

TCI, Viacom sports pact is official

MSO's announce details of regional sports ventures

Tele-Communications Inc. and Viacom Cable last week officially announced the partnership between the two companies that has launched Northwest Cable Sports in the Pacific Northwest and plans to launch another sports service in the Bay area in April 1990. The announcement follows by several weeks TCI's plan to join with Bill Daniels and Home Sports Entertainment to market and expand regional sports offerings beyond the four in which Daniels and HSE are involved.

Ed Bennett, executive vice president of Viacom Cable, who will join TCI's Peter Barton, senior vice president, on the management committee of the venture, said the companies made the announcement despite not having signed any major sports teams, to give it a leg up on marketing and promoting the new Bay Area Sports Network it will launch Sept. 1 as a promotional basic service, with the full-scale launch slated for April 1990.

For the San Francisco area, the top of the programing list appears to be the Oakland A's, which do not have a cable deal. The San Francisco Giants provide cable operators with 37 games on a pay-per-view basis. "This would be [the A's] entrée" into cable, said Bennett, if a deal is reached. Bennett said the companies "are fully prepared to go with one of those teams," although having both on the service would be ideal. Bennett said surveys show that one team would be enough to carry the service. The local NBA team, the Warriors, could appear this fall as part of the early promotional feed, but it's more likely if a deal is reached that the Warriors would be added in the fall of 1990, said Bennett.

In September, the network will carry local college and Pac 10 events, including basketball, football and baseball. (Local teams Stanford and San Jose State are perennially top-ranked college baseball teams.) The Pac 10 has a contract with Daniels's Prime Ticket, which has the rights to resell events to other parties, such as the TCI-Viacom sports services. Since Prime Ticket is Los Angeles-based, BASN and NCS would not be competing head on for games of local Pac 10 teams, such as Washington, Washington State and Stanford. Bennett also said the network will carry women's sports, giving those events "a lot of exposure" that they haven't enjoyed in the past.

BASN will be available to operators for a small fee in September, and will be either a pay or basic channel when it launches in April, depending on the cost associated with sports product. Cable systems also may have the option, depending on how far they are from the major market, to carry the service on pay or basic. "Our intention is to be as flexible as possible," said Bennett.

TCI and Viacom serve one million of the nearly two million cable subscribers in the Bay area, which stretches from San Luis Obispo to the south to Sacramento to the east. The NBA Sacramento Kings, Bennett said, could also be a part of the network.

In the Seattle area, where TCI and Viacom serve 780,000 of the nearly one million cable homes, the companies have launched the Northwest Cable Sports network, which carries Washington and Washington State events, professional soccer's Tacoma Stars, plus semi-pro hockey. The companies also will begin marketing the service in Oregon, where two major universities—Oregon and Oregon State—are also members of the Pac 10. TCI and Viacom

had been negotiating with the Seattle Mariners, but the team signed a broadcast deal at the 11th hour. Cable negotiations, said Bennett, have "broken apart" for the moment, but there is hope the Mariners will eventually be a part of the network. Meanwhile, the companies are "working in earnest" at signing a deal with the NBA SuperSonics, Bennett said.

Although the TCI-Daniels partnership has affected SportsChannel America's effort to expand, Bennett said the partnership will be talking to SCA about its National Hockey League package.

The TCI-Daniels partnership will help the two networks through sharing programming and marketing costs. □

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