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ACC launching digital network

By **Michael Smith**, Staff Writer

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The ACC is launching its own ad-supported digital network, with plans for a daily news show, a football studio show on game days, and unique behind-the-scenes programming.

Content slowly began to appear on TheACC.com last week as part of a soft launch, with a more formal unveiling expected this week. Kyle Montgomery has been hired from NBA TV to host studio programming, while former Georgia Tech running back Dorsey Levens will be one of the football analysts.

The digital network is a partnership between the conference; Raycom, a longtime ACC sales and marketing partner; and Silver Chalice, the Chicago-based tech company that helped the conference launch its iPhone app a year ago.

Initial distribution of the network will be focused on TheACC.com, but the long-term plan calls for its content to go to Internet TV outlets, such as Roku or Netflix, and syndication into other websites, such as newspaper sites that could embed an ACC Digital Network player in its ACC stories.

Silver Chalice is taking the lead on sponsorship sales, although Raycom will sell as well. They are seeking a company to be the presenting sponsor of the network.

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"We've seen other people's version of a digital network, which sometimes is a green screen with low-impact graphics," said Jason Coyle, Silver Chalice's COO. "What we're planning is TV-quality graphics, high-level talent and production that's going to make this the first and last stop for ACC fans. It also will have a scale to it that will take it off this platform and onto any place where fans consume their media."

Digital networks are all the rage among college conferences. The SEC works with XOS Digital on its version, the Pac-12 has aggregated the digital rights from its schools with the intent to create a network, and the Big Ten recently signed with CBSSports.com College Network to form a centralized portal into the conference's

digital content.

"This provides a new platform that will showcase more content, in more places, than we've ever experienced before," said ACC Commissioner John Swofford.

While the ACC's digital network won't be the only place fans can find live and non-live games, it will feature approximately 50 live ACC Network football and basketball games (those produced and aired by Raycom), 25 ACC championship events, and anywhere from 25 to 100 Olympic sports events that are not selected first by ESPN or Fox Sports Net.

That live game inventory is in negotiation between Raycom, ESPN and the conference. ESPN also carries live ACC games on ESPN3.com, so digital rights to any games it doesn't carry have to be resolved. ESPN owns the digital rights to live content, and Raycom sublicenses those games that it produces and distributes as part of a syndicated TV and digital package. Raycom has the non-live rights.

ACC schools retain some ability to carry games on their websites as well because they have revenue — some advertising, some subscriptions — tied to live streaming. The details of who will carry what are being ironed out, said Colin Smith, who has spearheaded the digital network for Raycom.

"Schools will still have rights to certain games they produce and we're asking for a certain number of live events we want exclusively," said Smith, Raycom's vice president of distribution and new media.

No subscriptions will be required to view the digital network. The mobile app will carry network content as well, but a one-time $7.99 charge is required for access to any live games.

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