



Game On: A Playbook for Local Stations

Core message points

- **Sports bring communities together, and local stations make that possible.** Local broadcast television ensures fans in communities across the country can share in the biggest moments together. At a time where shared experiences can feel harder to find, live sports unite us.
- **Today's viewing landscape is increasingly confusing for fans.** What used to be as simple as turning on the TV now requires multiple platforms, subscriptions and logins. This has become a fragmented and often frustrating experience for fans.
- **Watching sports is getting more expensive for fans.** As more games move behind paywalls and onto subscription platforms, fans are being asked to pay more to watch the teams they love. Watching a full season can cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars each year.
- **Free, local broadcast is the most accessible way to watch live sports.** Local stations provide universal access to the biggest games, free and easy to navigate. It is a simple, reliable way for entire communities to come together around live sports.
- **Viewers overwhelmingly prefer broadcast TV for live sports.** Fans consistently say they want games on free, local television. In fact, the vast majority of the most-watched broadcasts each year are live sports on broadcast TV. For viewers, it remains the simplest and most reliable way to watch.

Fact sheet on the benefits of sports on local TV

- While sports on broadcast TV are free to watch over the air, paywalls and streaming services make for a costly experience for sports fans. Analysts estimate that it costs approximately \$800 to follow the NFL and nearly \$900 for the NBA.
- Eighty seven of the top 100 telecasts of 2025 were on broadcast TV, with sports accounting for more than 90% of these top broadcasts.
- Seventy-five percent of sports enthusiasts watch sports on broadcast at least twice per week and 90% watch at least once per week.
- Ninety percent of sports enthusiasts say it is important for local sports teams' games to be available on broadcast TV.
- Live sports on broadcast TV continue to deliver record-high viewership, giving sports leagues the biggest reach:
 - In 2025, FOX and CBS delivered their best NFL season ratings on record.
 - FOX attracted 277.6 billion minutes of live sports viewing in 2025, the highest total in FOX Sports history.
 - Super Bowl LIX on FOX in 2025 averaged 127.7 million viewers, making it the most-watched show in U.S. history. Super Bowl LX on NBC in 2026 averaged 125.6 million viewers and peaked at a record 137.8 million viewers, making it the second most-watched show in U.S. history.
 - CBS delivered the most-watched regular season game in NFL history with the Cowboys vs. Chiefs on Thanksgiving in 2025, which averaged 57.2 million viewers.
 - The NBA All-Star Game returned to broadcast for the first time since 2002 and delivered its largest audience in 15 years with 8.8 million viewers, up 86% from the previous year.

Suggested local newsroom angles

- Profile a local bar owner juggling multiple subscription costs to show games.
- Calculate the cost of following your local teams for an upcoming season.
- Speak with older adults to understand the confusion caused when games move from one platform to another each week.

- Interview a fan that was unable to watch their team play because they didn't have the right subscription.

Suggested interview questions

For Fans

- How do you usually watch your favorite team's games?
- Have you had trouble finding where a game is airing?
- How many subscriptions do you currently pay for to watch sports?
- Has the cost of watching sports changed for you in recent years?
- Do you prefer watching games on broadcast TV or streaming? Why?

For Local Businesses (bars/restaurants)

- How important are live sports to bringing customers into your business?
- Roughly how much do you spend each month on subscriptions to show games?
- Has the shift to streaming impacted your business or customers?
- Have you had challenges keeping up with which games are on which services?
- What difference does it make for your business when games are available on free, local broadcast TV instead?

For Experts/Analysts

- What does the data tell us about how fans prefer to watch live sports?
- How are rising costs and fragmentation affecting fans' ability to follow their teams?
- What role does free, over-the-air broadcast TV still play in ensuring broad access to live sports?
- Looking ahead, what are the implications for leagues, broadcasters and fans if sports continue to move behind streaming paywalls?

For Policymakers/Industry Leaders

- Why is access to live sports on free, local broadcast TV important to communities?
- Are you concerned that rising costs and paywalls are limiting access for fans?
- How does keeping sports on local broadcast channels help ensure equitable access to major events?
- What role, if any, should policymakers play in preserving access to live sports?
- What's at stake for communities if more games move exclusively behind subscription platforms?

Calendar of marquee sporting events

MLB Regular Season (April-September):

- **Local broadcast stations and regional sports networks (RSNs)** carry the majority of hometown games in many markets.
- **National broadcasts** air on FOX/FS1 (Saturdays), ESPN (Wednesday), NBC ([select Sunday night games](#)) and TBS (select games).
- **Streaming platforms** carry exclusive matchups, including:
 - a. Apple TV+ (Friday Night Baseball)
 - b. Peacock (select Sunday games)
 - c. Roku (select games)
 - d. Netflix (special events)

NBA Playoffs (April-May):

- Broadcast across ABC, ESPN, Amazon Prime, NBC and Peacock

Stanley Cup Playoffs:

- First Round: April 18-May 3
- Second Round Starts: May 6
- Conference Finals Start: May 22
- Stanley Cup Final: June 3-21 (ABC/ESPN)

Kentucky Derby- May 2 on NBC and Peacock

Indianapolis 500- May 24 on FOX

Coca-Cola 600- May 24 on Amazon **Prime Video**

NBA Finals- Exclusively on ABC:

- June 3: Game 1
- June 5: Game 2
- June 8: Game 3 June 10: Game 4 June 13: Game 5 (*if necessary*)
- June 16: Game 6 (*if necessary*)
- June 19: Game 7 (*if necessary*)

Men's College World Series:

- Selection show: May 25 on ESPN2

- Games played on June 12-22
- All games are on ESPN except Championship Series Game 2 (ABC). All broadcast information [here](#).

FIFA World Cup (June 11-July 19):

- [FOX](#) will air 70 matches on network television and 40 matches in primetime.

U.S. Open Golf Championship (June 18-21)

NBA Draft:

- June 23: First Round on ABC/ESPN
- June 24: Second Round on ESPN

Wimbledon (June 29-July 12)

MLB All-Star Week:

- July 13 - The **T-Mobile Home Run Derby** on **Netflix**.
- July 14- The [2026 MLB All-Star Game](#) in Philadelphia on FOX.

The Open Championship (July 12-19):

- Was [NBC](#) is 2025 – need to confirm 2026

Freedom 250 Grand Prix of Washington, D.C.- August 22-23 on FOX

U.S. Open Tennis- August 23-September 13 on [ESPN](#)

Examples of other stations' coverage

1. News 5 Cleveland (April 20, 2026) – [Fed up with big games only on streaming? So are some Ohio lawmakers.](#)
2. WFMJ Cleveland (April 23, 2026) – [Lawmaker pushing back against pro sports streaming](#)
3. KIRO 7 News Seattle (April 1, 2026) – [Fans frustrated with streaming options for Seattle Mariners games](#)
4. CBS8 San Diego (March 28, 2026) – [Padres fans navigate complicated viewing options as season begins](#)