**Unofficial Podcast Episode 3**

**Re-Thinking Sport: Media Strategy**

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:00:00] Hello, and welcome to another edition of Unofficial Partner. The sports business podcast. I'm Richard Gillis. Today is the third episode in our series with Portas Consulting group and it's about Media and Media Strategy with our guests, Andrew Ryan from FIBA Media, Glen Killane Chief Executive of Eurovision Sports, and Wissam Khalaf, Partner at Portas Consulting group.

The Media Rights market is central to the sports economy, obviously, but we often talk about it in narrow price terms, focusing on how much money has been extracted by the major rights holders and ignoring the nuance and complexity and variation in strategic approach required in each particular marketplace.

So, for example, what works for the Premier League in Germany is very different to how the Tour de France is sold in China or how international basketball is viewed in the Middle East.

The nature of the demand and the competitive structure in the local TV market will shape the strategy.

From selling rights to Free to Air or Pay TV or via an agency and increasingly Private Equity groups. Or do you build a direct-to-fan channel?

These are decisions faced by Andrew Ryan who runs FIBA Media. And we start by going back to first principles. How does FIBA make money?

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:01:19] I'll talk about that primarily from the media side of things. So FIBA will still obviously make a significant proportion of its commercial revenue from the media rights side. It has a fairly comprehensive global sponsorship portfolio as well, but the media side is still a very powerful element.

And the media approach, the value of the rights is very much a territory by territory matter, obviously as compared to a domestic football property, we don't necessarily have the one territory where there's a huge concentration of media rights revenue, and which there is one absolute territory in which brings us most of our benefits, but we also have probably a delineation between those territories in which international basketball, and particularly games or tournaments involving a particular national team, are not only of huge media rights value, but have huge national significance as well, in the same way that a lot of your listeners gather around and see international football matches, particularly during the World Cup or the Euros, as a very important matter, the same applies to basketball, whether it's European teams in the Euro basket or global basis for the World Cup.

We work with intermediaries in the form of media rights, broadcasters, and that can go everywhere from your typical Pay TV acquirers in many markets to a lot of places where there's significant state interest in the in the games or the events. And quite often they will also work either n tandem or exclusively with a state or ad funded Free to Air broadcaster.

So, I don't think FIBA is necessarily different. We obviously have some territories and are seen more as a challenger sports rights property where basketball is either still developing or basketball as an international property is still developing. But I think probably people would underestimate how many countries have a very strong base in watching and consuming international basketball.

Aside from that, there's probably a few things in which either FIBA does differently, or it has been somewhat more advanced, in the way it manages its media rights. FIBA was very much one of the early adopters of OTT as a delivery product. And in particular, a focus on giving fans the ability to watch basically all of the content that comes from FIBA’s events.

S, FIBA not only has the benefit of managing the rights for the World Cup, but all of the continental events as well. And you look at qualifying tournaments and various other events that they'd come within our FIBA media portfolio at the least. So that OTT service of which is now called Live Basketball TV has been around for quite a deal of time and has provided an excellent outlet for a subscription based product, which enables particularly super fans or fans in underserved markets to access content that they might not otherwise be able to watch on traditional TV services.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:04:18] You mentioned the OTT program and in terms of the channel, what is it its real purpose? Is it a marketing platform or is it a commercial platform? One thing, how many people gravitate from being interested in basketball to then going and subscribing? Because you've got to be pretty avid to want to subscribe to a basketball only channel presumably.

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:04:37] Yeah, it's a, it's an excellent point, Richard. I think there's a lot of mistaking for direct-to-consumer activity and mixing that up with an OTT service, which for a lot of properties - not necessarily ours because of the way we tend to price in the market - but a lot of those can be pretty high entry points for someone who is just dabbling in the sport.

And the concept that someone who is not an avid fan is going to come along and pay $150 or £250 to access an OTT service when they're just at the entry point of following the sport is a slightly ridiculous concept. I think it's interesting that most of the Direct-to-Consumer services that involve OTT to date have been very much singularly focused around that OTT product.

