of our highest-rated shows, and I'm proud of that. We believe in a hidden broccoli formula for our shows, which is that we want people to be educated through watching our shows. I think it's great that people who never really thought of the other countries are now all of a sudden connecting to people outside of America.

B+C: Another ethnically diverse show you produce is *Love After Lockup* for WE tv. With that show, the network pitched you to produce. Why did you feel that show fit the Sharp Entertainment brand?

MS: Yes, our friends at WE tv approached us, so I can't take credit for the original idea. It was a little different when we started doing that, but we came in and we felt like there was an opportunity, like *90 Day Fiancé*, to do a show that we felt was extraordinary. We always talk about combining the relatable with the extraordinary in television,

Above, the *90 Day Fiancé* franchise has grown to include such spinoffs as *90 Days: The Last Resort*. Below, Sharp-produced shows like *Nat Geo's Doomsday Preppers* dive deep into subcultures.

meaning you bring an audience in because it's relatable but they stay because it's extraordinary.

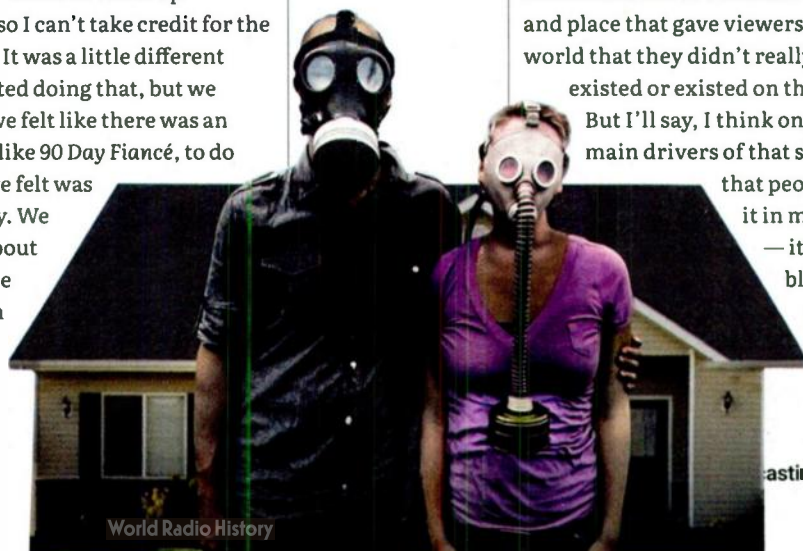
So for example, in *Love After Lockup* and *90 Day Fiancé*, it's relatable because people have been in a relationship and fallen in love before — they understand the baseline. Then the extraordinary thing is, can you imagine if you couldn't actually speak the same language as your fiancé and you had to rely on a Google Translator app? It's the same thing with *Love After Lockup* — people at home were saying, 'I've been in a relationship, but I've never been in a relationship with someone who just got out of prison.'

We also felt like there was an opportunity in that show to highlight the criminal justice system. I think that there's been a scarlet letter on people in prison, but we realized when we started researching that show and talking to people that so many people have a connection to someone who's been in prison. It's not a group of people that should be shunned for the rest of their lives. They deserve a second chance and a life too, so we wanted to tell those stories and we're really proud of what we've done on that show.

B+C: Along with love-themed shows, Sharp Entertainment has had several hits focusing on subcultures, like *Nat Geo's Doomsday Preppers* and *TLC's Extreme Couponing*. Why were they so successful during their runs?

MS: *Doomsday Preppers* was indeed a subculture show. I think it was a time and place that gave viewers access to a world that they didn't really know existed or existed on the periphery.

But I'll say, I think one of the main drivers of that show was that people watched it in multiple ways — it's not just black and white. When we developed



A MATCH MADE IN REALITY TV HEAVEN

TLC THIS PAST SEPTEMBER ushered in the season 10 debut of signature series *90 Day Fiancé* with a splashy launch party in New York. With both current and past cast members in attendance, it was a coronation of sorts for the network and producer Sharp Entertainment's endearing program, one of the most well-known and successful television franchises ever.

With more than 68 billion viewing hours across 150 countries and more than 30 spinoffs — and with such celebrities as Ryan Gosling, Chrissy Teigen, Lady Gaga and Venus Williams taking to social media over the years to express their excitement and fondness for the relationship-themed franchise — *90 Day Fiancé* had more than earned a victory lap heading into its 10th season.

90 Day Fiancé launched in 2014 with the premise of following couples who applied for a U.S.-based K-1 visa that allows Americans to bring their foreign fiancés to the country for 90 days before they get married. If the couples do not get married within that span, the visas expire and the foreign nationals must return home.

Sharp Entertainment president Matt Sharp said he came up with the original idea of the series after watching a news story in 2011 about Americans who were going abroad to meet a foreigner for love.

"I was fascinated by the magazine piece," he said. "We thought we had a great concept, so we quickly wrote up a pitch and we brought it around. We pitched it to all the networks and immediately got rejected everywhere."

The company even tried to sell the show to male-skewing networks with a new name, Bachelor Wars Russia, emphasizing the lives of the male suitors. Sharp said it wasn't until the company centered its focus on the relatively unknown K-1 visa law that the concept of *90 Day Fiancé* was fully realized.

Still, no network would take a chance on the show until Sharp pitched TLC executive Howard Lee at the 2013 Realscreen Summit. "I was surprised that nobody had been intrigued by the concept ... there

was a great ticking clock element to it," said Lee, now the president of Discovery Networks and TLC. "It had a finite ending — either you stay in the USA and get married, or say, 'Sorry, we're not in love,' and they go back home."

Viewers not familiar *90 Day Fiancé* might look at it as just another drama-filled dating show. While the series has had its share of relationship arguments,

separations, annulment threats and divorces, Lee said *90 Day Fiancé* is unique in that the couples are already together and know one another prior to their appearance.

"It starts from the basis of authenticity from the get-go," Lee said. "It's not about eliminations, competitions or about trying to figure out what twists or prizes are offered. It's just a true study of rotating couples and people who are truly coexisting in this world right now."

The mothership series is still going strong. More than 14 million viewers have seen season 10 of *90 Day Fiancé* across linear and streaming runs since its October 8 debut, TLC reported. It was the most-watched cable series on Sunday nights in January 2024 with key female demos, according to the network.

Host Shaun Robinson said *90 Day Fiancé* remains popular because it continually shows the lengths that people will go to in finding someone to love.

"It really opened my eyes to what these couples go through, and that is sweet in itself," Robinson said in a 2023 interview. "However, there is some drama around getting to that point. At the end of the day it conveys the universal ideal of wanting to be loved."

Robinson initially didn't think the show would last as long as it has. "I think if there is a person that said 'I knew this would happen,' I don't think they are necessarily telling the truth," she said. "I don't think anybody could foresee the popularity of the show."

Lee agreed no one could have predicted the success of *90 Day Fiancé*, but he is thrilled with its longevity over 10 seasons.

"If Matt and I could both produce a baby, [*90 Day Fiancé*] would be it," Lee said. — RTU



90 Day Fiancé

Doomsday Preppers, we naively felt like we're going to develop this show and people are going to watch this as a fascination of a world they've never seen before. What we realized when the research came back about that show is that half the audience was watching it that way, and half the audience was watching with a notepad and taking notes because they were kind of preppers themselves. So I think that's one of the reasons why that show went on to be one of Nat Geo's top shows of all time.

Extreme Couponing had that element where you couldn't believe there were people out there who were so crazy about coupons. We first developed a special which brought people into a subculture, but it also had a game-show element. If you remember, the segments ended with the people falling into a cash register to figure out how much money they could actually save. After the first episode aired, the phrase "how to extreme coupon" was one of the top search terms. People were riveted, because the idea you might be able to make money or save thousands of dollars with the paper that's just sitting there was compelling. It was also a female-skewing version of male-skewing transactional shows at that time, like *Pawn Stars* or *American Pickers*.

B+C: Is there a show currently on air that you would have loved to have developed for yourself?

MS: Without a doubt. My kids always say, 'Dad, don't you wish you did [Netflix's] *Love Is Blind*?' I'm like, 'Yes, dammit.' [Laughs.]

B+C: You mentioned earlier that 2023 was one of your best years. However, the television industry as a whole struggled as it continued to evolve. How do you see the future of the television industry shaping up, and why do you remain bullish about reality TV?

MS: I think right now, over the last five years, we've gone through real disrup-

tion in television with AVOD [ad-supported video-on-demand] and [subscription] SVOD. I think there are tons of eyeballs, but millions and millions of those eyeballs are being diverted. My kids are watching everything on their phones and I'm thinking, what does that mean for me? There's incredible disruption, but I will say that I am very bullish about content — it's not going anywhere. I think the question for guys like me is what is going to be the new model, because we obviously have seen everyone in linear television move towards streaming, and then all of a sudden the streaming business has gotten hard.

So I think it's about figuring out the model coming up. But at the end of the day, I think that the audience wants high-quality [content] and they'll pay for that high quality. I'm not blind to the fact that the entry barriers for making nonfiction content are low. When I started in this business, the camera that we used, I think, was \$200,000 and we had an edit machine. That was the only way you could make a series. Now, every single person walking in the street has a better camera and a better editing system on their phone than we had. So while the barriers to create content are down, I do think people are going to want quality storytelling and quality content. We as creatives are going to have to keep finding those fresh new worlds and give the audience access to those.

B+C: There are more platforms for distributing content than ever before. Given the industry's dynamics, is it more difficult to get your content in front of millions of viewers now than it was when you started 20 years ago?

MS: I think it's different because buyers are different. A cable buyer is different than a streaming buyer. They're different businesses.



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— Matt Sharp, founder and CEO, Sharp Entertainment

Extreme Couponing on TLC added game show elements and a female skew to the popular transactional reality genre.

When your business depends on wrapping ads around fresh content, that's one thing. Then, when you're a subscription-based business, that's entirely something else. So as a content creator, when I'm selling shows that's certainly part of the consideration. I have some shows that I think are long platform shows — we want lots of hours to tell these stories because we believe we can sustain an audience. For a streamer, I think they're less interested in that and more interested in, we have a show and we have eight episodes.

Marketing a show on a streamer is hard because it can get lost. There are only so many shows they can push a month, so it's hard to find an audience. Right now, 90% of our business is still in linear, so I'm still a big fan of linear and I still think [the platform] has the ability without marketing to find an audience — we've had very few shows that have ever gotten marketing. My belief is it's sticky, and if the shows are in the right place and in front of the right viewers you can get an audience.

B+C: What does 2024 look like for Sharp Entertainment in terms of distribution of content?

MS: We're continuing to grow. I think we have a lot of exciting projects coming out this year. We're continuing to grow and sustain our existing franchises, and we look at how we can keep that as fresh as we possibly can by looking at other areas where we can take that show, and how we can continue to surprise the audience with the stories we're telling.

We've got another great franchise on MTV now that's going to a third season called *Help! I'm in a Secret Relationship*, which is doing great and we're looking to grow that in terms of franchising. Our belief is that if I'm a network and I've got a successful show that already has an audience, and I can create another show that's 10 degrees to the left or right of that original show, it's got a much greater chance of success than taking something that's totally fresh and original and putting it on in the hopes of getting an audience. So I think that's the belief behind franchising, and we continue doing that and taking a show that's successful and figuring out how to break this in a different way.

We were fortunate to have had lots of hits throughout the years, but it's really fun when you develop something that people haven't seen before. We've got a couple of projects we're really excited about that we're working on now but that's always the goal, to come up with the next big hit. ●





GAME ON, SAYS LUIS SILBERWASSER, TNT SPORTS CHIEF

Veteran programmer discusses how to broaden the base for Warner Bros. Discovery's growing portfolio of events



By R. Thomas Umstead
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When Warner Bros. Discovery-owned TNT Sports last November announced it had reached a seven-year media rights deal with NASCAR beginning in 2025, the company was preparing to telecast the final rounds of the NBA's inaugural In-Season Tournament while producing its weekly Wednesday-night NHL doubleheaders — not long after the division produced 14 Major League Baseball postseason games.

Many TV sports executives would find managing the above scenario daunting at best. For Luis Silberwasser, chairman and CEO of TNT Sports, it's par for the course.

