upert 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 brave new world of sports, when you own the team, the network that carries the games, the print media that analyze the scores and the airwaves from San Diego to 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?

Joanna Cagan and Neil deMause are the authors of “Field of Schemes: How the Great Stadium Swindle Turns Public Money Into Private Profit.”

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.”

News Corp.

CHAIRMAN AND C.E.O.: Rupert Murdoch.
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, $955 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.

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 ESPn 2.

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

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.

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.

“We’ll be far less intrusive than others,” News Corp. C.E.O. Peter Chernin told Fortune magazine before the Dodgers purchase. “We know the Dodgers represent something special to the people in the city; evolving an era of nostalgia that resonates from Jackie Robinson to Hideki Nom.” Within a year, the team was discussing replacing Dodger Stadium — and Nom had been traded.

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

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WARD KUYTON
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-SI 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 1933) 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.

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.

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

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.

In 1997, Turner Sports signed a four-year, $690 million deal to continue as the N.B.A.'s cable partner.

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

Last year, Tony Vazquez, 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."

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.