And so when people talk about them as a marketing tool or a tool in order to bring people within your CRM system, it's a strange way to singularly focus on something that is a relatively high entry point of something that really is applicable to your more avid fans.

I think where we'd like to go with the development of that, is look at ways to turn that into much more of a comprehensive media and fan oriented product, because that way, when you're making the relevant investments in CRM or other user data infrastructure, when you're trying to introduce people to your sport in a way which gives them a singularly easy entry point, but something in which you can potentially ladder them up from being an interested inquirer into someone who will actually see value in buying an event pass or buying a yearly pass for an OTT service.

That's when I think that sort of activity becomes far more interesting. In the meantime, those OTT products, and certainly ours at the moment, as you mentioned earlier, are excellent when it comes to either servicing fans who are in territories in which there is probably a relatively limited amount of content outside of the national team and the main events that are made available on typical sports or free to air services. And also, for those mega fans or fans who were in territories outside of their home region who are looking to access content, which would be very unlikely to be on a on a local television distribution platform.

But I think there's a long way to go on those services. But also I think that most people are coming around to the idea now that actually running a successful OTT service is a fairly complex matter. It wasn't that long ago when some of the chat was about the Premier League starting its own OTT service and people essentially were just taking multipliers of the amount of people who follow the Premier League, multiplying it by £80 or a £100 and decided: ‘that's what you're going to enable as a as a profit center’. As opposed to taking account of the elements of unpredictability of revenue, the difficulty of marketing that product, when you're starting from scratch the difficulty of actually getting people to make those sort of monetary investments when it's not something that they have done out of habit before - the range of complications...

And then when you get into data, trying to work out, ‘am I going to actually share my service on an aggregator, like an Amazon channels or any of the other multi-district platforms that are emerging? Or am I going to distinctly try to do this myself? Because I'm desperate to hold on to every piece of user data. And I want that direct relationship with the customer.’

It's really complex stuff, and it shouldn't be underestimated, what it would take to not only make that a success, but what it would take to actually transition wholly and solely to a direct -to-consumer proposition, as opposed to using intermediary board broadcasters as at least part of your content distribution strategy.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:08:33] So there's geography in there. What are the top three markets for FIBA?

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:08:39] It will depend, as you can imagine, a lot on where a World Cup is hosted at any given time. So, we had the 2019 World Cup hosted in China - certainly the selection of China as a host was a strategically very important decision for FIBA. Basketball was a massive sport in that territory.

So as a result, not only China, but subsequently we've got the next world cup in a combination of the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia. And as a result, those markets are both financially and strategically also considered very important for FIBA.

If you look traditionally, there has always been a great strength within certain parts of Europe, whether it's Greece, the Balkan States Spain, France, where there's traditionally a lot of support for the national team and also fairly consistently strong performances in a lot of those countries.

The national basketball team is actually probably the premier national team over and above the football team as well. So in those territories it's a highly competitive, proactive for broadcasters to get a hold on. And also one that's very much treasured by the free to air market as well.

There are other places where I guess, we certainly wouldn't call them developing markets but across the vast majority of Latin America and the Americas, both Canada and the USA. There's a strong interest. The USA's an interesting one because it's probably a territory in which a lot of people would default that is the biggest market, because it is the most natural basketball market in the world.

Most people are very familiar with the NBA but at the same time, it's also a market where it's incredibly crowded in terms of high-level professional basketball, because you've got the NBA rights held between a number of different broadcasters on the national level, but also the concept of all the different regional sports networks as well who also have access to content on a team-by-team basis. So, it's very saturated in terms of basketball coverage. And so, while there is a great interest in international basketball, there it is also something that is on a different plane to the, NBA, domestic rights as well.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:10:53] Before Andrew Ryan talks further about FIBAs media strategy. I want to bring in Glen Killane. Glen is Head of Eurovision sport, which is part of the European broadcast union, the EBU, and that's an Alliance of public service media across and beyond Europe. Glen's role is key in the acquisition of rights on behalf of Eurovision sport division members I’ll let him explain this in more detail.

