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English Premier League Streaming Rights Change Hands in Canada (Again!)

By Stephen Zolf

International football (soccer) media rights have been “handed-off” again. According to the January 13 announcement, fuboTV has acquired exclusive Canadian streaming/media rights for the English Premier League (EPL). The deal includes exclusive rights on all media platforms for the EPL for the next three seasons (starting in 2022/2023).

fuboTV’s latest announcement adds EPL Canadian streaming rights to its growing stable of international football rights, including Italian Serie A, Coppa Italia and Club Deportivo Guadalajara (Chivas) for Liga MX home matches. Its reach and grasp in terms of rights in the streaming space is impressive, and includes streaming rights to content from legacy media platforms such as Paramount Network, which is home to high-profile content including *Yellowstone*, as well as OneSoccer and beIN Sports, which air Canadian Premier League, Canadian National Men’s Soccer and Ligue 1 games.

fuboTV’s recent rights acquisitions in Canada have come at the expense of DAZN, which has held EPL rights on all platforms in Canada for several years. Many Canadian sports fans will remember DAZN’s rocky start as the exclusive streaming platform of NFL Sunday Ticket games in 2017, which was initially beset by technical issues. Interestingly, these technical issues forced some market reordering as DAZN was forced to share the high-profile NFL RedZone package through a sub-license to TSN (Bell Media), which continues to offer cable and streaming subscribers the NFL RedZone package on cable platforms (TSN) and through the TSN App. So the television/streaming marketplace continues to get sliced and diced.

How did fuboTV wrest away the EPL rights from the deep-pocketed DAZN (often referred to as the “Netflix of sports”)? After all, DAZN is backed by London-based billionaire Leonard Blavatnik. We can look to its deep-pocketed owners, Waverley Capital. Chaired by former legacy media scion Edgar Bronfman Jr., Waverley describes itself as a venture capital firm “focused solely on the innovation and disruption occurring globally throughout the ~ \$2T media industry.”

Sidebar: beIN Media Group, formerly known as Al Jazeera Sport, is part of the Al Jazeera ownership group, the Qatari state-owned television network. In the ongoing musical chairs of international media sports rights, beIN Media Group assembled some of its EPL rights initially from Setanta Sports (e.g., EPL rights for Australia in 2014). Setanta previously held EPL media rights in Canada on all platforms, including legacy TV deals with the largest cable operator in Canada. Meanwhile, former Setanta CEO’s new venture, PREMIER SPORTS (headquartered in Dublin), has acquired an impressive basket of sports media rights, including streaming rights to the NHL outside of Canada (described as “Ice Hockey” on its website). So it’s a patchwork quilt of international media rights.

It will be interesting to see if current market conditions settle down in the sports streaming sector. Until then, it may be more “rinse and repeat.”

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