

Written by Maury Brown
Wednesday, 03 October 2012 00:00



This image may, one day, disappear on Biz of Baseball. MLB and FOX have partially listed the national blackout as part of their new agreement that begins in 2014

I didn't get to the story yesterday. Some may have thought I was drowning in the news of the day, sipping champagne and smoking cigars. I was basking in the news, but the truth was a technical issue here at the Biz of Baseball had the site down most of the day for posting. Still, it was, as Terence Mann said in *Field of Dreams*, as if I'd been dipped in magic waters.

You see, MLB announced the finalization of three major national broadcast agreements yesterday. While the 8-year ESPN deal [was announced at the end of August](#), FOX, TBS, and MLB Network were still wrapping things up. On Sept. 20, word got out what the deals would be worth—a [staggering \\$1.5 billion annually when adding in ESPN](#)—which meant that when the deals all kicked in in 2014, each club in MLB would see about \$26.28 million each year over the \$23.72 million they were each seeing as part of the last agreements.

It's not often that I'm pleasantly wrong about things, but with the money so staggering, I assumed that the national blackout policy would remain. In speaking to a senior league official about a week ago, his reply was, "The deals aren't all done yet. It's premature to assume." After more than a decade reporting on the league, I read this simply as, "The blackouts are remaining as they are, we just haven't finalized the deals."

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So, when word arrived today via Twitter that the deals with FOX, TBS, and MLB Network had been finalized, I was really just prepared to report on what I thought was more of the same. After all, baseball has been mired in the blackout policy for so long, I had simply become Pavlov's dog: you said the words "FOX" and "national broadcast deal" and my response was to write "arcane blackout policy" for the ten-billionth time.

Yes, as Joe Sheehan noted on Twitter, the blackout policy has been something that I have screamed from the tallest mountain about. Each year, as I watched MLB Extra Innings on television or MLB.TV on my computer or iPhone, there I'd be on Saturday gnashing my teeth and shaking my fists at the sky as "Due to blackouts, this game is unavailable" came (yet again) on the screen.

But, today was different. Today, something miraculous happened. No, it is not a complete lifting, and it will not happen next season, but it is a bit of a national holiday for baseball fans. Within the press release from FOX, there was this:

Beginning in 2014, subscribers of MLB Extra Innings and MLB.TV have the opportunity to watch Saturday MLB on FOX games subject to certain geographic black outs that protect games assigned to local FOX affiliates.

I must have read this ten times. What FOX and MLB did was throw this writer a curve. What will happen is not too dissimilar to the local blackouts (which, yes, MLB... you're still going to have to figure out one day). FOX selects three regional games each Saturday. If, let's say, the Rangers were playing the Angels in Anaheim, then those within that regional broadcast area would be blacked out on MLB Extra Innings and MLB.TV for that game and forced to watch on FOX. But, if the Yankees were playing in New York and you were within that West Coast television territory for the Angels game, that wouldn't be blacked out thus allowing you to truly get a complete out-of-market package. Given the money in play with the new deal (FOX jumps from \$257.1 million annually to approx. \$500 million a year), the fact that FOX relinquished **any** exclusivity is a major miracle. In other words, be happy and take it, baseball fans.

Sheehan [mentioned on Twitter](#) that I had "been out front on blackout issues for years" but I was no more persistent than Jeff Passan of Yahoo! Sports who has been banging on the "get out from the blackout policy" for years. The reality is, while we spilled gallons of ink on the topic,

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the likely reason that the blackout issue was lifted was that, by MLB's own admission, the blackout issue is the #1 customer service complaint that they've seen year in and year out.

So, remember, you still have to wait till the FOX deal kicks in in 2014, but at least, after all the years of hearing Commissioner Selig say that he was concerned about it, something is (finally) going to happen. Congrats, baseball fans. Take a bow.

[READ ALL THE DETAILS ON THE NEW NATIONAL BROADCAST AGREEMENTS INCLUDING THE FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN](#)



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