**Glen Killane:** [00:11:17] The EBU itself is a member owned and member operated organization and our members are public service media organizations, both commercial and non-commercial, across 56 different markets, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. The version of the EBU that I'm responsible for is the sports portion.

But there are other portions, such as media which runs the Eurovision song contest and our news operation, which is quite a big operation in terms of the news exchange and the ability to generate stories and share stories amongst the membership. And technology and innovation, and other areas like radio.

And we have Eurovision services, which is basically Eurovision, the satellite network, which is the genesis of the EBU where 70 years ago it was founded on the basis of kind of just distributing satellite signals around the continent of Europe and North Africa.

And the reason that the geographical area is such, was because that was the satellite footprint originally. But the sports portion the sports part - Eurovision sport - basically we are set up to, to uh, collective bargaining on behalf of our members, we acquire sports rights. We fund those sports rights through the members. It's an association and we're a not-for-profit, but we're also not for loss. So effectively we gather bids on various sports rights from our members and we place those bids. Occasionally in partnership with non EBU members to try and finance overall deals, but we have deals with FIFA for the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, across 35 territories.

We have the Tour de France. We own the Tour de France across the entire European continent. And we sub-license a portion of that to Eurosport, which was originally an EBU channel setup up in the late eighties. And then subsequently sold on. We have a deal with UEFA women's European championships next summer in the UK.

And we have lots of stuff, like lots of Olympics sports such as deals with European Athletics, European Swimming, World Athletics, World Swimming. European gymnastics, World Gymnastics, etc., World Rowing. So, a lot of sports. So, we have about 200 plus sports events a year over 30 contracts with different federations, but pretty much every European based Federation, we have some sort of contact with, and we have some relationship with.

Our main aim is to serve our members and work on their behalf to acquire content. And that's become a moot point. It was set up some time ago, but I suppose in terms of, rebalancing the equation somewhat with global entities, there's an element of what we do that is really, that actually rings true, even though the concept dates way before any of these global entities, wherever set up.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:13:55] Our third and final guest, is Wissam Khalaf who is the Portas Consulting partner in the Middle East region. One of the most complex and controversial in the sports rights marketplace.

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:14:08] I am a partner with Portas in the Middle East office, and I've had the chance to work with different clients, in the public sector, mostly. So that's Ministries, sports federations, sports leagues.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:14:21] So in terms of the role of sport to your clients in that region, it can be participation driven. It can be where there is a societal, objective, and then we go all the way to the other side. And there is a hard-line commercial objective. So, depending on who the client is and what their context is, give us a flavor of what most of the work relates to.

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:14:44] Absolutely. I think in the region today in the middle East, there is an unprecedented awakening of promoting sports in all sorts of aspects. So, whether it's participation to get social benefits or whether it's to actually contribute to the GDP, create jobs and so on. We are seeing massive investments from the local governments into developing and promoting sports.

Now, what does this mean for, uh, for sports and media rights? It's two things. One, media will be used (and is already being used) as a channel to promote the sports that, the governments are looking to push, whether it's to increase people's participation, whether it's to promote culture and heritage.

And the other thing, given the importance of sports to diversify the revenues of the government, there is kind of an underlying objective. To actually get, some sort of returns on the investments in sports in general. And then in sports media companies that the governments are investing in.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:15:42] We obviously talk a lot about the future of media rights, television broadcast, rights, the bundle, the cord cutting arguments, the diversification of, media across digital and what that means from a rights holder perspective. How do those themes play out in the middle East region?

