

The Beast

The Mogul

The Agent

The Product

The Player

The Fans

The Owner

The Team

Rupert Murdoch made headlines last month with his \$1 billion offer for England's Manchester United soccer club, but he's hardly alone among his fellow media barons. Disney and Time Warner are gobbling up teams and television rights with relative upstarts like Cablevision close behind. In today's world of sports, when you own the team, the network that carries the games, the print media that analyze the scores and the airwaves that carry the news from São Paulo to Singapore, the term "corporate synergy" simply doesn't do justice to the power at your command. And for fans who don't think any of this will affect them: Ever heard of pay-per-view?

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The Manchester United purchase would give Murdoch the world's most famous soccer team — and position him perfectly for TV negotiations with the English Premier League (for which BSkyB holds the satellite TV rights) and a projected European "Super League." It could also inflate sale prices for top teams everywhere. "If Manchester United could go for a billion dollars," one marketing consultant told Sports Business Journal, "then all bets are off for what the Yankees will go for."

Fox subsidiaries control local broadcasting rights to 24 Major League Baseball teams, 26 N.B.A. teams and 20 N.H.L. teams. "For Murdoch," says the entertainment analyst Bishop Cheen, "sports is a code word for TV programming."

Rupert Murdoch had never seen a Dodgers game before buying the team for \$311 million in March.

"We'll be far less intrusive than others," News Corp. co-C.O.O. Peter Chernin told Fortune magazine before the Dodgers purchase. "We know the Dodgers represent something special to the people in the city, evoking an era of nostalgia that resonates from Jackie Robinson to Hideo Nomo." Within a year, the team was discussing replacing Dodger Stadium — and Nomo had been traded.

Unholy alliance? Disney C.E.O. Michael Eisner and Fox TV chairman and C.E.O. Chase Carey have each met with the N.F.L., reportedly to discuss bringing a franchise back to Los Angeles.

News Corp.

CHAIRMAN AND C.E.O.: Rupert Murdoch.

TEAMS: Subsidiary Fox Entertainment Group owns L.A. Dodgers. British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB, 40% Murdoch-owned) controls rugby league in Britain. Murdoch-created rugby league in Australia ultimately forced merger with established league there. Has options to buy stakes in L.A. Kings and Lakers.

TV: Networks with sports programming include Fox, cable channel FX, Fox Sports Net (network of 22 local cable channels in joint venture with TCI's Liberty Media), satellite network Star TV in Asia, 50% of FoxTel cable network in Australia and 20% of Cablevision's Rainbow Media Holdings. Partial rights to N.F.L. (eight years, \$4.4 billion) and Major League Baseball (five years, \$565 million).

FACILITIES: Dodger Stadium and 20% of L.A.'s Staples Center, now under construction.

OTHER: Newspaper holdings include The Australian and 100-plus local Australian papers, along with British newspapers — The Times of London, The Sun and News of the World — as well as The New York Post and more. Also owns HarperCollins book publishing and 20th Century Fox studios.

The office-supply giant Staples will pay \$100 million over 20 years for naming rights to the new home of the Lakers, Clippers and Kings — the most lucrative such deal in sports history.



In August, Fox dumped money-losing U.S. TV rights to the N.H.L. Disney, owner of the Mighty Ducks, jumped in with a five-year, \$600 million contract for exclusive rights for ABC, ESPN and ESPN2.

This month, Fox's WNYW nabbed local broadcast rights for the Yankees in a two-year, \$40 million deal, cementing its bicastal grip on local sports. Three months earlier, Fox Sports West bought cable rights for the Anaheim Angels and Mighty Ducks from Disney Sports.

Buying naming rights to Atlanta's new arena will bring unprecedented access to the T.W. media empire, in a package expected to surpass L.A.'s \$100 million Staples deal.

Synergy redux: The logo of the Thrashers (due to join the N.H.L. in 1999) was unveiled on the team's Web site, the CNN-S.I. site and during halftime segments of N.B.A. broadcasts on TBS and TNT.