Silberwasser, the former Univision Television Networks Group and Telemundo

president who took over TNT Sports — the overall Warner Bros. Discovery Sports business, including the U.S. piece known as Turner Sports under prior ownership — in 2022, oversees one of the deepest and most diverse portfolios of live premium sports content rights in television. The TNT Sports lineup includes games from three of the four major U.S. sports leagues, as well as the U.S. women's and men's national soccer teams and the NCAA men's March Madness college basketball tournament, in a partnership with CBS Sports.

Add five summer NASCAR races to the mix next year, and Silberwasser, who grew up in Colombia as an avid soccer player, has quickly established himself as one of the busiest executives in sports TV.

"Luis

has seamlessly stepped into his new role at WBD Sports and brought to bear his many years of experience in media and business," NBA commissioner Adam Silver said. "Additionally, he has embraced our longstanding partnership with enthusiasm and a forward-thinking vision for the future."

Under Silberwasser's watch, the TNT Sports portfolio — which distributes most of its live sports content on WBD-owned linear cable networks TNT, TBS and truTV — increased viewership across its premium sports properties in 2023, amid what the programmer called an otherwise challenging television marketplace:

- TNT posted its most-watched NBA regular-season and postseason coverage in five years;
- Live NHL on TNT telecasts on Sundays delivered a 52% increase in average audience in 2022-23, compared to the prior season, and TNT Sports delivered the most-watched Stanley Cup playoffs coverage ever on cable;
- TBS's coverage of baseball's National League Division Series and National League Championship Series averaged 4.6 million viewers, up 8% over its 2022 coverage of the American League playoffs.

- Men's March Madness games on TBS, TNT and truTV were up by double digits in 2023 compared to the year prior, and TNT Sports and CBS sold out advertising opportunities for the tournament for the 12th straight year, according to WBD Sports.

"Since joining WBD, Luis has moved quickly and decisively to transform and grow our world-class sports business for the future," Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav said. "Simply put: He is a true All-Star."

Silberwasser also ushered TNT Sports into the streaming arena in October with the launch of the Bleacher Report Sports Add-On tier on Max. The free service, which will convert to a subscription-based offering later this year, offers simulcasts of TNT, truTV and TBS live sports events, and will offer exclusive content from NASCAR next summer.

"Luis and his world-class team at TNT Sports have a proven track

TNT Sports's co-production with CBS of the NCAA men's basketball tournament — better known as March Madness — has become a key piece of its programming lineup.



record of creating engaging content for each of their sports properties,” NASCAR president Steve Phelps said. “Joining TNT’s portfolio of premium sports content is a huge win for NASCAR fans, and under Luis’s leadership, we know NASCAR broadcasts across TNT on linear television and the B/R Sports Add-On on Max will offer fans innovative and interactive viewing experiences.”

Even with all of its acquired sports portfolio, Silberwasser remains bullish on TNT Sports’s homegrown sports properties, including The Match exhibition golf events. Since The Match launched in 2018, it has drawn high-profile participants from the world of sports celebrity, including Tiger Woods, Charles Barkley, Aaron Rodgers, Travis Kelce, Rory McIlroy, Peyton Manning, Tom Brady and Patrick Mahomes. The ninth iteration of the series, which teed off February 26, will feature the first female participants in LPGA players Lexi Thompson and Rose Zhang.

In 2024, Silberwasser will lead TNT Sports through the NCAA Men’s Final Four and Championship Game, to air on TBS, and the U.S. men’s and women’s national soccer team friendlies leading into the Paris Summer Olympics. (The 2026 FIFA World Cup TV rights in the U.S. are held by Fox and Telemundo.) Also on the horizon are negotiations to retain its NBA TV rights, which expire after the 2024-25 season.

Zaslav believes Silberwasser is more than up to the task. “Luis is a fantastic leader and a uniquely thoughtful executive whose drive, passion and ability to build and lead strong teams with heart I have long admired,” he said.

Silberwasser, who is the B+C Multichannel News Sports Executive of the Year for 2024, discussed the TNT Sports strategy of offering premium sports programming to both hardcore and casual fans across multiple platforms. (Silberwasser was interviewed before WBD Sports, ESPN and Fox announced their joint sports app. For more on that development, see Lead-in, page 4.) He also looked at the future of the TV sports business in a lengthy interview, presented with edits for clarity and space.

B+C: TNT Sports is coming off a year where all of its major sports franchises — Major League Baseball, the NBA, the NHL and men’s NCAA March Madness — posted year-to-year ratings gains.



The strength of this group and division is that we are not playing the volume business. We don’t have a 24-hour sports channel. We don’t have to have 1,000 hours of sports. We really focus on a few very big things.”

— Luis Silberwasser,
chairman and CEO, TNT Sports



TNT Sports reporter Matt Winer interviews members of the Arizona Diamondbacks after they clinched the National League pennant with an NLCS win over the Philadelphia Phillies.

How were you able to accomplish that in an otherwise turbulent television landscape?

Luis Silberwasser: In many ways, it's our No. 1 priority. The strength of this group and division is that we are not playing the volume business. We don't have a 24-hour sports channel. We don't have to have 1,000 hours of sports. We really focus on a few very big things, including the sports you mentioned in baseball, basketball and hockey, as well as U.S. soccer. In many ways, it allows us the bandwidth to really focus on making those productions the best they can be.

So when we talk about what the goals are for the division, No. 1 is that we want to serve the fan. By fan, I mean not only the real fan that knows everything about sports but also the casual fan. We believe that we can do a better job than anybody else with the casual fan to bring more diverse and younger people into the fold. So our production, marketing and digital teams are all focused on making our events bigger. That's how, in a challenging linear environment, we were able to increase ratings. We were also able to increase our partnership with the leagues to make these events better and more exciting. While there's no magic bullet, it's really a philosophy of taking care of these events and doing the best job of storytelling.

B+C: You came from an entertainment background, so did you have any perceived expectations about how a sports-based organization should run, and did your first year at TNT Sports meet or exceed those expectations?

LS: It has more than met my expectations. Even though my background wasn't 100% exclusive to sports, as someone who had experienced managing networks, sports was a big part of my portfolio in other companies, so I knew the value of sports. In an environment like today which is more challenging, the value of live programming and live sports is immense. So coming in, my philosophy was to let them go and create and I'll support them.

At the end of the day, probably what I added to the table is the idea of empowering the team to move faster. A lot of the changes that we did as a division were to become more agile and lean and trust the people we have to make the right decisions and support innovation. We've done a lot of things over the

last year that were different for the company, whether it was to make Bleacher Report and the linear TV group work more together, or to try some different marketing approaches to our content. I think part of our MO for the last year was to really embrace what we do and just have fun.

B+C: In 2023 you added a seven-year NASCAR racing package to the TNT Sports portfolio, and before that the company picked up U.S. National Soccer Team rights. While not as broad as the NBA or Major League Baseball, how do those properties play within the TNT Sports brand?

LS: Our strategy is to offer premium-tier sports. With U.S. soccer, even though the volume of matches compared to maybe some of the other leagues is not there, from a premium standpoint, having the U.S. men's and women's national team's games is tier one, and it captures the imagination of the people in the United States as they get behind those teams.

I think it's the same thing with NASCAR.

The audiences behind NASCAR are very passionate and very large. We used to have NASCAR and now it is a huge sport. We don't have the volume of races that some of the other distributors have, but we wanted to become part of the NASCAR ecosystem and add our value from the production side, how we market the sport and the way we talk to our viewers.

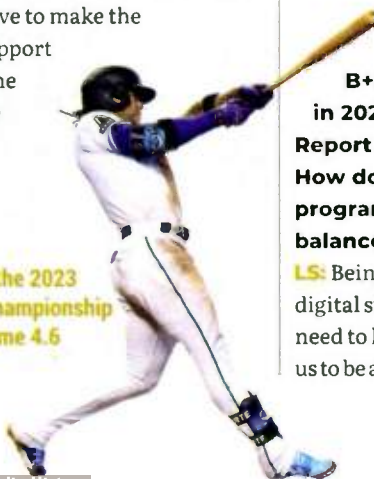
Also, NASCAR was a little different because it provided us with sports during a time of year in the summer that was light for us besides baseball. With the NASCAR deal, we were able also to get programming for TNT, which is where the five big races are going to be, but also for truTV, where we're going to have a high volume of practices and qualifying races. We're going to have something exclusive for Max, which we'll let the market know later.

B+C: Another big move for TNT Sports in 2023 was the launch of the Bleacher Report Sports add-on service on Max. How does the introduction of live sports programming to the streaming platform balance with linear distribution?

LS: Being able to create a viable and significant digital strategy for us was a major objective. We need to have a really strong digital strategy for us to be able to reach consumers, but also for the



TBS's coverage of the 2023 National League Championship series averaged some 4.6 million viewers.





TNT Sports is revving up to cover NASCAR in 2025, having secured the rights to five major races to air on TNT, plus additional coverage on truTV.

partnership with the leagues. So the internal debate was, 'OK, how do you do it?' Max is a fantastic, entertainment-focused platform that has incredible penetration, about 50 million subscribers or more in the United States. So do we add sports in the same way that other people are doing it, where you basically splinter your rights and have some content on streaming and then some other content on linear, which in many ways is frustrating for the viewer because they don't know which platform my favorite team is on?

We decided to be more consumer-friendly and focused on providing it on both platforms. We adopted what we call a simulcast strategy — we didn't want people to make a choice based on whether you had the game or not. It was more of a choice of a platform. If you were comfortable in a more portable environment with Max and being able to watch it on your phone or on your iPad or on connected devices, that's the right platform for you. But you get the same level of sports as somebody who is watching TNT or TBS or truTV as well.

So we launched the Bleacher Report Sports add-on in October of last year, which is basically a section inside Max that has all the sports that we have.

B+C: You mentioned that TNT Sports might develop an exclusive package of NASCAR content for Max. Could we eventually see more exclusive content for the streaming service outside of what's airing on the linear channels?

LS: It's TBD. I think we're all learning in this new environment and we want to follow the audience. It's very important for us that we don't stay behind. We're really happy with our strategy right now because we don't want to compromise a level of reach on one platform just to grow another platform, so that's the right strategy for the rights that we have. In the future, we may have different rights or something that is more niche-oriented, which may become more exclusive to one platform because we know there may be a passionate audience that will follow that where reach may not be as important.

So again, it's TBD ... I think it's too early to say.

B+C: Let's expand this

topic to the broader television universe. Clearly sports continues to be a main viewership driver for linear television, but now we're seeing a large migration of live sports to streaming services. Do you see this trend continuing and if so how much does it hurt the linear television business?

LS: I think streaming will continue to be a very big part of the landscape, and I think more and more people will feel even more comfortable watching it on the digital platform. There's no doubt that streaming television and sports included will become a big part of it, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you will have a reduction. I think you'll have an environment where cable and the traditional bundle continue to be available, and at the same time, sports through other bundles or on different platforms will continue to be available. That's why it's so important that we keep committed to a healthy, traditional linear environment, but at the same time have our sports very present and available in a streaming environment where people can access the same amount of sports.

B+C: The TNT Sports NBA deal expires after the 2024-25 season. There's been a lot of noise about other distributors bidding for the league's television rights. How important is the NBA to TNT Sports and how aggressive will the company be in trying to secure those rights?

LS: The NBA is a premier, tier-one set of rights. It is an integral part of TNT. We have a more than 30-year history with the NBA. We love the NBA and we love what we do with them. We partner with them in producing the NBA TV channel and we partner with them on NBA.com and NBA League Pass. The NBA is a fantastic partner for us, so we're very committed to being aggressive and retaining those rights.

We recognize that there are other people who are interested in those rights — who wouldn't be? — but we feel good about our proposition, what our assets are and what we can do with the NBA. All the decisions that we made last year to strengthen our production capabilities, to strengthen our



**TNT Sports reporter
Lauren Shehadi**



A lot of the things that we're focused on [with sports betting] is creating unique content in partnership with the betting companies to be able to give something to the consumer that is looking for something really, really targeted to his or her betting experience.

— Luis Silberwasser, chairman and CEO, TNT Sports

talent capabilities, to hire new talent, to retain talent, were made with the objective to make ourselves invaluable for a league, and in this case, the NBA is the one that's up for renewal.