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:16:03] I think the Middle East is no different to anywhere in the world, really. There is quite an established foundation for traditional media, but looking at, what the population wants, what are the consumption trends…

Those again are no different from other parts of the world. There was a strong push to actually develop a comprehensive offering that includes both the traditional channels and the digital channels. And it’s no longer enough for the broadcasters or the rights holders to actually just develop the time content, which is broadcasting the game or showing highlights of the game. But I think it's becoming more and more important to actually develop a holistic value proposition around that. So that includes, engagement on social media. It could include things like developing a fantasy league that would be really appealing for the new generations that might have a challenge watching two hours straight of a game on TV, but rather be more interested in those new forms of digital engagement. So I think that there is a trend of actually developing more diversified touchpoints with the viewers. And this could be many different things.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:17:11] One of those many different things relates to the digital question. And in particular, how to construct the Direct to Fan relationship. This is a question facing every sports Federation or governing body. And I asked Andrew Ryan about FIBAs approach.

The challenge that every sports rights holder, Federation or governing body has which is: do you build a house and expect people to come to it, or are you going to take your content and distribute it to where they are ready?

And that comes with lots of tradeoffs, noticeably commercial ones, trying to generate an audience that will pay you and give their data to you. Or do you go the Buzzfeed route and say they're never going to come to our website and we're going to have to accept that, that you're generating fame and engagement, but then you're doing it on other people's platforms so that's a dilemma that the answer will change, depending on who you talk to, but in terms of FIBA, is there a strategic impulse that puts you in one direction or another on that sort of line?

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:18:13] I don't think you're alone in not having an answer to that, Richard, and I genuinely don't think there is an answer as such. There is no one size fits all for that approach. I think the concept of thinking that you can create excitement and an energy around your sports property by going completely blank on social media is something that does not make sense to me whatsoever.

And I think you’ve had a great test product with the American professional sports over a number of years with almost all of them having taken a different perspective on how much content they have they have been flexible enough to allow on social, whether or not delivered or by themselves or through fan created content.

And certainly, the NBA are the ones that have taken the greatest and most flexible approach with that. And in terms of the demographics of their audience and where they probably have positioned themselves for the future, you would suggest that approach has turned out to be the most sensible one in the circumstances.

You also had the NFL who took a fairly draconian and negative approach to social media for a number of years and have now actually taken some really strong steps in on that front.

And the last couple of years, I think for an organization like FIBA we obviously have a basketball fan public who have a certain expectation created, whether by the NBA or many other domestic leads, and certainly cultivated by ourselves that the ability to see highlights content where the short form individual clips or whatever it is on social services or video platforms such as YouTube is something they have certainly come to expect. I certainly don't view that as a negative whatsoever. I think one thing I'm very big on though is undertaking that activity with some sort of objective that's linked to it.

And I think that's something that we've already started to do successfully and in conjunction with FIBA communications who manage all the FIBAs social accounts and handles to utilize that distribution of content to either deliver links to broadcast activity or to promote upcoming broadcasts or to have links to sponsors or a sponsored branded content series, for instance, so that it's not just activity that's happening in a vacuum.

It is amplifying the fact that your event is happening or going to happen at any given time, but there is a linkage to your own and operated properties, because I think that is the holy grail for all sports on a digital product front that you want to establish relationships with fans directly on your properties, where you can have all number of either transactional or benefits where you're learning more about your fans and what it is that they like at any given time.

But to suggest that it has to be one or the other and all being on aggregated public, almost across our public platforms or all on your own and operated platforms. I don't really see that as a sensible approach as with everything, all of this is far more complex than a lot of people would love to give the sports industry credit for and generally, anyone who is giving you a very simplistic, you must do this, or you must not do that. I generally would question the incentive of why they are pushing that particular strategy.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:21:50] It's fair to say that FIBA's media strategy is more evolved than the majority of international federations and governing bodies. Glenn Killane at Eurovision Sport deals with many smaller federations. So I wanted to know how the D2C question affects them.

We're at an interesting moment, I think because you've got a lot of rights holders who have been sold the idea, and we all could intellectually get there. We understand what going direct to their fans and the consumers and the long tail argument.