The most influential Emilio Estevez movie ever? Disney's "Mighty Ducks" (1992) gave the N.H.L. franchise (founded 1993) its name. The N.H.L. Ducks logo provided a key plot point for the sequel, "D2" (1994).



As part of its plan to "think globally but customize locally," ESPN provides thousands of hours of cricket coverage in India each year.

Promising that "we are not your father's sports magazine" (read: Time Warner's Sports Illustrated), ESPN the Magazine made its heavily cross-promoted debut in March.

In 1996, a year after buying into the Angels, Disney redesigned the team's logo, which would end up resembling the ads for Disney's "Angels in the Outfield" (1994).

Last year, Tony Tavares, then Disney Sports president, told Fortune: "Our main goal is to get people to spend their disposable income with properties associated with the company, whether they're our theme parks, videos, movies or our sports teams. If you've got a dollar, we want it."

Disney

CHAIRMAN AND C.E.O.: Michael Eisner.

TEAMS: Owns Mighty Ducks of Anaheim, plus 25% controlling interest in Anaheim Angels and option to purchase entire franchise from Gene Autry's estate.

TV: Includes ABC, Lifetime and 80% of ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN Classic Sports and ESPN International (including Eurosport, ESPN Star Sports channels in Asia and four channels in Latin America), partial rights to N.F.L. (eight years, \$9 billion) and Major League Baseball (five years, \$440 million).

FACILITIES: Disney's Wide World of Sports complex in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

OTHER: Disneyland, Walt Disney World, Touchstone and Miramax movie studios, ESPN the Magazine.

Disney reportedly offered to make a movie of Orlando (El Duque) Hernández's life story as part of the Angels' unsuccessful bid for the Cuban pitcher.

Fox owns 20% of the Garden and its teams and stakes in local TV broadcast rights to the seven N.Y. area baseball, hockey and basketball teams.

Time Warner

CHAIRMAN AND C.E.O.: Gerald M. Levin.
VICE CHAIRMAN: Ted Turner.

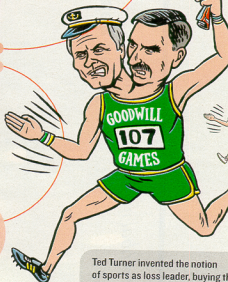
TEAMS: Owns Atlanta Braves, Atlanta Hawks, Atlanta Thrashers, Goodwill Games, World Championship Wrestling.

TV: CNN, HBO, TNT, TBS and dozens more.

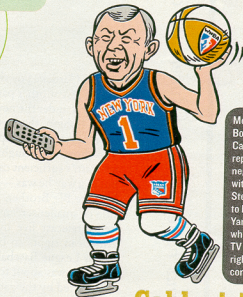
FACILITIES: Turner Field, plus Atlanta arena, now under construction.
OTHER: The world's largest media corporation owns Sports Illustrated and dozens of other Time Inc. magazines, along with Warner Brothers film and TV, New Line Cinema and five major record labels.

Smarting from their respective losses of N.F.L. TV rights in January, Time Warner and NBC have announced tentative plans to start a new football league.

In 1997, Turner Sports signed an four-year, \$890 million deal to continue as the N.B.A.'s cable partner.



Ted Turner invented the notion of sports as loss leader, buying the Braves in 1976 in part to insure programming for his Channel 17 station, which later became TBS, once assigned No. 17 to pitcher Ar Messersmith and put "Channel" in his uniform in place of Messersmith's name. The baseball commissioner made Turner change it back.



Meet the new Boss? Cablevision reportedly negotiating with George Steinbrenner to buy the Yankees, whose cable TV and radio rights it now controls.

Cablevision

CHAIRMAN: Charles F. Dolan.

TEAMS: Owns 60% of N.Y. Rangers, Knicks and Liberty.

TV: Through its Rainbow Media Holdings subsidiary, owns controlling interest in Madison Square Garden L.P., including arena, teams, MSG Network and Fox Sports New York. Also operates four regional networks formerly part of Sportschannel family.

FACILITIES: In addition to Madison Square Garden, owns controlling interest in Radio City Entertainment.