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NWSL achieves huge uplift, though cash rights fee short of '40x' increase

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- **NWSL is earning around \$20m-\$25m per year in cash rights fees, 2024-27, sources say**
- **League is also receiving around \$35m-\$40m per year in marketing VIK and production costs**
- **New deals with four broadcasters represent huge increase on previous \$1.5m CBS fee**

The US's top-tier National Women's Soccer League has achieved a substantial increase in its media rights fees, though the cash value of its agreements is understood to be short of the '40x' total uplift that has been reported.

Several sources that buy and sell women's football rights said the NWSL deals' total cash component is worth between \$20m (€18.7m) and \$25m per season, from 2024 to 2027. However, a spokesperson close to the league said this range was too low.

The league, which has run for 11 years, announced its record domestic deals with ESPN, CBS Sports, Amazon Prime Video and Scripps' ION in [November](#).

For the 2023 season, which took place from March to November last year, Paramount Global-owned CBS paid around \$1.5m for exclusive nationwide domestic rights to the league, *SportBusiness Media* understands.

From 2020 to 2022, the NWSL also had a deal with Amazon-owned streaming platform Twitch for 24 games per season in the US and all games internationally, for an additional \$1m in rights fees per season on top of the \$1.5m from CBS.

The new four-year deals were negotiated by the Endeavor-owned IMG and WME Sports agencies. Endeavor Steaming also

oversees NWSL+, the league's direct-to-consumer product which shows games not picked up by its domestic media-rights holders.

The NWSL initially fielded offers for a single broadcaster to take over from CBS, after the latter was "light years apart", in the words of one source, from the league's financial expectations during its exclusive negotiation window. The league then explored different models and packages, ultimately landing on a multi-broadcaster approach.

SportBusiness Media understands that the league's [previously announced](#) \$60m per-year rights revenue includes around \$35m-\$40m per year in value-in-kind (VIK) through marketing and promotion as well as production subsidies.

The value of long-term media rights deals is sometimes reported including VIK and production costs. This includes tech giant Apple's landmark, 10-year global rights deal with [Major League Soccer](#). The deal is worth at least \$2.5bn over the course of the agreement – and potentially more when also factoring in

revenue-sharing components – but this annual \$250m fee also includes significant production costs.

Allocation

In total, at least 118 out of 190 NWSL games were originally announced to air live on linear broadcast channels and OTT platforms each season.

Disney-owned pay-television broadcaster ESPN will show 20 games per season, CBS will show at least 21 games, online retail giant Amazon will show 27 games on its Prime Video OTT service, and 50 games per year will be broadcast on the free-to-air linear channels of ION, owned by broadcasting company E.W. Scripps.

ESPN's inventory includes exclusive rights to two quarter-finals and one semi-final, while CBS's package includes the NWSL Championship, the annual final playoff game, which it aired in primetime on its over-the-air channel CBS over the 2022 and 2023 seasons, drawing the two biggest audiences in the league's history. CBS went on to add 22 more games in May to its streaming platform, Paramount+.

Prime Video holds rights to the new Challenge Cup match to start the season. This match is similar to the FA Community Shield in England, with the NWSL Shield winner (most regular season points) taking on the NWSL Championship winner (playoff champion).

All remaining matches not on any of the four media partners' platforms are on NWSL+ for free. The league used a similar model last year for international markets without rights deals. NWSL commissioner Jessica Berman described the D2C product as a "catch-all" that ensures fans will never have to miss any games.

Exposure

While it will be highly satisfied with its uplift in rights fees, the NWSL prioritised broad exposure for the league in order to drive fan acquisition.

"This deal was carefully constructed ... in favour of reach, relevance and discoverability by not putting our games behind an NWSL-specific paywall or creating barriers or gate-keeping mechanisms for people to be able to

discover and watch our games," Berman said.

IMG vice-president Andrew Demsey told *SportBusiness Media* after the domestic deal was finalised: "To come in and go through all the different models and end up with that four-partner split really took multiple months and developed into a really good place. Even if we felt good towards the end of the summer and into the fall we still had to land all four planes by that press conference."

The model allows for various ways for potential fans to discover games casually by having matches on CBS and ESPN.

Prime has well over 100 million members in the US, and games on Prime Video are considered accessible. Scripps' ION is on an over-the-air channel while also being available on free streaming apps with FAST (free, ad-supported TV) platforms.

The four companies will be tasked with not only just airing games but also cross-promoting the league, similar to that of other leagues with multiple partners like the National Football League and the National Basketball Association.

“We’re very ambitious,” Demsey said. “This is about growth of the league, we’re all in this together, and [there is] cross promotion — [such as] Amazon opening up the weekend on Friday nights the way they open up on Thursdays for the NFL.”

Football rights in the United States have rarely landed with multiple partners. MLS had national deals with ESPN and Fox for English-language rights, with the vast majority of games on a league pass service or on in-market regional sports networks, before shifting to the 10-year deal with Apple that also sees [34 games per season](#) on Fox Sports.

The NWSL’s previous deal with CBS put the bulk of its games on Paramount+, making discoverability consistent for fans. In 2023, all NWSL clubs had some form of a local media deal for games to be aired in their market.

In April, the league and IMG announced widespread media rights agreements internationally, while NWSL+ is also available in most regions.

Australia's Optus Sport has rights to all matches this season, while ESPN Africa, Canal GOAT in Brazil, TV Azteca in Latin America, and Canal 11 in Portugal have rights to two matches per week. ViaPlay in Scandinavia and TSN in Canada have exclusive rights to one match per week matches, with TSN non-exclusively streaming three matches on TSN+. Through the NWSL's domestic deal with ESPN, ESPN Latin America has rights to 20 annual matches across platforms.

Last season, IMG struck a [multi-territory](#) broadcast deal for the league with subscription streaming platform DAZN.

Domestic Competition

The United Soccer League is [joining the NWSL](#) with its own first-division women's football league launching this August. The league will have eight teams in its first season before adding at least two more in 2025.

The league recently announced that it had struck a multi-year deal with NBCUniversal's streaming platform [Peacock](#) to show all 115 matches from the

regular season and playoffs for the league's inaugural season. With that deal, the USL Super League will do what the NWSL had previously done by keeping all its games in one place. Peacock also shows the Premier League and holds Spanish-language rights to Fifa competitions.

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