All of it makes sense. I'm just wondering whether it's as easy as the tech vendors will have us believe.

**Glen Killane:** [00:22:30] For me, there's football and there's everything else. So let's just go in with that kind of a frame on this, because when you're talking about football, you're not talking about every sport.

Frequently we're dealing with European associations who are not even in receipt of the kind of Olympic funding that a lot of the federations get and, they're quite small organizations, but they're very interesting rights. Because actually increasingly on at European level, our members are, not all of them are big countries.

There are five big countries, and maybe the Nordic region as well. You could classify that. They’ll always win medals at world championships and things like that. But the majority of them are like, come from countries like me, like Ireland small countries that, every 10 years you might, will win a world a metal and the world championships, or it could be longer.

So European competitions are actually more attractive because it's more, they have more of a chance. But a lot of those federations don't have the capacity to build out tech or spend kazillions on trying to drive their own OTT proposition where they don't have a distribution mechanism.

And I think that's where we can come in. And I think those relationships we have are really important to us. We want to try and make sure that we drive those into the future. And I think aggregation is the key because I think, one of my mantras is, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That actually, when you bring a lot of these Olympic sports together in the same way as was done with the European championships in 2018, when we brought seven sports together, back by the EBU members in Glasgow, in Berlin. And it was a tremendous success because like the European athletics championships on its own is a great competition.

But when you bring that together with the European Swimming Championships, Gymnastics Championships, Cycling Championships, Rowing Championships… It becomes something really compelling. And we've audiences of over 250 million people for that for a first for a first effort.

And there's something interesting there. And I think the same is true in the digital world. If you start trying to develop OTT propositions, each Federation going direct to consumer, it's grains of sand on the beach kind of stuff. And I think it's a terribly unsatisfactory customer experience as well.

You have to download 17 apps to watch the sport that you want to watch. So I think bringing it together and that's what we're working on is bringing our sports together on a platform on on an OTT proposition into the future.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:24:46] The Direct-to-Consumer question or the OTT question is outlined by Glen there from a, from a media perspective. It brings for the rights holder and the governing body, or the Federation, some big questions and not least: what is it that they're trying to do what role does the content play? This is a question I wanted to ask Andrew Ryan, FIBA.

It's an expensive decision, but also talks to what a governing body is in terms of its ability to act like a media company. It seems to me there's a whole load of blind assumptions made about going direct to fans.

But then when you reach them, what you're going to look like, what you're going to sell them. Are you a retailer? Are you a media company? How you're defining yourself becomes much more important and these are expensive decisions.

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:25:39] Very expensive decisions, but I think you've also you've also probably touched on one of my bugbears from the last few years of whether it's a league or a club or a governing body describing themselves as: ‘we're now a data company, or we're now a media company’. It's just an absurd over-simplification of these organizations as effective business operations.

When you look at your typical professional league and the clubs that underpin it, you have obviously pretty significant media sales, operations that are not done. There's obviously a lot of people who will sit out there and say, ‘we're now at peak media rights value’, or ‘sports value’s never going to be the same’.

Well, whether or not that is true, you have a large number of incredibly intense, elegant, and sophisticated individuals working in that sphere at any given time to try to maximize the returns for their league or for their governing body. And whether that is returns in terms of trying to get the greatest exposure and visibility, and particularly on a multi Platform, multi distribution structure on a broken down territory by territory structure or alternatively trying to generate, a high returns from the pay TV market, because there's very much a focus on profit maximization that in and of itself is a very sophisticated activity.

Not to mention the other part of that, the main commercial revenue in terms of the sale of sponsorship, either the concept of packaging and selling an association to a club or to a league is something that there is a genuine art to and something that once again, you have some very experienced and talented individuals working on, then you moved all the transactional components, whether or not it's ticketing, whether it's selling of merchandise.