But I'll say that for every league that we are partnered with, we want to be a preferred broadcaster. We may not have other things that other partners may have, but we have other things that others don't have. And I think we've been very deliberate about what we do with Bleacher Report, what we do with [social media network] House of Highlights, what we do with our decisions in terms of personnel and talent and our investment in production, as well as our move to Max. When you look at all those things, it is in many ways strengthening ourselves to continue to be a preferred partner to the NBA.

B+C: One of the things that has come out of your long relationship with the NBA is *Inside the NBA*, which has really transcended basketball and become more of a cultural phenomenon. How does content like *Inside the NBA* help TNT Sports position itself with its league partners?

LS: It's interesting. When I go back to when I was about to enter Warner Bros. Discovery and take this job, I'd watched basketball before, but I wasn't an expert. I'm not saying that I'm an expert now, but I know more now than let's say a year ago. [Laughs.] You don't realize the impact that a show like *Inside the NBA* can have in the marketplace. People would tell me, 'Whatever you do, don't mess that up.' [Laughs.] Then once I was inside and started working with the team and started getting the feel for how special that franchise is and how magical the production and the talent behind the franchise is with EJ [Ernie Johnson], Shaq [Shaquille O'Neal], Kenny

[Smith] and Chuck [Charles Barkley]. We've had a lot of internal conversations about what the show is and it's not just one thing — it's a multitude of factors that create that show.

You can see us now taking that show's DNA and trying to apply it to other things we do, like the new [NHL on TNT pregame] show once we got the NHL franchise. I think that show today is a fantastic show and it's on its way to becoming as important for the NHL as *Inside the NBA* is for the NBA. I also think that the DNA of talking to the casual fan as well as the super-informed sports fan is in every show we try to do. Sometimes we get it, sometimes we

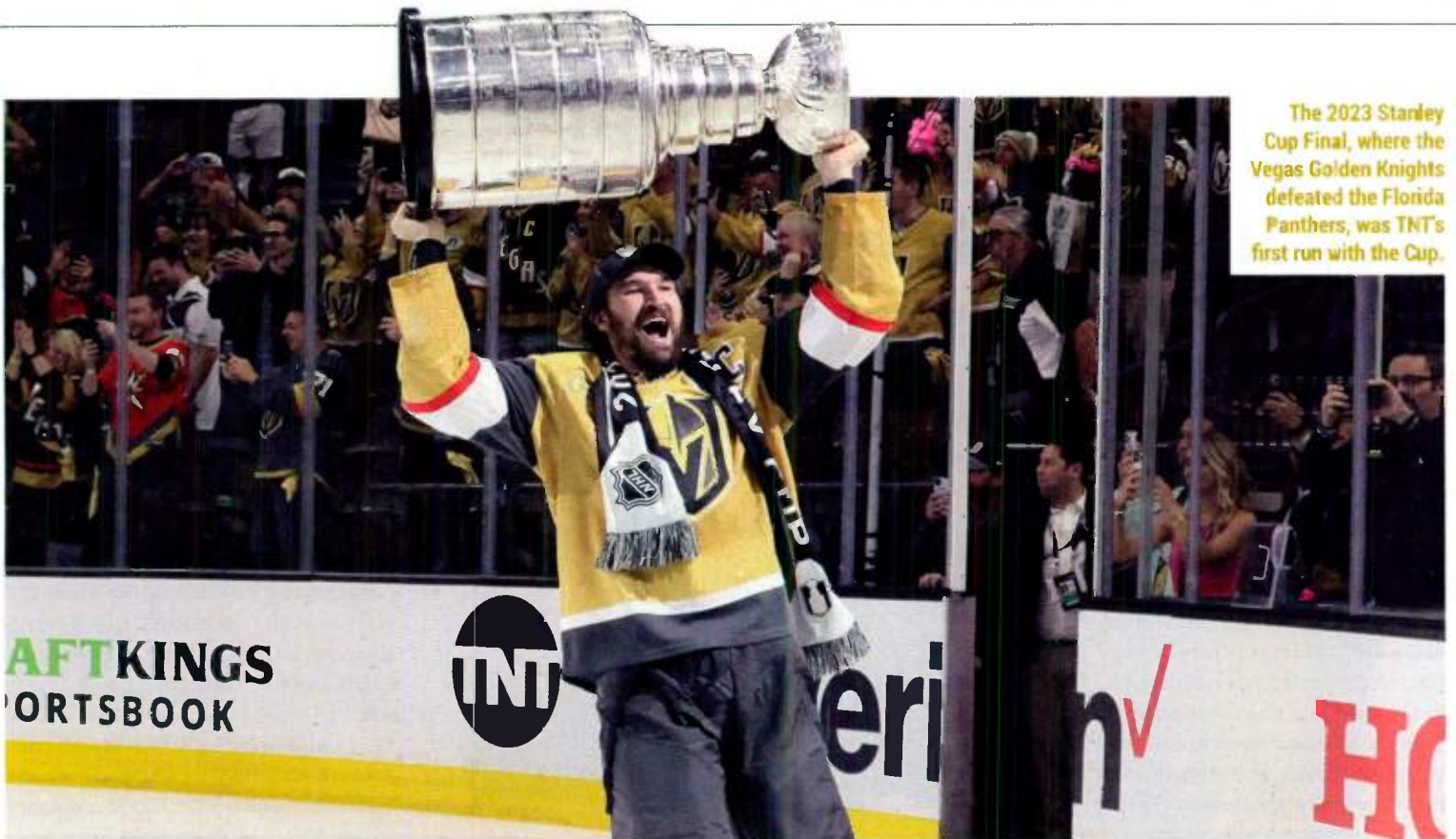
don't, but I think more times than not, we are distinctive in the marketplace because people say, 'Hey, the way you do it, it's different.'

B+C: TNT Sports also created The Match charity golf tournament exclusively for TNT. Will you continue to look to create exclusive sports events in the future?

LS: Yes, it's one of our objectives. We like the fact that The Match is our own event. We own it, we're able to customize it and we're able to try different things. It allows us to reach a different audience. We want to develop more of our own [intellectual property] because I think it's important — not to replace what we have, but to add to the equation and to make sure that we're tapping into sports we don't have now or to bet on things for the future. So we really love The Match and we love it for what it does, but also for the fact that it's our own thing.

B+C: This year TNT Sports has the March Madness Final Four and Championship game. How has your partnership with CBS for the tournament benefited both brands and built a sports franchise that dominates the sports calendar for a month in March and early April?





The 2023 Stanley Cup Final, where the Vegas Golden Knights defeated the Florida Panthers, was TNT's first run with the Cup.

LS: I've been a fan of March Madness for a while, but when you are inside the world of sports, you see the importance of March Madness on a national scale and how the whole country stops for three weeks to see who makes it to the Final Four. Every game is a do-or-die situation. It is such a special tournament that our team is extremely proud of and looks forward to it every year.

I don't want to be repetitive, but we do it the way we do it. We try to add our expertise, we try to make it special, we try to talk to the casual fan — all the things that I've said before. The one thing that makes it also very special is our partnership with CBS, which, at the end of the day, putting the business terms aside, we're both focused on the fan. We're all focused on that person enjoying the tournament from the MML [March Madness Live] app or through the linear channels, whether it's CBS, truTV, TBS or TNT. We have that commitment to that fan, and we work seamlessly with CBS to make sure that the tournament is bigger and better every year.

B+C: The March Madness tournament is also a huge draw for sports betting. What is TNT Sports's philosophy and strategy towards sports betting content?

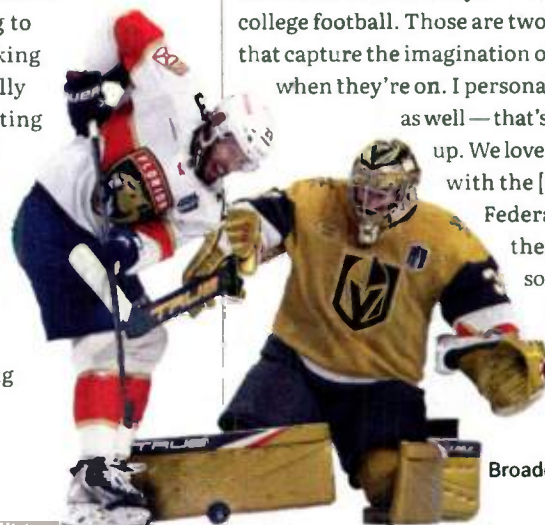
LS: We are involved in many ways because we have a very strong partnership with FanDuel and with DraftKings. But I think the idea of becoming what they call a sports book is not something that we're that keen on doing, at least not at this point in time. We do think that betting is an integral part of sports and the sports ecosystem. Bleacher Report, for example, has a very big betting vertical where we do a lot of things revolving around sports betting, so we embrace it.

A lot of the things that we're focused on is creating unique content in partnership with the betting companies to be able to give something to the consumer that is looking for something really, really targeted to his or her betting experience. If you watch Inside the NBA, Charles actively participates and gives out picks during the show, so we see it as part of the content that we need to provide. We did something interesting for the [NBA] in-season

tournament where we had an alternate cast really focused on betting. So, you could watch the game on TNT and you could go to truTV and see the same game, but with commentators who were really looking at the game through the eyes of somebody who's betting. We want to do more of those kinds of things, because it's part of what today's sports-watching experience is all about.

B+C: Is there a sport that you would love to have in the TNT Sports portfolio?

LS: It's hard not to say that you would love to have the NFL and that you would love to have college football. Those are two big, big sports that capture the imagination of the viewer when they're on. I personally love soccer as well — that's where I grew up. We love our partnership with the [U.S. Soccer] Federation, but there may be some soccer tournaments out there that we at some point take a look at. ●



FAST Channels Quickly Find Favor With African-American Viewers

Familiar content, lean-back experience proving popular with Black adults



By R. Thomas Umstead
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Black viewers have always been at the forefront of new media consumption, and the emerging free ad-supported streaming television (FAST) environment is no exception.

As more Black viewers tune into FAST channels, though, industry observers are concerned the platform won't keep up with an increasing demand for content that reflects the images and stories of that audience segment across all platforms. That's because big media companies are gobbling up bandwidth by launching multiple channels based on their owned-and-operated networks and popular shows. A perception holds that independently-owned multicultural programmers might get stuck on the outside looking in.

Much as Black viewers have traditionally consumed more content on linear and streaming platforms than the total viewing audience — Black viewers watched TV an averaged of 44.32 hours a week compared to 32.18 hours for the general population during Q2 2023, according to Nielsen — but they're also more likely to watch content from FAST services than viewers overall. Some 52% of Black viewers tune into a FAST service every month, compared to 45% of total market users, according to the 2023 Horowitz Research study "FOCUS Black: State of Media, Entertainment & Tech: Viewing Behaviors."

Only subscription video-on-demand services like Netflix and Hulu topped



FAST usage among Black consumers, Horowitz reported.

"Black viewers are among the most valuable for media brands because historically they are much more likely to spend more time with media and entertainment," Horowitz Research

Familiar library shows like 1990s sitcom *Malcolm & Eddie* are popular FAST offerings among Black viewers.

executive VP of insights and strategy Adrianna Waterston said. "We're seeing a continued pattern of how valuable Black consumers are to this space. That continues to be true even in this new ecosystem that now includes FAST."

The survey of 643 Black TV viewers 18 years and older, conducted last February, also reports that older and younger Black adults use FAST platforms almost equally. Fifty-one percent of Black adults 18-34 viewed a FAST channel at least once a month, compared to 59% of adults 25-54 and 48% of adults older than 50. Comparatively, 88% of Black adults 18-34 used a streaming service, compared to only 65% of adults over 50.

