



Ellis, Raycom are teaming up

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Adding a twist to the trend of broadcasters merging with or creating their own programming and production ventures, Ellis Communications has acquired Raycom Inc., the nation's largest indie producer of college sports.

Ellis Communications, headed by former Act III Broadcasting president Bert Ellis, owns six TV stations, two radio stations and hopes to add a heavy diet of sports programming to the menu and possible entry into syndication through its ownership of Raycom.

Over the last several months, group owners and programmers have linked up to produce their own shows and control their own destiny. For example, Scripps Howard, owner of 10 network affiliates, formed Scripps Howard Prods., headed by former CBS executive David Percelay and former Twentieth TV president Michael Lambert.

Eye on the pros

Although Raycom's focus to date has been on college sports, Raycom executive Ken Haines did not rule out acquiring rights to professional sports, including Major League Baseball and preseason football. Raycom already produces the preseason broadcasts of the NFL's Houston Oilers.

With the Ellis stations as a base, Raycom could try to organize a syndication package of Major League Baseball, a concept that has been floated with the league for several years.

Higher levels sought

“We want to provide Raycom with the resources necessary to take the company to another level of programming, including the possible acquisition of major league sports and high visibility entertainment specials,” Ellis said.

Raycom’s current production slate includes college basketball games of the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big 8, Big Ten, Metro and the Pacific-10 conferences.

Ellis has been on a spending spree as of late, coughing up \$ 140 million for network affiliate stations in Memphis, Tenn.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Toledo, Ohio; Columbia, S.C.; Naples, Fla.; and Reno, Nev.

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