And then you have clubs who are almost quasi- real estate operations to a certain extent where they've set up a new ballpark or a new arena, that's part of a multipurpose development. And when you take all of that into account, and you think about the incentivization structures that exist from competition to competition, whether it's qualification for a pan European league or winning a premiership, that brings a certain amount of direct financial value in terms of winnings or out of the exposure that allows you to sell a greater commercial property at the end of the day. These are mostly sports organizations are really quite sophisticated operations and operations that involve a pretty large number of revenue streams that all have to be managed and all have to coexist, and all have to help each other within that same ecosystem.

So, the concept of just singularly referring to yourself as a data company or a media company is just uh, just something that doesn't ring true in the real world. On that specific topic of OTT? Absolutely. The difference between just licensing your content to a broadcaster that has an inbuilt high level of audience, a sophisticated approach to the marketing of their services, which will then include your property, the production capacity that they essentially make available to numerous sports properties in their territory, going and replacing all of that is a really, it's certainly not impossible by any stretch, but you certainly do want to go in there with your eyes open as to what's necessary and to be very cognizant of the costs that are involved.

I think at the end of the day, if you've got the financial model or the cash availability that allows you to do that, you can effectively buy the services and buy the expertise necessary to do all of that. The bigger question is, can you actually deliver on the strategy that underpins something that would whether or not it's a full or a partial move to an OTT service, particularly if you're in a property which has experienced a quite heavy income from media rights sales in the previous cycles, and your constituents have gotten very used to having that sort of predictable income come in over, over a multi-year period.

That is a big challenge, but so I think once again, it comes back to that very much. It very rarely is any of this a black and white scenario. When it comes to our next cycle of FIBA rights, which we're finalizing our current sales cycle for events that start towards the end of this year, when it comes towards the next one that is in four years’ time, there is a fairly reasonable possibility that we will have a far more expensive presence on OTT or may actually end up having a lot more content exclusively on OTT.

But all of that will come. And if it does happen, following some fairly balanced analysis of the ins and outs of doing so, of assessing what the media rights value that we might be foregoing from having less content available in the broadcast market, how that affects the sponsorship program that FIBA runs as well.

These are really complex discussions. And so I think the more our industry commentators and particularly those who love to put forward simplistic reflections or suggestions, can take that step back and recognize that each ecosystem or each part of the sports industry is a very complicated beast in and of itself.

I think the better for all of us.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:31:08] So as you can hear the creation of OTT platforms creates as many questions as sometimes it answers. I was keen to focus the question on strategy with Whissam Khalaf of Portas again.

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:31:22] So I think this is a question of: can we really cut the middle man, which is the broadcaster, can we go direct to our fans? And can we actually monetize well, can we first reach the same or more, uh, eyeballs then if we would have, going through the middle man, and then how do we actually monetize them and keep them engaged and do we have the capabilities to do so?

And I think it's really a question of capabilities. If you want to do this as a league, you absolutely have to build capabilities that allow you to produce, that allow you to broadcast, that allow you to have the data and intelligence to, uh, predict the behavior of your customer and keep them engaged.

So, to actually be able to cut the middleman, you will have to build those capabilities. I think today, we won't see this trend happening a lot, but if something's considered it in the future, when the collapse of - collapse is a big word - but with the decline of the revenues from broadcasting, the rights holders might consider, uh, using their own channels and their own platforms to actually recover some of those revenues.

And then, be more in control of the money they're bringing in.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:32:40] What do you mean when you're talking to your clients about, cutting out the middleman, going, going direct to the customer? What are the tradeoffs? What are the problems?

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:32:49] So again, you will have, uh, you need to have, flawless capabilities. So if you're competing with a broadcaster, It will be very challenging for you to actually be able to broadcast at the same level at the same quality. And you need a lot of time and investment to actually get there. Um, the other point I think is if you're going with a broadcaster, this broadcast already has an established base of customers or subscribers or eyeballs, I think getting there will also take your time as, as, uh, as a rights holder.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:33:23] Who is it that is going to sign up? I mean, we're bombarded as sports fans with options and those are changing, but we're not short of, places to go people to subscribe to. Are we in danger of confusing the sports fan?

