

Television Territories Impact Relocation/Expansion

Written by Maury Brown
Sunday, 09 April 2006 16:00



Click On the Above Image To Enlarge

What you are looking at, albeit somewhat outdated since the Expos relocated to Washington, D.C. last year, is reported to be a breakdown of the broadcast territories for the 30 MLB clubs.

The picture tells the story: there is no place in the US where one or more clubs do not broadcast to, with national and superstation broadcasts the exception.

Why is this relevant? Simple: Relocation or expansion.

Recall that when the relocation derby for the Montreal Expos was occurring, Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos threatened to sue MLB if they should decide to relocate the Expos to Washington, D.C. based on territorial infringement. Yes, MLB has territories for where other franchises can be located in relationship to another, and in the case of the Orioles it's as follows:

City of Baltimore; and Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Howard, Carroll and Hartford counties in Maryland

The thing was, both the RFK site and Navy Yard site where both the Expos/Nationals play, and will play in the future do not sit within these counties, or within a special 15 mile buffer zone around all territories. So what was Angelos referring to? He was referring to the map above.

Angelos got MLB to back down because he threatened to sue MLB over territorial infringement into the Orioles ***broadcast*** territory.

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That's the difference. That's why that relocation set a precedent. That's why future relocation or expansion has to deal with the above map.

Take a look at the Pacific Northwest, or more correctly look at Portland.

Portland is now the largest market in the US without MLB. The city sits approx. 175 miles from Seattle, where the Mariners reside. Now look at the sea green on the map that surrounds Portland. The entire state of Oregon—the bottom three counties the exception—is controlled by the Mariners. In the case of the bottom three counties in the state, the broadcast territory is shared between the Mariners, Giants, and A's.

When I interviewed [Mariners President Chuck Armstrong](#) in Dec. of last year, he was non-committal on one hand, but clearly the issue of Portland, and the surrounding area needed to create a broadcast territory for Portland, would be something of keen interest. "I really haven't studied [the issue of relocation or expansion] to Portland," said Armstrong. "We have specifically stayed out of that issue. That's up to the Commissioner's Office and the Relocation Committee. I'm sure if that time comes, they would talk to us about it. No one here is on that committee and we're not involved in that decision."

Now, take a look at Texas, or more correctly, San Antonio.

Since the Portland MLB effort is currently mired in a political landscape where the Mayor is dead set against the use of public subsidy for ballpark construction, San Antonio has grabbed the flag and tried to run with it.

Going back to the map... All of Texas is shared by the Astros and Rangers. Where Portland would need to deal with only one franchise (the Mariners), if the Marlins were to relocate to San Antonio it would mean possible compensation for lost broadcast territory to not one, but two franchises.

While Tom Hicks the Ranger's owner has said that he would not oppose the Marlins relocating to San Antonio (think of the nice payoff for him), the Astros' owner, Drayton McLane does. As

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the [South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported](#)

Astros owner McLane expressed reservations. Houston is 197 miles away from San Antonio, about the distance between Fort Lauderdale and Kissimmee.

The Astros also have their Triple-A affiliate in Round Rock (partially owned by Nolan Ryan), north of Austin. Round Rock is among the best drawing teams in the minors and could see its attendance take a hit with a big-league team in San Antonio.

"If you look at the new Nationals franchise, that created a huge issue in [Baltimore]," McLane told the Houston Chronicle. "I'm sure that if they're serious about moving, they will consult with the Astros and Rangers at that point. I understand the difficulty the Marlins are in. They're where we were before the [stadium] referendum. They need to get a new stadium."

So, we've come back to the issue of Angelos and the relocation of the Expos.

When the MLB selected Washington, D.C. as the new home for the Montreal Expos, and renamed them the Nationals, here what Angelos got:

- A guarantee that will keep Baltimore's annual revenues no lower than \$130 million. If they do drop below that threshold, MLB will make up the difference;
- A minimum franchise value for the Orioles at around \$360 million; and
- A 60-percent equity in a proposed new regional sports network (now, Mid-Atlantic Sports Network or MASN) to the Orioles while the Washington franchise would receive only 40 percent.

If relocation or expansion is going to occur in the future, the question will be whether it is worth the hefty payouts to get into markets that are now considerably smaller than DC was. With Portland ranked 23rd in the country by population, and San Antonio back considerably further than Portland at 37th, the issue will cloud talks of relocation. As Marlins President [David Samson said recently](#)

, "The biggest issue we are having right now as we go through the numbers in San

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Antonio is trying to figure out where we fit in the broadcast market," Samson said.

"It's the No. 1 factor we can't firmly come to grips with, and it's a huge area of competition between Major League Baseball teams and a huge factor in revenue sharing."

"It's complicated. A TV territory would have to be carved out and then monetized."

Samson has been looking at the map.

CREDIT: This map was part of an article by [Dan Werr](#) on Baseball Think Factory in May of 2003. [Please use the following link to see how this map was derived](#) . A
simply amazing bit of research