

Broadcasting Oct 16

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College ball: Take a number

CBS, with rights to the 1990 NCAA tournament and final; ESPN, with a 225-game schedule, including early NCAA tournament games and several conference championships; and Raycom Sports and Entertainment, with syndication rights to 170 games from six major conferences, remain the big three college basketball television powers.

Other networks and syndicators, including ABC, NBC, SportsChannel America, Black Entertainment Network and Creative Sports Marketing, will, as they did last year, also present regular and post-season schedules between November 1989 and April 1990. But when the multiple levels of regional and local syndicators, regional cable channels and individual TV and radio stations are added to the queue, the suitors going after college basketball properties become legion. In most markets, nearly 500 games will be telecast by the aggregate national networks and local rights holders.

College rights: Revenue streams, plural

Other conferences appear to give preference to local broadcasters, which in larger regions are plentiful and add up to large payments. In the ACC, Raycom and Jefferson-Pilot Telecommunications are paying \$7 million per season for regional syndication rights to a 38-game package. But in an unusual deal already complicated by revenue sharing between conference and syndicator, NBC will distribute the conference championship game elsewhere in the nation while Raycom and JPT distribute it regionally.

Competition among old and new television outlets is also complicating the picture. Take, for example, the recent battle for Southwest Conference rights among current rights holder Raycom and its new partner Prime Network (on one side) and SportsChannel America (on the other). Bidding there, where distribution has been limited to Texas and Arkansas, has gone as high as \$3.45 million per year (over four years) for rights to basketball and football together (BROADCASTING, Aug. 14). A SportsChannel win in that rights contest could mean no over-the-air distribution of the conference package in the schools' home markets and, since SportsChannel has no affiliate service in that region, could also mean severely limited cable distribution in the area as well.

Syndication: Local interest, national reach

Once again, 10-year-old Raycom Sports and Entertainment, based in Charlotte, N.C., retains regional syndication rights to six major college basketball conferences: the Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big Eight, Big Ten, Metro, Pacific 10 (Pac-10) and Southwest (SWC). All told, Raycom will produce and distribute 170 games from those conferences, and although in each case over-the-air distribution is limited to the conference region, Raycom continues to successfully sell advertising across its schedules, reaching 75% of the nation, 5% more than it was able to claim last year.

Indeed, Raycom has been able to present to those advertisers impressive numbers from the 1988-89 season. All six conferences saw increases over the previous season in households delivered: ACC up 31.5% in prime time; Metro up 18.4% in prime time; Big Eight up 39.5%; SWC up 12.2%; Pac-10 up 8.3%, and Big Ten up 23.5% on Saturday afternoons. "Naturally, any time you increase household delivery and national reach, it puts you in a better

position with national advertisers," said Ken Haines, executive vice president, Raycom.

Last November, Raycom and the Pac-10 signed a new three-year agreement through the 1991-92 season, and last March, Raycom and the Big Ten signed a new six-year pact running through 1994-95. New deals have also been made with the ACC and Big Eight. College basketball, said Haines, "is more conducive to regionalization" than college football, since with football there are fewer games and more limited windows that force local broadcasters to compete with national schedules, and the cost of production is considerably higher; therefore, national networks appear to be strengthening their hold on football rights.

Raycom will distribute 27 Pac-10 conference games and seven tournament contests to 14 markets in four western states this season. The 22-game Big Ten schedule will go to 38 markets in seven states where Raycom also packages for individual schools that include Michigan and Michigan State, Indiana, Purdue and Northwestern (via cable in Wisconsin).

Stations in 18 markets in five Atlantic Coast states will carry Raycom-Jefferson-Pilot-Telecommunications' 38-game ACC package, which will also be carried nationally on NBC. Raycom's 29-game Big Eight package (including seven Phillips 66-sponsored tournament games) will reach 18 markets in five Midwestern states. Its 26-game Metro Conference package (including two tournament games) has been cleared in 20 markets in eight Tennessee Valley and other southern states. And stations in 19 markets in Texas and Arkansas will carry Raycom's 18-game SWC schedule, which includes three tournament games.

Regional reach

Thanks to a two-month-old agreement between Raycom and Prime Network, many teams in the conferences to which Raycom holds rights—ACC, Big Eight, Big Ten, Metro, Pac-10 and Southwest—will experience extended national exposure. Prime Network is a program-sharing consortium of regional cable sports channels including Home Sports Entertainment (Houston and Dallas), Prime Sports Network (Denver), Prime Ticket (Los Angeles) and Prime Sports Network Midwest (Indianapolis), as well as affiliates in Washington-Baltimore, Detroit and New York.

Within several weeks after Raycom and Prime announced a joint bid for rights to Southwest Conference football, basketball and other sports (BROADCASTING, Aug. 14), the two announced the larger cooperative venture. Through it, as Raycom delivers dozens of conference games to broadcast stations in dozens of markets in each conference region, Prime affiliates outside that region will have access to those games, except where the contract prohibits it or where a shared rights agreement with ESPN or one of the broadcast networks already exists. With the ACC, for example, ESPN carries Raycom games in all regions except the Atlantic Coast.

Most of the Prime affiliates hold rights to one or more local college schedules. Denver-based Prime Sports Network, for example, will carry 12 Colorado State games and also the "Mile High Classic," featuring Colorado State, Colorado, Massachusetts and North Carolina. And Detroit-based Pro Am Sports System will carry 11 Mid-America Conference games between Dec. 2 and March 3.