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:33:39] I'll give you a personal example. So, if there is a property I want to watch, so if I want to watch the Champions League, absolutely. And the only way for me to do it is to download an app. I'm willing to sacrifice some real estate on my phone to actually watch the Champion's League. Now if it's a property that I'm interested in watching, but I wouldn't go the extra mile to do it.

Then I would think twice before downloading another app on my phone to be able to watch. So I think it's a compromise between developing your own, uh, applications and channels and being in control; or bidding on what's existing to actually promote your, uh, promote your properties and your competitions.

To put it in a simple way, if you want me to discover something new, your new property, just reach me where I am already. If it's something you know that I would do anything towards, then you have this bargaining power actually to impose, a new application or a new channel on me.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:34:43] So just to round off this D2C part of the media conversation. I asked Glenn Killane and then Andrew Ryan of FIBA, about the Olympic Channel. Perhaps sport’s most ambitious D2C OTT play. What is it, though? And what is its role?

**Glen Killane:** [00:35:02] The Olympic Channel is a concept that was brought to the table by the president Thomas Bach, which was about keeping the Olympic flame burning inbetween the Olympia, in the four years between. And I think it's a really laudable concept. I think the challenges they face are the localization, which is something we do very well.

Local languages, local content and actually rights because, they don't actually outside of the Olympics, so I think they're working on that. We'd be very open to working with them. Of course we have a historical relationship with the IOC. And it's an ambition of ours to build that relationship again.

But from their point of view, they’re producing some excellent content. But it's not from a European con point of view, there's not enough localization. And I think, I met with Mark Parkman some time ago to discuss that. And that's one of their challenges, the local content plus also owning the rights for the live rights for the events in between the Olympic games.

That was their approach. But there are challenges there and the challenges for all of us and I suppose bringing an audience to it as well. And as big as the IOC are, I think it has been challenging to bring significant audiences in the European market. I think they're doing quite well in China and possibly quite well in the US also.

But I think Europe is a different kettle of fish if you like, because it is 50 plus different markets trying to do different things and that's my daily life trying to herd those cats and try and make them all speak the same language if you like, in terms of trying to move in the same direction.

And I think there is, there's definitely some movement in that space and realization that we have to work together.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:36:30] So following on from Glen Killane there on the Olympic Channel. I asked the same question to Andrew Ryan of FIBA.

So you've got the Olympic channel, which I'm unclear as to whether that helps or hinders FIBAs own direct to basketball fan ambitions. What the initial ambition of the Olympic channel was and what it is now, again, I'm a bit vague on.

 Does FIBA content appear on the Olympic Channel?

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:36:54] It has in the past. So, I guess I've I'll be judicious in what I say here. Because I had the great privilege of working within the IOC for a bit, years and was involved in a reasonable way with a lot of the development of the Olympic channel as it moved forward.

In terms of, I think first and foremost, a platform like the Olympics or the IOC is an organization investing in the creation and distribution of content that's linked to the sports that are involved in its wider family. There is no negative that comes from that to start with.

And it's an amazing brand and a wonderful connection that all of the sports that are part of the Olympic family have with that organization in terms of the Olympic channel itself. Certainly FIBA 3x3 content has appeared on there, live, and obviously it's part of their sort of other content distribution efforts there is there have been a number of original documentary type pieces that involved basketball as a sport, whether or not it's related to the US dream team or otherwise that have obviously been a very good, positive investment from the perspective of basketball as a sport, given that there, there is creating that linkage and getting to explore some amazing moments from basketball at the Olympics in the past is certainly no negative thing whatsoever.

I think it's interesting and you've started to see even over the weekend, actually with the launch of olympics.com, the new digital home of the, I guess the Olympic games and the Olympic brand, where you’ve started to see that the movement of the Olympics realizing the value of having all of their content within a singular place.

