ESPN agreement to bring unprecedented exposure to SBC

New contract goes through 2012

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NEW ORLEANS - The Sun Belt Conference and ESPN announced today a new agreement that extends the network's relationship with the conference through the 2011-12 academic year. The agreement, which will take effect beginning in the 2009-10 academic year, will expand the conference's national television exposure to unprecedented highs and was negotiated exclusively with ESPN, Inc.

"The Sun Belt Conference's negotiation with ESPN, Inc. is one of the most significant events in the conference's 33 year history," said Sun Belt Commissioner Wright Waters. "There have been many great steps taken in the history of this league including the Sun Belt becoming a member of the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision and the Bowl Championship Series. I firmly believe that this new deal and our partnership with ESPN, Inc. is another important step for the success of the Sun Belt Conference."

"We are thrilled to remain the exclusive national television home for the Sun Belt Conference," said Burke Magnus, ESPN senior vice president, college sports programming. "Through this extensive agreement, ESPN's long relationship with the conference will continue to grow with additional coverage across our multiple platforms, including ESPNU."

The new agreement will give the Sun Belt Conference's rising football league a minimum of two games on either ESPN or ESPN2. Additionally, ESPN Regional Television will have the right to produced, distribute and syndicate up to five football games each year. ESPN, ESPN2, and ESPNU, the 24-hour college sports network, will also be granted additional opportunities to select games to air. This trio of networks will be granted a 12 day rolling window during the season to select additional games to televise. Games available for selection are after the third Saturday of the season. This provides the Sun Belt Conference additional opportunities for exposure previously not available.

In recent years, football teams from the Sun Belt Conference have made the most of their appearances on the ESPN family of networks. Perennial league power Troy defeated Big 12 powers Missouri and Oklahoma State in nationally televised contests. The Trojans also won the 2006 R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl on an ESPN nationally televised game. Florida Atlantic became the first Sun Belt Conference team to win bowl games in back-to-back years, as the Owls won the 2007 R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl and the 2008 Motor City Bowl in ESPN nationally televised games.

ESPN and the Sun Belt Conference have a long history as partners in men's basketball. ESPN will televise the conference's men's basketball championship game for the 29th consecutive season in 2009, marking its longest affiliation with any conference in the country.

ESPN will continue to air the Sun Belt Conference men's basketball championship game and the new deal will also create additional appearances for the league's men's basketball programs. Sun Belt Conference men's basketball teams will now make a minimum of four appearances annually on ESPN or ESPN2. Additionally, ESPN Regional Television maintains the right to produce, distribute and syndicate up to eight men's basketball games annually.

Sun Belt Conference women's basketball, long one of the conference's most successful sports, will also benefit greatly from the new deal. Sun Belt Conference women's basketball teams will make a minimum of two appearances annually on ESPNU. This is the first time women's basketball is guaranteed national exposure on an ESPN network in the history of the Sun Belt Conference. ESPNU will televise either the league's women's basketball championship game, or up to two regular season games.

Detailing the Sun Belt Conference-ESPN Agreement

- The Sun Belt Conference maintains national exposure on the most prominent all sports network.
- As an emerging football league there is now a greater chance for inclusion in national telecasts on ESPN, ESPN2 and ESPNU through the 12 day rolling window.
- 60% increase in the number of games/appearances over the current ESPN agreement.
- There is the potential for the SBC to have over 40 appearances on the ESPN through ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU and ESPN Regional Television each academic year.

Football

- The Sun Belt Conference receives guaranteed national exposure on ESPN or ESPN2 with a minimum of 2 Sun Belt controlled games a year.
- Upon request the Sun Belt Conference will make available two midweek games to ESPN/ESPN2.
- Through a 12 day rolling window (i.e., by the second Monday preceding each Saturday telecast date) ESPN may select additional games to air after the first three weeks of the season for inclusion on ESPN, ESPN2 or ESPNU. Previously this option did not exist.

Men's Basketball

- 25% increase in guaranteed annual exposures on ESPN and ESPN2.
- Continued relationship with ESPN for championship week. The Sun Belt Conference has the longest relationship with ESPN for its men's championship game than any other conference in the country. The men's championship game will continue to air on ESPN or ESPN2.

Women's Basketball

- First time women's basketball is guaranteed national exposure on ESPNU.
- ESPNU will air either the women's championship game or at minimum one women's regular season game.

Olympic Sports

- ESPN retains first selection rights on all other sports.

Syndication

- ESPN Regional Television retains the rights to produce, syndicate and distribute up to eight men's basketball games a year.
- ESPN Regional Television retains the right to produce, syndicate and distribute up to five football games a year.

What they are saying about the Sun Belt Conference-ESPN Agreement

Frank T. Brogan, President of Florida Atlantic University and President of the Sun Belt Conference

"The Sun Belt agreement with ESPN will provide tremendous exposure to a league that is growing exponentially as it showcases the quality of teams that take to the field, the diamond and the courts. The agreement will also allow universities to demonstrate the educational opportunities that many Sun Belt schools offer. In a time when many universities can not afford to spend precious dollars in advertising to potential students and donors, televising games will allow for publicity at the national and international level."

Peg Bradley-Doppes, Denver Athletic Director and Representative for ADs on Executive Committee

"This is a wonderful and significant achievement for the Sun Belt Conference that provides our great league with important national exposure. Being associated with the prestigious ESPN moniker is an added plus for our thriving league. I think the conference was very progressive in its negotiations as shown by the inclusion of our highly successful women's basketball league in the agreement."

Larry Blakeney, Troy University Head Football Coach

"It is always a great opportunity for all of us in the Sun Belt Conference to play in front of the national audience that ESPN provides. To be on that grand stage is something that is very exciting for our players and fans. As a coach we look at playing on these national broadcasts as a great recruiting tool. I am personally very excited about having additional opportunities to showcase our league."

Ronnie Arrow, South Alabama Men's Basketball Coach

"Whenever you can get the exposure that ESPN provides, it is a major plus, not only to the families in your program, but to potential new student-athletes as well. This agreement adds a whole new dimension in coverage to the conference and its institutions."

Rick Insell, Middle Tennessee Women's Basketball Coach

"I commend the league for moving forward and continuing to build solid television coverage for our conference. Having a chance to be on ESPN is always a big plus for any league and we feel this new deal with ESPN will only enhance the Sun Belt's reputation around the nation."

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