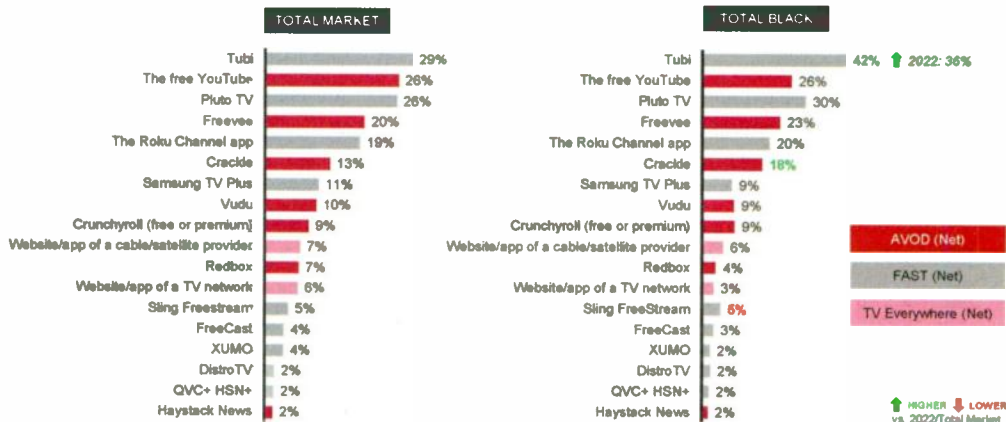
The uniqueness of FAST channels, which offer a myriad of programming choices, similar to SVOD, but provide the lean-back viewing experience of traditional cable or broadcast TV, is

DEVICES & SERVICES

Similar to 2022, Tubi and Pluto TV continue to be the leading free streaming services among Black TV content viewers.

FREE/OTHER STREAMING SERVICES USED TO WATCH TV CONTENT (PAST MONTH)

Among TV Content Viewers 18+



Malcolm & Eddie: CBS via Getty Images; Horowitz Research

quickly capturing the attention of African Americans.

“Television has always been about being live and ad-supported, but when streaming came it changed behaviors,” Waterston said. “But at the end of the day, we forget that television isn’t supposed to be work. It’s supposed to be entertainment, and people are getting very frustrated with the cost of streaming services.”

With streamers such as Netflix continuing to raise monthly subscription fees, the relatively inexpensive cost of accessing FAST content — free, aside from the price of a smart TV and a high-speed internet connection — makes such services appealing to Black viewers, observers said.

“You can get many FAST channels and [streaming content] apps without having to have a cable subscription,” Douglas Holloway, a cable-industry veteran and longtime senior executive at NBCUniversal, said. “In this recessionary time, you can get a relatively inexpensive smart TV with, in most cases, hundreds of FAST channels already embedded in the operating system of those sets.”

Paramount senior VP, global streaming research and insights Christian Kurz also said Pluto TV’s lean-back viewing experience — synonymous with traditional linear TV — appeals to Black audiences. “What we’re seeing is that for the Black audience, the comfort and ease of watching television is more important than for everyone else,” he said. “You don’t need to register, you don’t need to pick any show and it’s very easy to navigate.”

Pluto TV and Tubi are the two FAST services Black viewers watch most, with use within the demographic overindexing against the general market, according to Horowitz’s survey. The two services succeed by effectively curating content targeted to Black audiences, Waterston said.

Kurz pointed to the programming offered by Paramount-owned Pluto TV, with channels featuring familiar and entertaining

At right, TV One made a successful foray into the FAST space with its Crime & Justice channel. Below, Pluto TV is finding success with popular shows from the past like *Moesha*, starring Brandy.



content such as classic Black-focused movies and TV shows and branded channels from such cable networks as BET, Bounce and Aspire TV.

“We believe that our overall content mix is absolutely leaning into that familiar nature and into that easy viewing and positive content that Black audiences are looking for and craving,” Kurz said. “We are trying to engage with audiences of all forms, shapes and sizes, and this audience is certainly one that we’ve been working on.”

Even as FAST services grow in popularity among Black audiences, there’s still a paucity of services targeted specifically to the demographic. FAST channels targeted to Black audiences make up just 2% of all such channels in the U.S. at a time when Blacks represent 14% of the U.S. population, according to Ebony TV, a FAST channel venture between Ebony Media Group and Lionsgate that launched this past October and is available on Fox Corp.-owned Tubi.

Other independent Black-targeted entertainment brands, such as Revolt TV and TV One, are also featured on Tubi’s live FAST TV lineup. TV One’s move into the FAST space in 2023 with the launch of its Crime & Justice channel reaches the target audience where they are.

“We have some franchises that are extremely popular with the TV One audience, and luckily, we’re now at a point where we can make that available to people who are outside the pay ecosystem without cannibalizing the [linear] business,” Rori Peters, senior VP of content distribution & marketing at TV One & Cleo TV, said.

Shelf-Space Worries

As media companies turn to FAST channels to generate additional streaming revenue from their existing linear networks and shows, Horowitz’s Waterston is concerned that bandwidth issues will eventually shut independent, multicultural content out of the platform.

“I think the strategy that media brands are using to try to use FAST to drive engagement with their premium services is a smart one because then at least you’re keeping the viewers in your ecosystem,” Waterston said. “What remains to be seen is whether the FAST space will have room for independent, new emerging media companies trying to make a name for themselves and build an audience, or whether they’re going to get edged out by the big media conglomerates that have discovered this space.”

Another looming issue in the development of diverse FAST channels is access to bandwidth. Former NBCU executive Holloway runs a pair of ad-supported streamers in UKW Media and Urbn-TV.

“Ultimately it comes down to bandwidth allocation and the cost of developing a FAST channel, which is fairly expensive,” Holloway said.

While Pluto’s Kurz acknowledges that there is an “upper limit” of live, linear content that the distributor is keeping an eye on, it is still being aggressive in launching content that will bring in a broad cross-section of viewers.

“We’re always on the lookout for the right opportunities to broaden the appeal of the overall service,” he said. “It’s not just all content, but it’s about content that we also think is going to work for our viewers.” ●



Former ABC News Chief James Goldston Launches The CW Series 'Crime Nation'

Anthology show will offer two-hour documentaries on compelling crimes



By Michael Malone
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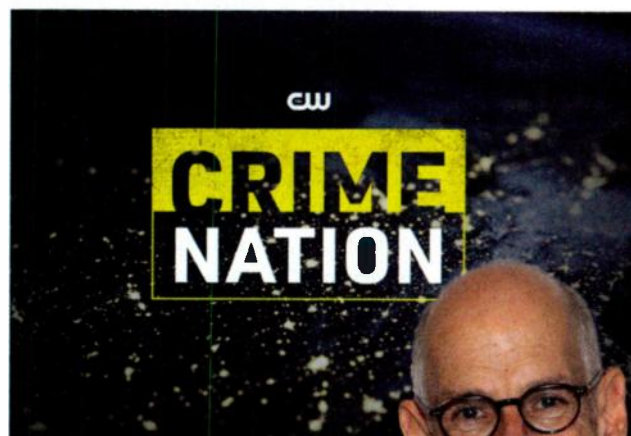
James Goldston, former ABC News president, is behind *Crime Nation*, a true-crime anthology series that debuted on The CW February 20. The network ordered 10 episodes.

Goldston was the president of ABC News from 2014 to 2021. From the U.K., his career began at BBC News. He joined ABC News in 2004 as a senior producer of primetime specials and investigative reports and was soon promoted to executive producer of *Nightline*, a position he held until 2011. He was also senior executive producer at *Good Morning America* and senior VP for content and development at ABC News before becoming president.

Goldston stepped down in early 2021. In 2022, he and a production team edited footage from the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, which became evidence in the House committee's public hearings.

Now president of Candle True Stories, part of Candle Media, Goldston is doing what he calls his "first love," which is storytelling. Each episode of *Crime Nation* features one story, including the Gilgo Beach murders and the killing of Gabby Petito.

Goldston spoke to B+C Multichannel News about whether he misses running a network news organization, what makes the U.S. a unique crime nation,



Former ABC News president James Goldston says *Crime Nation* is a return to his "first love" of storytelling.

and which case has stuck with him the most. An edited transcript follows.

B+C: What makes a crime story right for the show?

JG: We look for those cases where you think you might know a story, but there are new layers and new information coming out that enables you to reassess what it is that you know about them. We're always trying to shine a new light on cases, bring new

information to the fore, to see what happens when that bright light of the media goes away and what happens with these cases afterwards.

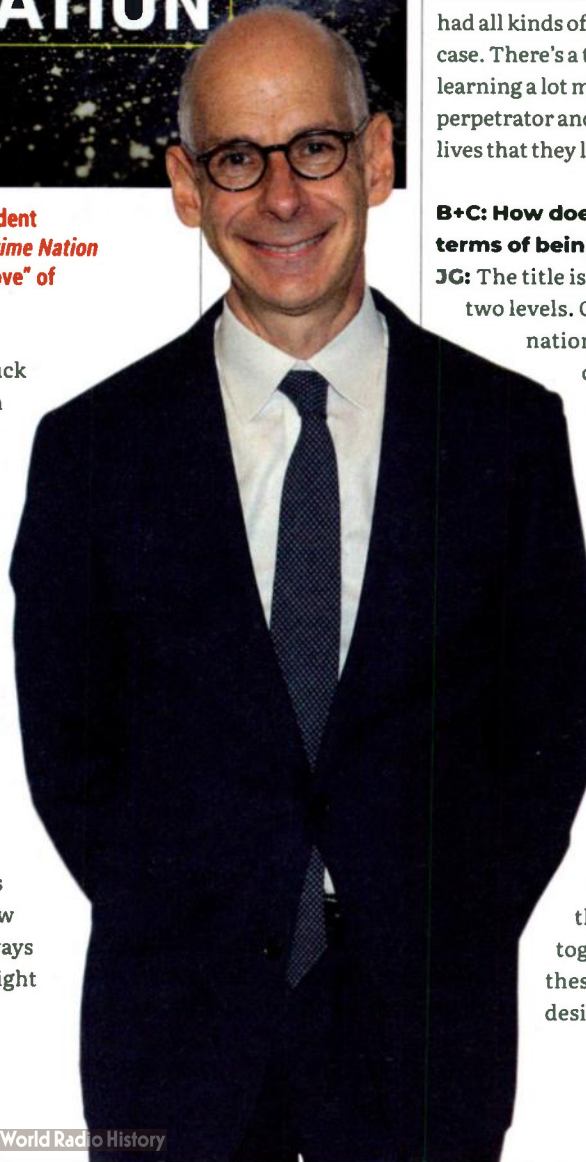
Each one of these is essentially done as its own two-hour-long documentary. So we need those stories that will really sustain for those two hours, where we can continually be bringing new information to the viewer to keep them intrigued and keep them learning.

B+C: Is there one crime that you just keep coming back to in your head?

JG: One of the first ones we're doing, and this one's particularly interesting because we're learning new things about it all the time, is the Gilgo Beach case [which involved serial killings, mainly of sex workers, in Long Island, New York]. It was a cold case for so long, and people had all kinds of perceptions about that case. There's a trial upcoming and we're learning a lot more about the alleged perpetrator and also the victims and the lives that they led.

B+C: How does America stand out in terms of being a crime nation?

JG: The title is designed to be read on two levels. Obviously, we are a nation that is consumed by crime and the coverage of crime. But part of the reason for calling it *Crime Nation* is to reflect that culture and that national obsession with becoming involved in the process of solving crime as well, and the way that plays out over TikTok, Facebook, Reddit and every possible social media [platform] out there. There are communities all over the country coming together, fascinated by these crimes, with a genuine desire to see justice.



B+C: Do you find it hard to be immersed in crime so much?

JG: For sure. Some of these stories are very dark and very difficult. There are definitely times when one needs a good walk in the fresh air to cleanse one's soul.

B+C: Do you miss running a network news organization?

JG: I don't. I feel extremely fortunate to have run ABC News for almost eight years and to have worked at ABC News for almost 20 years.

Storytelling is my first love and I'm now the president of Candle True Stories. We're part of Candle Media, the Kevin Mayer-Tom Stagg group that houses Hello Sunshine and Moonbug and a great number of media entities. I feel like I've gone back to my love of storytelling. I'm getting to do it in a slightly different form, which is actually very exciting. Last year I again did that in a slightly different form with the January 6th hearings, another way of bringing that knowledge of storytelling into a different form.

I'm fascinated by the art of storytelling and telling stories for different audiences and helping hopefully bring some understanding, and entertaining them at the same time.

B+C: Any influences on *Crime Nation*, whether it's another crime show, a podcast, a film, a book?

