

## SPORTS MEDIA INSIGHT

**Jon Higon, Head of Broadcasting, Couchmans LLP**

*In the final of four articles Jon Higon, drawing on his 25 years of sports broadcasting experience, discusses his take on some recent developments in the industry.*

For part one in Jon's series please click here:

[http://www.couchmansllp.com/ssi\\_folder/right\\_nav/documents/SportsMediaInsight-WherenowforBBCandSport.pdf](http://www.couchmansllp.com/ssi_folder/right_nav/documents/SportsMediaInsight-WherenowforBBCandSport.pdf)

For part two in Jon's series please click here:

[http://www.couchmansllp.com/ssi\\_folder/right\\_nav/documents/SportsMediaInsightContentandTechnology.pdf](http://www.couchmansllp.com/ssi_folder/right_nav/documents/SportsMediaInsightContentandTechnology.pdf)

For part three in Jon's series please click here:

[http://www.couchmansllp.com/ssi\\_folder/right\\_nav/documents/SportsMediaInsightGlobalisation.pdf](http://www.couchmansllp.com/ssi_folder/right_nav/documents/SportsMediaInsightGlobalisation.pdf)

### Inflation

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Sports programming, or, more accurately, particular sports programming retains a unique ability to deliver clearly targeted audiences. This is the key to its attraction. Whether it is securing advertising spend, recruiting subscribers, defining a choice of viewing platforms or internet/telecoms providers, access to sports programming remains the "battering ram" (as so described by Rupert Murdoch many years ago (<http://tiny.cc/1t2h3x>)). Be it cricket in India, the Premier League in England, and much of the world, or top soccer leagues in their various territories, wherever there is competition for the rights the prices have been driven up.

Most eye-watering, perhaps, has been the rise in the price of the domestic rights to the Premier League – the next three year cycle is due to yield over £5 billion from the UK alone (<http://tiny.cc/qu2h3x>) (an increase of 70% on the previous rights sale). With the Premier League's international sales cycle having started well with a dramatic long-term tie up (6 years as opposed to the normal 3 year cycle) with NBC Sports in USA (<http://tiny.cc/5u2h3x>) and renewals with long-standing partners in other areas, the likelihood is that the international rights will smash previous records too. In Australia the biggest ever sport rights deal, for AFL (Aussie Rules) (<http://tiny.cc/ow2h3x>), has just been announced following hard on the heels of the NRL's (Rugby League) massive new deal (<http://tiny.cc/rx2h3x>).

Resources are not infinite however, if more and more money is flowing to the major audience driving events, whilst the broadcasters hope and expect these rights to also drive increased revenues, sports which slip back in the popularity stakes are unlikely to fair so well. With more sports fighting for airtime and revenues, some will inevitably suffer. Cycling is enjoying a huge public interest in the UK and with its increased media interest but what about ice skating or gymnastics?

Sports broadcasters still have schedules to fill on 24 hour channels but they do not always have money for the rights fees. This can leave sports having to fund their own coverage leaving them reliant on sponsor support. Whilst the country may only be grabbed by some Olympic sports every four years, these sports need support at all times. Following the success of London 2012 there were various attempts to establish a “Legacy Channel” to draw on the success of the games and continue to showcase the sports and their stars. Unfortunately these attempts have, so far, come to nothing. The IOC is to launch an Olympic Channel and perhaps it is an approach that the new rights holder, Eurosport, will follow and develop on a national level across Europe.

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## About Couchmans LLP

Couchmans is the UK's leading specialist sports law firm (as ranked by the independent legal directories), providing advice to clients operating in the sports industry around the world. The firm serves many of the most prestigious operators in sport, who benefit from an unrivalled collective experience and highly commercial approach.

### **The leading independent legal directories say the following about the firm:**

*"The UK's leading sports boutique" (Legal 500)*

*"If you want someone who knows the sports business inside out, these are the guys to call" (Chambers & Partners)*

*"Formidably strong line-up ... the firm dominates the commercial side of the sector" (Legal 500)*

*"A phenomenal sports practice ... there is clear, blue water between Couchmans and rival boutique sports firms ... the firm acts for some of the best known names in the sports industry" (Legal 500)*

*"The premier sporting boutique ... extremely commercial, increasing the value of every deal with the knowledge it brings" (Chambers & Partners)*

*"The achievement of this firm is incredible ... the country's number one sports boutique" (Chambers & Partners)*

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