

# SEC leaving CBS for ESPN in US\$3bn deal from 2024

Disney confirms exclusive rights to conference's marquee football games for ten years.

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SAM CARP

NEWS



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- SEC secures more than fivefold increase on US\$55m a year it receives from CBS
- ABC to be home of SEC's Saturday afternoon and primetime fixtures, as well as championship game
- Agreement brings all SEC media rights under Disney umbrella, providing 'significant scheduling flexibility'

US college sports' Southeastern Conference (SEC) has confirmed a 'milestone' ten-year media rights agreement with ESPN, bringing an end to the power five conference's long-running association with CBS.

Starting in 2024, the deal will see the Disney-owned broadcaster and its sister commercial network ABC become the exclusive home of the SEC's premium football package and basketball events until 2033/34.

The contract is worth a whopping US\$3 billion, according to the New York Times, meaning the SEC will get an annual payment of US\$300 million, which is over five times more than the yearly US\$55 million it received from CBS.

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Approximately eight key men’s basketball games will be featured across ABC or ESPN, while the deal also includes the right to place a limited number of non-conference football and men’s basketball fixtures on ESPN+ from 2021/22.

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“This is a significant day for the Southeastern Conference and for the future of our member institutions,” said SEC commissioner Greg Sankey. “Our agreement with ESPN will greatly enhance our ability to support our student-athletes in the years ahead and to further enrich the game day experience for SEC fans around the world.

“The broadcast industry’s intense and widespread interest in securing the SEC’s first tier rights is a direct reflection of the sustained excellence achieved by our 14 member schools, and we are thrilled to have been able to maximise our current position of strength to benefit our student-athletes, the fans who go to our games and home viewers.”

The deal will bring all SEC media rights under the Disney umbrella, which the conference said will provide ‘significant scheduling flexibility’ and an ‘array of benefits for fans’, with the agreement allowing for a number of game times and broadcast windows to be announced ahead of the season.

ESPN has a separate deal with the SEC, which also runs until 2034, covering events in football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball and softball. The pair also penned an agreement in 2013 for the creation of the SEC Network, the conference’s dedicated channel.

“This new agreement was born from a strong foundation which began almost 25 years ago and now reflects a shared vision of the future with the SEC, commissioner Sankey and their member institutions,” added Jimmy Pitaro, chairman of ESPN and sports content. “With all the conference’s games under the ESPN umbrella and adding ABC and ESPN+ to our distribution channels, ESPN will have complete scheduling flexibility, resulting in maximum exposure and adding significant benefits for SEC schools, student-athletes and fans.”

CBS has been the broadcast home of SEC football since 1996 and will continue to air the conference’s marquee games for another three years before ESPN’s contract kicks in.

Sports Business Journal (SBJ) reported **nearly a year ago** that CBS would not be renewing its deal, deciding instead to invest the money it would have paid the SEC into other sports.

A CBS statement issued to SBJ at the time read: ‘We made a strong and responsible bid. While we’ve had success with the SEC on CBS, we are instead choosing to aggressively focus on other important strategic priorities moving forward.’

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