JG: For many years I oversaw 20/20 and all of our crime content at ABC News. But the podcast revolution has really led into how true crime is covered, from *Serial* onwards, and particularly in the [Alex] Murdaugh [murder] case, which we cover in one of the episodes. And through the really excellent storytelling that's been applied to some of these cases through the streaming revolution — we've tried to learn from all of those sources.

There's an incredible amount of great, innovative storytelling happening. We try to draw from all of those innovations. ●

LATEST 'GOOD WIFE' SPINOFF SET TO PREMIERE ON CBS

Elsbeth, a spinoff in *The Good Wife* universe, premieres February 29 on CBS. The title character, portrayed by Carrie Preston, is an attorney who relocates from Chicago to New York for an investigative role involving the NYPD. She's there on a consent decree, essentially policing the police.

With her unique powers of observation, *Elsbeth* ends up helping the detectives, who are initially put off by her unconventional personality, solve crimes.

Showrunner Jonathan Tolins said *Elsbeth* Tascioni, who had a limited role in both *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*, "brings a level of warmth and intelligence, and a sense of humor, and an unpredictability."

Tolins executive produces the series with Robert and Michelle King and Liz Glotzer. Wendell Pierce plays NYPD Capt. C.W. Wagner and Carra Paterson portrays Kaya Blanke, a uniformed police officer who accompanies *Elsbeth* on her investigative excursions around New York.

Tolins described the relationship between *Elsbeth* and Wagner as akin to Mary Richards and Lou Grant.

Elsbeth's offbeat nature made her a logical choice to carry the show, Tolins said. "Robert and Michelle managed to create this pure, original character that is the perfect match for an actress you just love to watch and who is incredibly inventive," he said. "[*Elsbeth*] brings such a spirit of joy and curiosity and intelligence that she became a fan favorite, even though she was originally only

featured in a few episodes of *The Good Wife*."

Tolins previously worked on the King drama *BrainDead*, then worked on *The Good Fight*.

He's also a playwright whose work includes *Buyer and Cellar*, about a struggling actor who lands a job sorting out the memorabilia in Barbra Streisand's basement in Malibu.

Tolins said his theater background influences his television work. "I like to write good scenes for actors, with subtext and rhythm and humor," Tolins said.

Viewers don't have to be familiar with *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight* to enjoy *Elsbeth*. "It's a new setting and a new role for the main character, and "a new chapter in this character's life," Tolins said.

Besides *Lou Grant*, Tolins lists *Columbo* as an influence. That drama, which originally aired in the '70s, had Peter Falk playing an LAPD homicide detective. Tolins said he watched nearly every episode during the writers strike.

The showrunner credits the Kings with taking the procedural format of broadcast TV and marrying it with the more sophisticated storytelling and character development one might find on cable and streaming. "They put those things together, and I think that's the genius of their shows," Tolins said.

He's psyched that *Elsbeth* is on CBS. "I think everyone should be able to see this show for free," he said. "I'm thrilled that we can reach as many people as possible, because I think that we could all use a little more *Elsbeth* in our lives."



Carrie Preston and Wendell Pierce take Manhattan in CBS's *Elsbeth*.

Elizabeth Fisher/CBS



Angeli Kakade delivers the news for KING Seattle viewers.

Emerald City Stations Move the Needle

Rebrands and affiliation switches are happening in high-tech Seattle-Tacoma



By Michael Malone
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The home base for Amazon and Microsoft, Seattle has close to 300,000 tech workers. It boasts the highest proportion of advanced tech employees in the nation, according to a study from Burning Glass Institute. As a result, stations in DMA No. 12 work hard to reach users on the move.

Besides local news, KING 5 Plus, KING's streaming app, has lighter fare such as its '80s-'90s comedy show *Almost Live!* and "Gardening With Ciscoe" segments, among other local content. KCPQ-KZJO has a camera in the newsroom and can

go live on Fox Local Seattle in minutes.

"We treat that as our third channel," said Amber Eikel, senior VP and general manager, KCPQ-KZJO.

Seattle-Tacoma is a highly competitive TV market, with the traditional Big Four affiliates all in the hunt in key races. Tegna has KING-KONG, an NBC-independent pair. Fox owns KCPQ-KZJO, known as Fox 13 and Fox 13 Plus. Sinclair holds KOMO-KUNS, an ABC-CW duopoly. Cox Media Group owns CBS affiliate KIRO and CBS has independent station KSTW.

Comcast is Seattle-Tacoma's primary pay-TV operator.

KSTW was affiliated with The CW but went independent last year. KOMO slotted The CW on digital channel 4.2 in September, then put it on

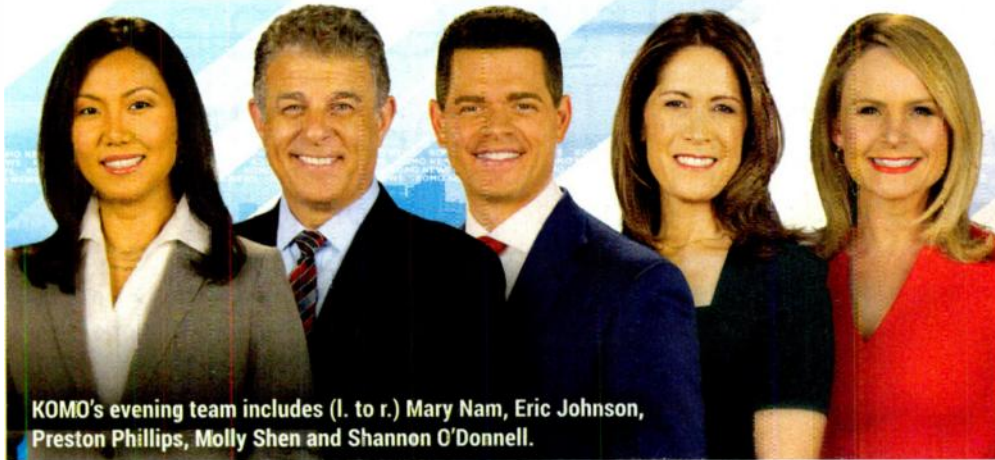
KUNS, which had been the local Univision affiliate, as 2024 began. Weigel Broadcasting grabbed the free-agent Univision affiliation and put it on KVOS, with *Heroes & Icons* moving to the station's subchannel.

"We saw it as an opportunity to serve a broader community in Washington State," said Steve Farber, Weigel senior VP of operations, who is based in Chicago. "We're glad to have the opportunity to work with Univision and we're proud to provide Spanish-language broadcasting."

KVOS does not have local news, but Farber said Weigel is "exploring options" in terms of local content. Weigel also has MeTV station KFFV in Seattle.

Chad Conklin, KOMO-KUNS VP/general manager, said he was pleased to see Univision find a new home. KUNS has launched newscast ARC Seattle (Authentic, Relevant, Community) from 8-10 a.m. and 10-11 p.m. "We're really happy with the programming and how it looks," Conklin said.

In December, KOMO won the tight 6 a.m. household race, according to Nielsen numbers from Seattle, and KCPQ took the viewers 25-54 battle, also a close race. At 5 p.m., KOMO easily won households and KIRO took the demo. At 6



KOMO's evening team includes (l. to r.) Mary Nam, Eric Johnson, Preston Phillips, Molly Shen and Shannon O'Donnell.

p.m., KOMO was tops in local news households (KING airs NBC Nightly News at 6), while KIRO took the demo.

On to 11 p.m., where KOMO won the household weekday race with 28,719 impressions, followed by KIRO at 23,116, KING at 22,172 and KCPQ at 8,932 (and 15,419 at 10 p.m.). In the demo derby at 11, it was KIRO at 6,392 impressions, then KING at 4,662, KOMO at 3,469 and KCPQ at 2,602 (and 4,509 at 10).

"It's a very competitive market with really strong competitors," said Christy Moreno, president and general manager, KING-KONG. "Every day, everybody gives their best."

Happy Anniversary

KOMO uses "So Northwest" branding. The station marked 70 years on the air in December. Conklin described the event as "a big class reunion for KOMO legends."

KING celebrated 75 years on the air in November. "We were able to bring back a lot of people from our history," Moreno said. "It was super cool to get them all together and hear all the interesting stories."

Moreno and KING news director Julie Wolfe first worked together at WHAS Louisville. "She's an incredible journalist, very thoughtful in what she does and how she does it," Moreno said.

The KING newsroom works hard to provide context to news stories, said the GM, and "go a little deeper" on them.

KONG, for its part, has morning and evening news, including a 7-9 a.m. newscast, and Seattle Kraken preseason hockey.

Like Moreno and Wolfe, Eikel and KCPQ VP, news director Jake Wiederrich also worked together previously, both at KIRO and at KTVU San Francisco. "It's so nice to walk into the station and have the news director completely understand me and where I'm coming from," said Eikel, who became general manager in August 2023, when Sheila Oliver departed Seattle to be general manager of WFLD-WPWR Chicago.

Morning Makeover

Fox 13 has focused on its morning show, which got a rebrand in 2022, relaunching as Good Day Seattle instead of Fox 13 Morning Show. Erin Mayovsky shifted from covering weather to an anchor role. Wiederrich called her "a Swiss army knife utility player."

Mayovsky and Bill Wixey anchor 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. Both have 25 years in the market. KCPQ takes considerable pride in anchors who have roots in the Pacific Northwest, including the morning pair.

New to the market is Sabirah Rayford, who

came from KPRC Houston in the fall and is evening co-anchor on Fox 13.

David Rose anchors at 5, 6, 10 and 11 p.m. on Fox 13 and hosts weekly crime show *The Spotlight*. "He knows every detective and attorney and police officer and police chief," said Wiederrich. "His sources deliver."

Pat Nevin was named KIRO VP/general manager in 2020. Morgan Palmer is KIRO chief meteorologist and Jesse Jones is the consumer advocate.

While it's the middle of winter, the Seattle stations are looking forward to the Summer Olympics. A large number of local athletes are heading to Paris, including Nevin Harrison, who competes in sprint canoe, and basketball star Jewel Lloyd. NBC of course has the Games, and KING sports anchor Chris Egan will head to Paris to report.

Besides Amazon and Microsoft, corporations that call Seattle home include Costco and Alaska Airlines, the latter getting lots of play in the news after a door blew off one of its airplanes in January. The local economy is on solid footing, thanks to a diverse array of industries, including tourism — evident in the many cruise ships pulling into and out of the market. There are challenges, such as a persistent homeless population and substantial layoffs at Microsoft in January.

Station chiefs said Seattle's picturesque setting, including Mount Rainier and the Space Needle, lively business portfolio and progressive residents mean a ton of applicants for a job listing. The region's natural beauty still strikes Eikel after years in Seattle. "I can't describe it any other way other than to call it magical," she said. "There's a beauty to this place that I don't think you get anywhere else. Yes, it rains occasionally, but it's green and gorgeous." ●



KCPQ Fox 13 anchors John Hopperstad, Mireya Garcia, Bill Wixey and Erin Mayovsky, chief meteorologist Brian MacMillan and traffic anchor Adam Gehrke serve up the morning news for Seattleites.

Stations Snap Up True Crime, Game Shows for Fall Season

With no big talk shows in the mix, path is clear for more economical entries



By Paige Albinia
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Talk won't be the talk of syndication this fall — instead, producers are bringing out much more economical true-crime series and games to fill station slates.

In January, Warner Bros. renewed talk strip *Jennifer Hudson* for a third season, airing on Fox-owned stations in the country's biggest markets. That caused Debmara-Mercury to withdraw its talk show starring Ken Jeong from the marketplace. After that, several pieces of the fall 2024 syndication puzzle fell into place.

Two new first-run shows have been cleared for launch this fall, Warner Bros.' *True Crime News* and *The Flip Side* from CBS Media Ventures, and the potential is there for a few more shows to emerge.

True Crime News is a new version of *Crime Watch Daily*, a strip that Warner Bros. produced from September 2015 through June 2018. *Crime Watch Daily*'s watch ended when stations elected to instead pick up a less-expensive but similar format, Investigation Discovery's *True Crime Files*. That show did not last long in station lineups, though, while *Crime Watch Daily* continued on in the form of *True Crime Daily: The Podcast* and the *True Crime Daily* website.

