

Apple TV becomes the new home of Major League Soccer with a 10-year deal for every game

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The home of Ted Lasso will soon become the major home of Major League Soccer.

Apple and MLS announced a huge new rights deal on Tuesday that will start next year and run for 10 seasons, with streaming broadcasts of every game in the league—including those on traditional national TV.

From 2023-32, the Apple TV app will be the place to watch every MLS regular-season contest; the new Leagues Cup between teams from MLS and Mexico's Liga MX; and select games from MLS's reserve and youth leagues.

"We are convinced that this is where our fans are going, this is where the business is going, and we have an opportunity to go there perhaps before anybody else does," MLS commissioner Don Garber said. "And to do it with the company that we believe is going to be the driver and ultimate winner in this global sports streaming space."

Garber claimed that "over 80 percent of our fans" watch soccer via streaming.

"This is the way they are," he said. "This is what they do, this is what they've asked for, and we're going to deliver [to] them."

Every regular-season and Leagues Cup game will be broadcast in English and Spanish, with pregame, halftime, and postgame coverage. Every game involving a Canadian team will also be broadcast in French. Portuguese broadcasts will be added by 2025.

A ton of money, but with a cost

There's perhaps some humor in the notion that MLS's new main platform is known for a wildly popular scripted TV show founded on the premise that American soccer is a joke. But the partnership between Apple and the league is very serious, and historically big.

The Sports Business Journal reported that Apple will pay the league at least \$250 million per year, more than four times the \$65 million per year MLS has received from ESPN, Fox, and Univision combined since 2015.

"I'm a huge sports fan, and for the first time ever as a fan, I'll be able to access everything from a major professional sports league in a single place," Apple senior vice president of services Eddy Cue said. "It's never been done before. We're going to take all of the things that Apple is really good at—our experiences, the style, the approach we take to making great products—to this. ... We think we have a huge opportunity to build on the great work MLS has already done to create and bring a whole new generation of fans, and expand the audience in North America and beyond."

No cable or satellite TV subscription will be required to watch the streams at all, even for the games on traditional national TV. But there will no longer be local TV broadcasts with locally-based announcers.

"Local TV will be out of the deal," MLS president Gary Stevenson said as he took some pointed questions from reporters on the subject.

Still some details to finish

Games will be produced from a central location. Stevenson said "the majority of our matches" will have broadcasters on site, "but not all of them."

Teams will be able to have local radio broadcasts, and fans watching games through Apple TV will be able to select those broadcasts as the commentary.

Apple's deal will span the entire planet, meaning that any soccer fan in

the world can sign up for it. Stevenson said there might be linear TV deals in other countries in the future, but there are none confirmed yet.

While this is the biggest sports rights deal Apple has signed, it is not the company's first. Apple has a package of exclusive Major League Baseball game broadcasts on Friday nights. It's also reportedly a leading candidate to acquire the NFL Sunday Ticket package that has been DirecTV's property for nearly 30 years.

The number of MLS games that will be on traditional national TV in the U.S. and Canada is not clear yet. Multiple sources told The Philadelphia Inquirer that ESPN and Univision are likely to continue as the league's U.S. TV partners, with Fox dropping out.

ESPN also currently has the league's out-of-market streaming rights for ESPN+, but did not bid to keep them.

"We continue to have a great relationship with MLS and are proud of the role we've played in helping grow the league and the sport in the U.S.," a statement from the network said.

A Fox spokesperson declined to comment.

Further benefits

A side effect of the new deal is that MLS will be able to clean up a schedule that Stevenson said has 63 different kickoff times across days and times of the week. Now almost every game will be on Saturday nights and Wednesday nights, except for the few on national TV or any dealing with venue conflicts.

And on nights when there are lots of games over a few hours, there will be a live whip-around show on Apple's platform—a broadcast that many

fans across the league have long desired. Apple TV will also be the home of [game](#) replays, highlight packages, and other MLS programming.

"When we met with Apple the first time, this was not a presentation by Major League Soccer. It was a presentation by Apple," Garber said. "To show us the breadth and scope of their company, and the way they think about customers or they think about fans, how they have a product that is the same and accessible to a consumer no matter where they are in the world."

Stevenson added: "Apple has said to us, 'We will take as much content as you possibly can give us, because that helps us serve the fans.' ... That part of it is very, very, very important to us on the fan creation and development side."

The bad news is that this new package won't be included in Apple's existing subscription streaming package, Apple TV+. It will cost extra. But the official announcement said "a broad selection of MLS and Leagues Cup matches, including some of the biggest matchups, will also be available at no additional cost to Apple TV+ subscribers, with a limited number of matches available for free."

The announcement also said that the MLS package will be given free to every season ticket-holder of an MLS team.

You don't have to have an Apple TV box to get Apple TV content, or even an iPhone or iPad. There are apps on Roku, Amazon Fire TV, and Chromecast devices, and a wide range of smart TVs including Samsung, LG, Panasonic, Sony, TCL, and Vizio brands.

An Apple TV app is also built into Xfinity X1 boxes. So if you're a Comcast cable subscriber with a X1 box, you can pull up the app, log in with your credentials there, and watch games on your TV.

More details about the plan, including how much it will cost and when fans can sign up, will be published in the coming months.

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