True Crime News will be hosted by Ana Garcia, who hosts *True Crime Daily: The Podcast* and contributes to ABC's newsmagazine *20/20*. *True Crime News* will be produced by Warner Bros. Unscripted Television in association with Telepictures, and provide stations with 52 weeks of original programming,



including breaking crime news, ripped-from-the-headlines cases and updates on stories pulled from WBD's vault of crime footage.

Ties to Local Newsrooms

True Crime News also will work closely with local newsrooms to integrate local crime stories into episodes, using stations' footage and reporting. That type of integration is something increasingly important to launch group Fox, which has worked collaboratively with Warner Bros. entertainment magazine *Extra* in some markets. For example, Fox-owned KTTV Los Angeles morning show *Good Day LA* and *Extra* partnered ahead of the 75th annual Emmys in January, producing a pre-ceremony red-carpet show at 4:30 p.m. PT on KTTV.

Along with the third-season renewal of *Jennifer Hudson* and the pick-up of *True Crime Daily*, Warner Bros. has renewed *Extra* for a 31st season and is shopping off-CBS sitcom *Bob Loves*

Above, actor Jaleel White will try his hand as a game-show host for CBS Television Distribution's *The Flip Side*. Below, Warner Bros. has renewed entertainment newsmag *Extra* for its 31st season.

Abishola to stations. While it looked like Warner Bros. was stepping away from first-run syndication after the studio canceled such long-running series as *Judge Mathis* and *People's Court* and *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* ended in May 2022 after 19 years on the air, the studio's recent moves indicate that Warner Bros. remains in the syndication game.

True Crime News isn't the only new true-crime show in the offing: Trifecta is shopping *Crime Stories With Nancy O'Dell*, which will spend each 30-minute episode telling the story of one murder, Trifecta Entertainment president Hank Cohen said.

Trifecta also renewed *iCrime* with Elizabeth Vargas for a third season, Cohen said, after tweaking the show creatively, revamping the set and bringing in a new showrunner. Both *iCrime* and *Crime Stories* are executive produced by Scott Sternberg Productions, which has produced such shows as Investigation Discovery's *On the Case With Paula Zahn*.

While syndicators and stations look to introduce new true-crime shows, NBCUniversal's repackaged version of *Dateline* has been renewed for an eighth season while CBS's syndicated version of *48 Hours* debuted in September.

Repackaging longstanding libraries and offering them to TV stations on an all-barter basis is a growing trend in syndication as TV stations face shrinking margins and less cash to spend.

Along those lines, *Judge Judy*



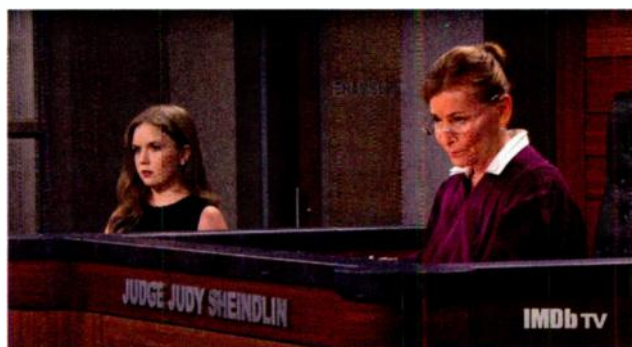
Sheindlin, star of CBS Media Ventures's *Judge Judy* and Amazon Freevee's *Judy Justice*, is poised to compete with herself in syndication. Scott Koondel's Sox Entertainment has cleared *Judy Justice* in all-barter deals in more than 100 markets on such TV station groups as Nexstar Media Group, Sunbeam Television, Cox Media Group, Weigel Broadcasting and Mission Broadcasting. The show stars Sheindlin as well as her granddaughter, Sarah Rose, as her law clerk; Whitney Kumar as the court stenographer and Kevin Rasco as the bailiff. Randy Douthit, Sheindlin's longtime executive producer on *Judge Judy*, executive produces *Judy Justice*.

Sheindlin also has launched another court show on Freevee, *Tribunal Justice*, which is similar to one she created for CMV, *Hot Bench*. *Tribunal Justice*, which was renewed for a second season in October, stars two of *Hot Bench*'s three original judges — Patricia diMango and Tanya Acker as well as Sheindlin's son, Adam Levy. *Tribunal Justice* also is expected to be shopped to TV stations, potentially putting it up against *Hot Bench*.

Meanwhile, Fox has renewed *Judge Judy* library episodes for three more seasons so that show is expected to remain on stations for years to come.

One big court entity not offering any new shows this fall is Allen Media Group, sitting out this season after launching three new court shows in September — *Mathis Court* with Judge Mathis, *Justice for the People* with Judge Milian and *Equal Justice* with Eboni K. Williams. Allen Media Group scooped up Judge Greg Mathis and Judge Marilyn Milian after Warner Bros. canceled *Judge Mathis* and *People's Court*.

"We are in ongoing development discussions focused on fall 2025 and we will continue to invest heavily in linear broadcast television adding to our portfolio of 70-plus shows," Andrew Temple, chief operating officer, broadcast sales and syndication, Allen Media Group, told B+C Multichannel News. "This year, we are focused like a laser on upgrading *Funny You Should Ask*, *Comics Unleashed*



Above, Judge Judy Sheindlin will compete against herself as Freevee's *Judy Justice* hits the market alongside the still-available *Judge Judy*. Below, Rachael Ray is collaborating with A+E Networks to produce new content.

and all nine of our outstanding court-show series."

Over on 'The Flip Side'

While stations build up their true-crime schedules, many of them are leaning heavily on game shows. In January, the CBS-owned stations picked up *The Flip Side*, which is the first new syndicated series to be produced under the leadership of Wendy McMahon, president and CEO of CBS News and Stations and CMV.

The Flip Side will be hosted by Jaleel White, known for his role as Steve Urkel on *Family Matters*, which aired on ABC from 1989 to 1997. Since then, White, who also works as a writer, producer and comedian, has starred in Netflix's *Hustle*, CBS's *Me, Myself and I* and Apple TV Plus's *The Afterparty*.

The Flip Side pits two teams of players against each other, testing them on how they think two different groups of people feel about the same issue. Teams choose from multiple-choice answers, and whoever reveals the best intuition regarding human be-



havior will find themselves richer.

Overall, game shows are popular in syndication right now, often taking the place of more expensive off-network sitcoms. *The Flip Side* will air on CBS's duopoly stations in big markets, and Fox also has renewed most of its game slate for next year. That includes *Pictionary*, starring Jerry O'Connell; Debmar-Mercury's *People Puzzler*, starring Leah Remini; *25 Words or Less*, starring and executive produced by Meredith Vieira; and *Person, Place or Thing*, starring Melissa Peterman. Fox also renewed *Dish Nation*, which features radio deejays chatting about the entertainment gossip of the day, for a 13th season after doing some cost-cutting. Going away after one season is the TMZ-produced *Who the Bleep Is That?*

Among the major talk shows, NBCUniversal's Kelly Clarkson and Debmar-Mercury's Sherri, starring Sherri Shepherd, have been renewed through next season. NBCU's newest conflict talker, *Karamo*, starring Karamo Brown, is expected to snag a renewal for season three. ABC's *Tamron Hall*, now in season five, is awaiting word on a season-six pickup.

Meanwhile, former syndicated talk show stars are finding new homes elsewhere.

Dr. Phil McGraw, who starred in an eponymous syndicated talk show produced and distributed by CMV from 2002 to 2023, is launching Merit Street Media on February 26. Besides a primetime version of *Dr. Phil*, the network will feature morning and evening newscasts and a daily afternoon true-crime block anchored by a new show hosted by Nancy Grace.

Rachael Ray, whose CBS-produced show ended after last season, immediately started a production company, Free Food Studios. In late January, A+E Networks said it bought 50% of that enterprise and also ordered 278 episodes featuring Ray and other talent that will run as part of the Home.Made.Nation lifestyle programming block on A+E, FYI and other platforms. A+E Networks will distribute the content around the world. A+E Networks will distribute the shows globally. ●

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President
CBS News



LUCILLA D'AGOSTINO

Head of Evolution Media
and Big Fish Entertainment
**Evolution Media and
Big Fish Entertainment
(Amazon/MGM companies)**



STEPHANIE DORMAN

Chief Customer Officer
Mediaocean



KIM GRANITO

Chief Marketing Officer
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BARBARA MAUSHARD

Senior Vice President, News
Hearst Television



KATE MORGAN

CPO, EVP Global Media
Entertainment & Games
Magid



**LAURA PALUMBO
JOHNSON**

Partner, Co-Founder and
Executive Producer
Magilla Entertainment



GINA REDUTO

Senior Vice President,
Client Strategy
NBCUniversal



ADRIENNE ROARK

President, Content Development
and Integration
**CBS News and Stations and
CBS Media Ventures**



NOGA ROSENTHAL

General Counsel and Chief
Privacy Officer
Ampersand



SHEEREEN RUSSELL

EVP, Ad Sales, Client Partnerships
& Inclusive Solutions
Warner Bros Discovery



TINA THORNTON

EVP, Creative Studio
and Marketing
ESPN



KAVITA VAZIRANI

EVP of Research,
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**Horowitz Research, division
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Group Vice President
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People

Notable executives on the move



ACA CONNECTS

Independent cable trade group ACA Connects has added **Zamir Ahmed** as VP, external affairs. Ahmed comes from the National Association of Broadcasters, where he worked in media relations for 13 years, departing as VP of communications.



ACA CONNECTS

ACA Connects also tapped **Olivia Shields** as VP, public affairs and communications. Most recently communications director for the House Energy & Commerce Committee, she was a top communications adviser to House Speaker John Boehner and the House Republican Conference.



ACA CONNECTS

Finally, ACA Connects hired **Max Staloff** as of regulatory affairs, working with chief regulatory counsel Brian Hurley. Most recently a telecom attorney in private practice, he began his career with the Federal Communications Commission, including in the agency's Office of General Counsel.



CBS STATIONS

Sahand Sepehrnia was elevated to executive VP, digital content strategy and business at CBS News, Stations, Entertainment and Sports. Sepehrnia, who joined the network in February of 2022, has been senior VP of streaming for CBS Stations and its 14 local streaming channels.



CBS STATIONS

Jamie Reysen was promoted to senior VP, digital editorial, growth & engagement at CBS News and Stations. Most recently senior VP of CBSNews.com and growth and engagement, she will oversee a new unified digital editorial operation spanning local and national coverage.



COMCAST

Comcast named **Mike McArdle** as senior VP of its South Region, comprising Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee. He had been senior VP of National Customer Care for Customer Experience Strategy and Operations.



COMCAST

Chris Winton was named senior VP, human resources in Comcast's Central Division, based in Atlanta and comprising cable systems in 12 states. He joins from FedEx, where he ended a 25-year run with the delivery service as chief people officer.



EXTREME REACH

Extreme Reach has named **Jo Kinsella** as global president of SourceXR, its video creative-asset delivery platform. She had been president of ad delivery and measurement firm Innovid and was co-founder of TVSquared, which was acquired by Innovid.



GRAY TV

Gray Television promoted **Liz Knight** to general manager of WALB-WGCW Albany, Georgia. Knight had been general sales manager of WALB, an NBC affiliate, WGCW, a The CW station, and WTSG, a Telemundo affiliate, for the past five years.



LG AD SOLUTIONS

Mike Brooks has joined LG Ad Solutions as global head of business development and partnerships. He comes from Verve Group, where he was chief operating officer managing global teams for supply-side platforms Smaato and Pubnative.



NIELSEN

Nielsen has named **Carole Robinson** as chief communications officer, responsible for all global communications. She joins the firm from digital media company BuzzFeed, where she had worked as chief communications officer.



OPENX

Omnichannel supply-side platform OpenX Technologies has tapped **Nick Cuniffe** as VP of product, CTV, a new role acting as the company's connected TV product lead following the recent launch of TV by OpenX. He had been head of product at Airfind.



SCRIPPS

E.W. Scripps said it named **Lisa Moore** as station manager of KSBY San Luis Obispo, California. Moore has been senior director of sales at KSBY since 2022 and will continue to lead the NBC affiliate's sales efforts as well as help with day-to-day operations.



SHOWSEEKER

Rose Schneider has joined cloud-based TV advertising order system ShowSeeker as VP of technical operations. The 20-year industry veteran comes from OnMedia, where she was senior director of ad sales operations leading the IT, client services and traffic teams.



SINCLAIR

Sinclair promoted **Ryan Moore** to senior VP and chief revenue officer, with responsibility for the group's TV stations, networks and its marketing technology and managed services company. He was senior VP and chief revenue officer of sports and digital.



VIDEOAMP

Ad tech firm VideoAmp has added **Peter Bradbury** as chief commercial and growth officer, a new role tasked with leading all client, business development and commercial transformation initiatives. He had been chief commercial officer at Nielsen.



VIZRT

Marco Kraak was named general manager, global channel at real-time graphics and live productions solutions provider Vizrt. The ex-Cisco Systems executive most recently worked at Suse, where he led the channel remit for AIPAC, EMEA and China.



WISH

WISH Indianapolis owner Circle City Broadcasting has named **Taylor Bassett** as its first senior executive producer, responsible for "infotainment" storytelling across WISH News 8 broadcasts. She was executive producer of afternoon show All Indiana.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Other industry execs making moves

Scott Wilder was elevated to executive VP, production and operations at Fox News Media. He was VP of field operations. ... NBC News named **Paul Ryan** executive producer of news-magazine *Dateline*. He had been senior producer and creative director. ... **Bernie Ritter** was named news director at Nextstar Media Group's WRIC Richmond, Virginia. He comes from WNCT Greenville, North Carolina, where he was news director. ... Ad-tech firm Simulmedia has named founder and CEO **Dave Morgan** as executive chairman as part of a new shared leadership structure across the company. Also, chief operating officer **Jon Werther** was elevated to CEO. ... **Patrick McFadden** has joined Sinclair as senior VP for global public policy and communications. He was senior VP and deputy general counsel at the National Association of Broadcasters.

For more personnel news from the TV, video and connectivity business, visit nexttv.com/fates-and-fortunes.



(From l.): **JoAnn Alfano**, EVP, current programming, Universal Television; **Pearlena Igbokwe**, Chairman, Universal Studio Group; **Mariska Hargitay**; **Mark Lazarus**, chair, NBCUniversal Media Group; **Lisa Katz**, president, scripted content, NBCUniversal Entertainment; **Erin Underhill**, president, Universal Television; and **Frances Berwick**, chairman, NBCUniversal Entertainment at the 25th anniversary party for NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* at Edge at Hudson Yards in New York.



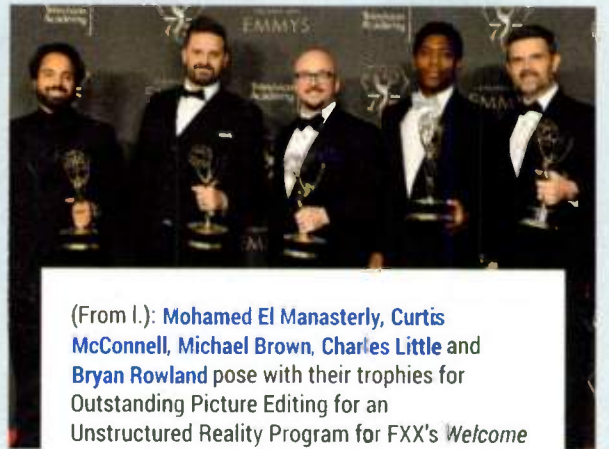
(From l.) **Wrenn Schmidt**, **Joel Kinnaman** and **Krys Marshall** at the screening event for Apple TV Plus's *For All Mankind* at the AMC Theater in Century City, Calif.



Matthew Macfadyen (l.) and **Sarah Snook** of HBO's *Succession* celebrate their wins at the 81st Annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif.



At the 81st Annual Golden Globe Awards (l. to r.): Netflix co-CEO **Ted Sarandos**; his wife, former Ambassador **Nicole Avant**; and **Lee Sung Jin**, **Steven Yeun** and **Ali Wong** of *Beef*.



(From l.): **Mohamed El Manasterly**, **Curtis McConnell**, **Michael Brown**, **Charles Little** and **Bryan Rowland** pose with their trophies for Outstanding Picture Editing for an Unstructured Reality Program for FXX's *Welcome to Wrexham* at the 75th Creative Arts Emmy Awards in Los Angeles.

Todd Williamson/NBC; Apple TV Plus; Trae Patton/CBS; Todd Williamson/CBS; Scott Kirkland/PictureGroup for FXX



Claire Danes (l.) and showrunner Taffy Brodesser-Akner of *Fleischman Is in Trouble* at the FX and Vanity Fair "Celebrate Fearless Television Emmy Party" at Sunset Towers in Los Angeles.



(From l.): Dana Walden, co-chair, Disney Entertainment; Jeremy Allen White of FX's *The Bear*; John Landgraf, chair, FX Networks; and Nick Grad, president, original programming, FX Entertainment, at the The Walt Disney Co. Emmy Party at Otium in Los Angeles.



Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series winner Quinta Brunson of ABC's *Abbott Elementary* in the press room at the 75th Emmy Awards.



(From l.): 75th Emmy Awards host Anthony Anderson; his mom, Doris Bowman; and Rob Wade, CEO, Fox Entertainment, behind the scenes during the ceremony at the Peacock Theater in Los Angeles.



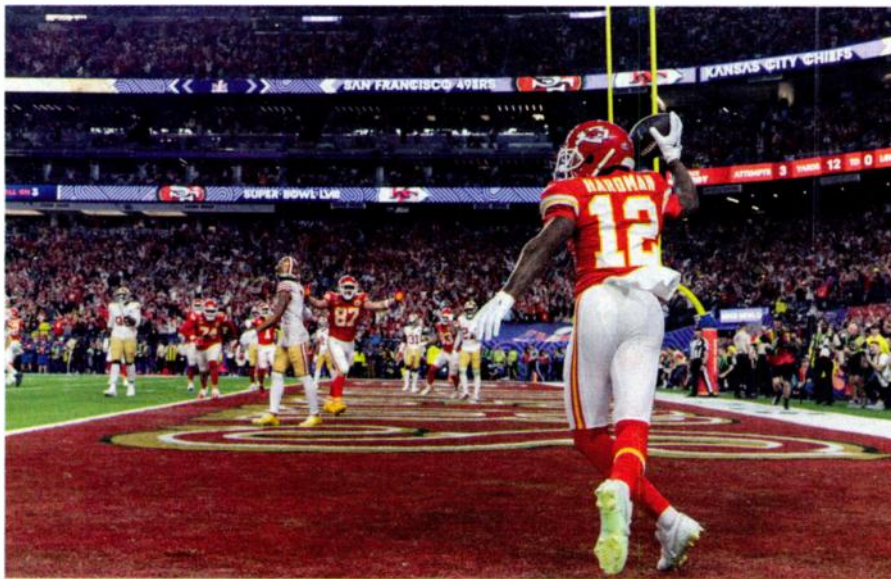
RuPaul Charles of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and cast accept the Emmy for Outstanding Reality Competition Program onstage during the 75th Emmy Awards.

Frank Micelotta/PictureGroup for Disney, Fox (2), Vince Buccell/PictureGroup for FX

Ad Meter

Who's spending what where 2023 TV ADVERTISING RECAP

The year's most-seen brands and industries on TV, and more



Impressions Spotlight





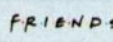
Highlighted here are top programs and networks ranked by household TV ad impressions delivered from January 1 through December 31.

Total household TV ad impressions:
8.50 trillion (+ 1.8% YoY)

National TV ad minutes:
18.4 million (+ 2.2% YoY)

Key takeaway: iSpot's year-end recap highlights how advertisers still found significant reach on TV despite the challenges presented by entertainment work stoppages. With fewer scripted programs, brands flocked to sports and news, while many networks also aired more ads (and ad minutes) compared to 2022.

TOP 5 PROGRAMS, JAN. 1-DEC. 31

- 1. NFL**
 Share of impressions: **3.03%**
 Top advertiser: **Progressive (2.08%)**

- 2. College Football**
 Share of impressions: **1.66%**
 Top advertiser: **Allstate (1.99%)**

- 3. Law & Order: SVU**
 Share of impressions: **1.25%**
 Top advertiser: **Domino's (1.80%)**

- 4. NBA**
 Share of impressions: **1.21%**
 Top advertiser: **State Farm (2.14%)**

- 5. Friends**
 Share of impressions: **0.93%**
 Top advertiser: **Progressive (1.65%)**


TOP ADVERTISERS

By share of household TV ad impressions (Jan. 1-Dec. 31)

1 **PROGRESSIVE**

Share of impressions: **0.92%**
 Top network: **CBS (11.08%)**
 Top program: **NFL (7.82%)**

2 **Domino's**

Share of impressions: **0.87%**
 Top network: **Ion (6.35%)**
 Top program: **Law & Order: SVU (2.65%)**

3 **Liberty Mutual Insurance**

Share of impressions: **0.65%**
 Top network: **Fox News Channel (7.42%)**
 Top program: **NFL (3.12%)**

4 **verizon**

Share of impressions: **0.60%**
 Top network: **NBC (9.83%)**
 Top program: **NFL (9.47%)**

5 **BURGER KING**

Share of impressions: **0.55%**
 Top network: **Ion (7.53%)**
 Top program: **NFL (8.71%)**

MOST-SEEN INDUSTRIES

By share of household TV ad impressions (Jan. 1-Dec. 31)

- 1) TV Networks (13.82%)
- 2) QSR (4.15%)
- 3) Automakers (3.84%)
- 4) Auto & General Insurance (2.71%)
- 5) Streaming Services (2.22%)
- 6) Wireless Services (2.21%)
- 7) Department Stores (2.00%)
- 8) Vitamins & Supplements (1.85%)
- 9) Skin & Foot Care (1.85%)
- 10) Cleaning Supplies (1.51%)

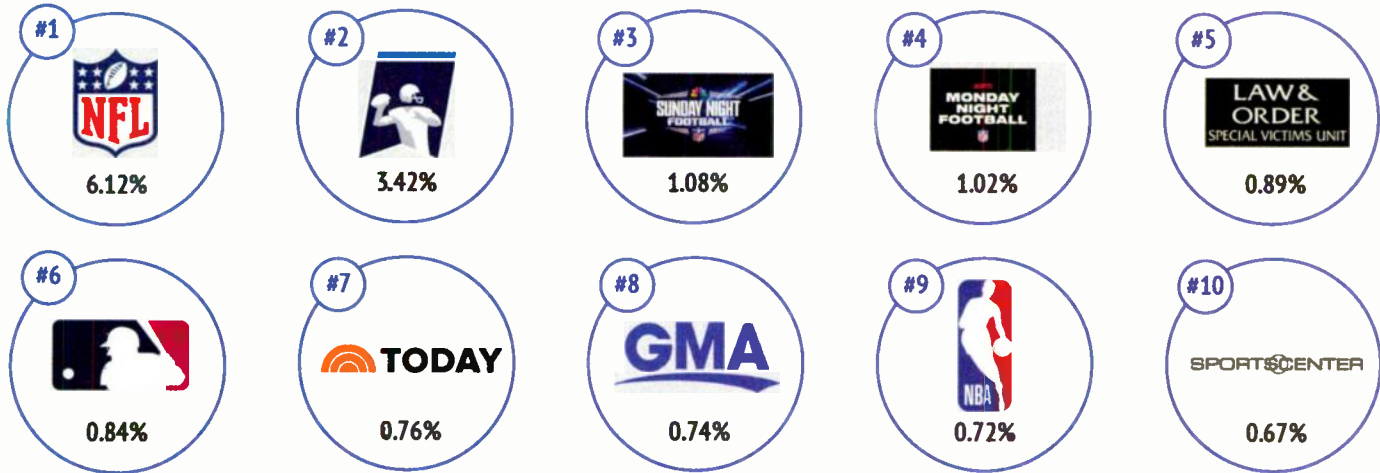
TOP NETWORKS

- 1) CBS (7.24%)
- 2) ABC (6.53%)
- 3) NBC (5.52%)
- 4) Fox News (3.81%)
- 5) Ion (2.69%)
- 6) ESPN (2.65%)
- 7) Fox (2.53%)
- 8) HGTV (2.34%)
- 9) Hallmark (2.32%)
- 10) Univision (2.24%)

INScape

The Most-Watched TV Programming In Q4

Of all live, linear minutes watched on VIZIO smart TVs from October 1 through December 31, 2023, 6.12% were spent watching the NFL -- a slight decrease from the 6.39% share of episodes captured during the same time period in 2022. Notably, other sports programming like MLB saw year-over-year increase in watch-time, climbing by nearly 0.14% during the same period in 2022.

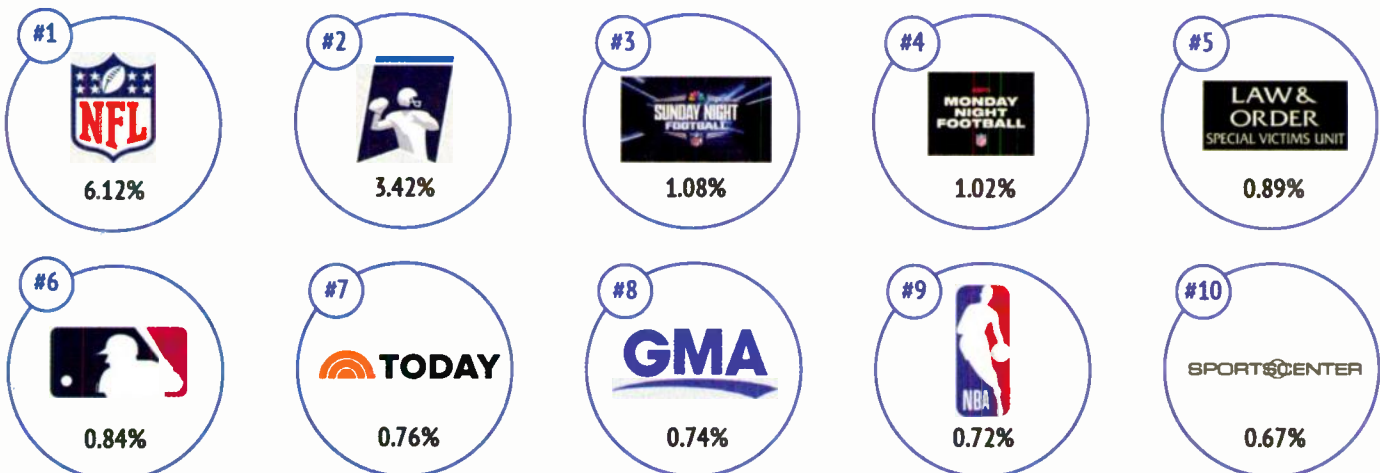


Via InScape, the currency-grade smart TV ACR data provider and data technology division of VIZIO. Data is live, linear TV only and includes all episode types (new and reruns). Rankings are by percent share duration, defined as "of all the live minutes watched from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, 2023, X% of the time was spent on show Y."

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Jessica Wolin

jessica.wolin@futurenet.com | 212-685-4233

2024 INDUCTEES



Janice Arouh

President, Network
Distribution
Allen Media Group



Bob Bakish

President and Chief
Executive Officer
Paramount Global



**Karen Dougherty
Buchholz**

Executive Vice President,
Administration
Comcast Corporation



**Valari Dobson
Staab**

Chairman
NBCUniversal Local



**CHAIRMAN'S
AWARD**

Mario J Gabelli

Chief Investment Officer
Gabelli Funds



Marianne Gambelli

President of Advertising
Sales, Marketing & Brand
Partnerships
Fox Corporation



Scott Herman

Chairman
*Broadcasters Foundation
of America*



**Douglas V.
Holloway**

President
Homewood Media



Steve Lanzano

President & CEO
TVB



Debra OConnell

President, Networks & TV
Business Operations
*Disney Entertainment
Television*



**George
Stephanopoulos**

Co-Ancor of Good
Morning America,
ABC News; Ancor of
This Week with George
Stephanopoulos,
ABC News
ABC News



**LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Arthur Wagner

Executive Chairman
of the Board
& Co-Founder
Active International



By Erik Schrader, WANF-WPCH Atlanta
@ATLNewsFirst

Why Sports Works Better on Free TV

Putting games behind a paywall won't cultivate new fans

As the sun rises on 2024, a lot of light is shining on the future of sports and its relationship with broadcast television. For fans, things seem to be getting more complicated. Many games are only available through subscription, be it cable, satellite or a streamer. For the first time ever, most of the country had to pay to watch an NFL playoff game in January.

The immediate risk of going behind paywalls might not initially seem huge for some teams. Devoted fans are likely to follow their teams wherever they are — and the beat goes on ... for now.

But where do the new fans come from? How does someone become a fan of something they can't sample for free? What happens to franchises that are still in the process of establishing rabid fan bases?

And as of right now, streaming isn't working for everyone — and that is going to impact the casual fan. I don't think it's any coincidence that the NFL playoff game I mentioned earlier — Kansas City Chiefs vs. Miami Dolphins, streaming on Peacock — was the lowest-rated wild-card playoff game dating back to 1991-92.

Built by Broadcast

It's important to remember the NFL wasn't always the juggernaut it is now. There was a time it was firmly behind baseball and the product was — for quite a while — considered to be inferior to college football. The legend of the NFL's



growth dates to December 28, 1958, when Johnny Unitas led the Baltimore Colts to the NFL championship in a nationally televised game that changed the future of the league. A fan base — and the NFL's legacy — was truly born that day. Less than a decade later, the Super Bowl existed and the marriage of broadcast TV to professional football was forged.

Could that have happened behind a paywall?

There are reasons for optimism for broadcast sports. Our sister Gray Television station in Phoenix is now showing Phoenix Suns and Mercury games over the air across the state. Here in Atlanta, we're proud to be showing 10 Hawks games across our stations in early 2024 — returning the NBA team to WPCH, where it aired over 30 years ago.

The reaction on social media when we announced this over the holidays was tremendous: "Awesome News!!" "That's

Trae Young and the NBA's Atlanta Hawks are among those making a fast break from regional sports networks to over-the-air TV.

Erik Schrader is VP and general manager of Gray Television-owned WANF-WPCH Atlanta.

Outstanding." "People should always be able to see some of their local teams' games on TV, period." "Awesome. About time."

It's not just viewers who are excited. Our sales team is talking to new advertisers who want to be a part of live sports.

Live and Local

We've also launched the Peachtree Sports Network with the goal of sharing live sports all across Georgia — from pro basketball and hockey to lacrosse and the Ultimate Frisbee Association, as well as high school sports. The idea is to give fans the games they want but also to grow more fans — people who can watch a game for free, then watch another game, then another ...

I grew up in a household of casual sports fans just interested enough to know who won each game in some sports, but certainly not watching nightly. Would I have become the crazy sports fan I am if I hadn't watched football, baseball, basketball and hockey for free on broadcast television as a kid? Televised games on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and evenings were what did it.

At their best, sports bring the people in this country together. We root for our teams, buy the gear, read about them, watch and listen to shows that talk about them. In many cases, we even pay the taxes that help fund stadiums and arenas. All of that became possible once fans didn't actually have to attend the games to be part of the action. From listening to reports of the World Series over the telegraph to the evolution into radio and television, mass broadcast created mass fan bases.

Now, suddenly, we're at a crossroads. Are sports going to remain something that everyone can be part of, or will they become private games played in publicly financed buildings available only to people willing to swipe their credit card?

The promise of rights fees may be alluring, but teams that go behind paywalls are putting a ceiling on how big their businesses can be. In the end, no matter what someone is selling, if people don't know what the product is, they're just not going to buy it. ●



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Jeff DeMond

Chairman and CEO, Archtop Fiber
Cable stalwart says fiber is still the future

Jeff DeMond believes in the power of fiber and in super-serving the customers who buy internet and phone service on it. The longtime cable executive, whose roots go back to Bresnan Communications in the 1980s, is the chairman and CEO of Archtop Fiber, which recently completed a third acquisition in a five-month span of regional phone carriers in the mid-Hudson Valley area of New York state. In between, he was CEO of Vyve Broadband, another startup that saw value in buying broadband providers in rural markets, upgrading them and upselling customers where good internet was lagging. He recently fielded questions from B+C Multichannel News content director Kent Gibbons about Archtop's aims and goals and why delivering multi-gig internet is a business worth investing in at a time when cords are being cut but broadband demand is high.

Despite video cord-cutting, do you see good opportunities to invest in internet and phone service via fiber? Cord-cutting creates an incredible opportunity to invest in fiber internet and phone service. More and more people are using streaming services for entertainment, requiring a fast and reliable internet connection. In less than a decade, the volume of internet-dependent devices in households is expected to double, numbering in the billions. Combined with the rising number of simultaneous streams available, multi-gig Internet becomes more of a necessity than a luxury. Communication in the form

of videoconferencing is also on the rise, which depends on fast upload speeds, which fiber enables. Overall, the tech we need for work and play will constantly need faster Internet speeds and greater bandwidth and fiber is future-proof — we've got the speeds needed to support the needs for today with plenty to spare and the ability to scale up to deliver what everyone will need in the future.

What characteristics does Archtop Fiber look for in the companies and communities it invests in? We look for companies that are deeply rooted in their communities with a strong record of customer service. We love working with local businesses, employing local team members, and becoming an integral tech partner and neighbor to provide underserved areas with new and unlimited possibilities that, before now, were unattainable. I founded Archtop along with a group of longtime friends and leading industry veterans who have decades of experience building and operating world-class Internet networks in areas that have been neglected or overlooked by other providers. We all share the vision of identifying such communities and bringing the latest and greatest tech to them.

How do you assess the competitive environment either from wireless 5G or other big or small providers in your markets? It's not something that keeps me up at night. The service we will deliver with our 100% fiber network is unmatched in the communities

BONUS FIVE

First job in cable? I met Bill Bresnan in 1984 ... I joined him as his senior financial exec in 1985. Bill passed away in 2009. I was then CEO, and we sold Bresnan Communications in 2010. My first and longest cable job thanks to Bill.

Shows on your watchlist? None, really. I bounce between C-SPAN and *PBS NewsHour*, the Tennis Channel and a few other regulars.

What apps do you use the most? Too many! Spotify, newspapers, YouTube, sports, social media, banks, thermostats ... I have an overly app-driven existence!

Books on your nightstand? Constant changing rotation — today, *Differ We Must (How Lincoln Succeeded in a Divided America)* by Steve Inskeep; *Democracy Awakening* by Heather Cox Richardson; *Freezing Order* by Bill Browder; several jazz guitar books.

Where would you like to vacation? Places I've never been in the U.S. for a change: Sedona, Arizona, or similar dramatic, regal, peaceful places.

we are moving into. In terms of reliability, sustainability, speed and cost, our network will be a game-changer for these areas and deliver a service no one else is offering currently.

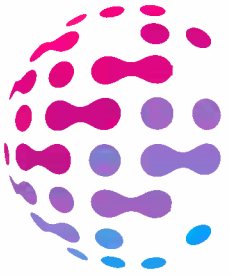
How hands-on do you get with the companies that Archtop acquires?

We are picky when it comes to who we work with, so we chose companies that are already well-established and well-run. As these companies are integrated into the Archtop Fiber family, it's an easy transition because they share values similar to ours, and we're all working hand in hand on the optimizations we're looking to deliver. We collaborate closely with the teams on the ground day to day to ensure we're delivering the quality customer experiences that we all aim to achieve.

What are your goals for how big Archtop Fiber can become? Our primary goal is to bring high-speed fiber Internet to underserved communities in New York's Hudson Valley and the greater Northeast. The growth we achieve through that process is an added bonus to our mission of bridging the digital divide and delivering equity to these areas. That being said, many communities have been overlooked for too long and lack the necessary infrastructure to truly take advantage of the digital opportunities that exist today. We have outlined a roadmap to serve these communities with a network spanning from the eastern Pennsylvania border to western Massachusetts. Archtop's network is expected to reach over 500,000 households and local businesses, bringing tech-driven opportunities, economic growth and jobs along with it. What makes it even more exciting is that our journey has really just begun. Archtop is poised to have an extraordinary impact on the communities it serves. From homes to businesses to schools, the work we are doing will open up doors of opportunity and growth that before now were not possible. ●



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