And certainly while I was at the IOC, that was something I was hugely in favor of and hugely in favor of making hay while the sun shines to a certain extent of focusing a lot of your activity around being a primary home for news and video content at the actual Olympic games itself, and then utilizing the benefits and the value, including your ability to generate direct relationships with users during that time to try to keep them interested in the Olympic movement and what happens in between the games.

It's a ridiculously challenging thing to try to keep up the interest levels between an event that happens every two years. And if you’re in a summer country, then it probably even less focus on the winter Olympics and there are many others, and obviously you have the youth Olympic games in between as well, but it is a very challenging thing to do.

And I think it's a really positive development of for them that, that there's this new central home in, which is also for those who haven't been out of the, the easy gateway to all things, Tokyo 2020 as well. And I know it's been a bit, a lot of work from the team that's involved over there and putting it together.

And so personally from someone who is a massive Olympics fan and massive Olympics person I think it's a really positive development and something that I'm pretty excited to see and to certainly use at the upcoming Tokyo games.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:40:04] Was that the early ambition for it? A Netflix for the Olympics to use a popular term? Is that, was that what it was supposed to be, and then it's just evolved? Because obviously it's a very fast dynamic, changing market strategies change.

They come in and out of fashion, certainties become less certain over time, particularly in media and broadcast. And was that the initial ambition for it?

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:40:28] Yeah as we said that, as we talked about earlier, Richard there's always people who will tell you absolute certainties in the world of sports, media, and media distribution. And I guess when it was first raised as part of Agenda 2020 that there was the concept of at Olympic channel.

And I think it probably that could have been interpreted by many people in that almost feels like Brexit in some ways that everyone had their own version of what that should be or what that could be doing. Obviously it's after the decision was made to, okay, this is a digital first venture, as opposed to literally setting up linear channel television channels in one or more territories.

And then there was a strong push to work with broadcast partners to, to leverage both the assets that were created on or as part of the Olympic channel organization with those partners and all of that was done in, relatively successful fashion. I think the difficulty - and it comes back to an earlier point about OTT services - is that more and more users or individuals maintaining their digital life within a relatively small number of environments.

And that's usually their primary, couple of social media channels. And then a few other things that represent their interests on a very much a frequency or a day-by-day level. Trying to create something for any sports property, but particularly one where you do have a very large time gap in between the events and trying to bring people to that property itself outside of those times, when you have monumental organic interests in the property itself, which has essentially either side and during the actual games themselves is a very big challenge.

And I guess that comes back to my earlier point where I think it's a really strong strategic move to take the lessons of the previous five or so years since that service was launched and refocus it. So that original content, I assume is still going to be a strong part of that portfolio moving forward.

But part of the portfolio that is a much more comprehensive user proposition that is also very much directed towards the events themselves at the appropriate time, so that it's not an isolated OTT product in and of itself as something that fits as the Olympic digital destination. And in my humble opinion, that's absolutely the way that they should continue plowing forward.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:43:04] We'll finish off with a future gazing question, which I'm asking each of the guests. Let's just project forward. It's very difficult to do this with any sense of certainty obviously, but what are the trends that you think are really going to happen?

It might be the way in which we're watching or consuming media on that side, or it might be on the supply side of, how the market starts to reorganize itself.

**Wissam Khalaf:** [00:43:29] One, I think that the pandemic has forced people to stay at home. And push them away from the stadium. So, I think we're going to see an accelerated trend of broadcasters trying a bit to replicate the stadium experience and compete on that actually, which is going to increase investments in things like, uh, augmented reality and virtual reality to make the experience a bit more, uh, more genuine for the fans.

I'm not talking about the next two or three years, but this is something that would obviously happen a bit in the future. And then the second thing is, again, around digital, uh, digital will obviously play a more and more prominent role in the way we watch the games and the way we engage, the way we interact, the way we watch games is going to be more and more interactive through specifically those digital channels that exists.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:44:24] Next up on the future gazing question is Glen Killane of the EBU Eurovision sport.

**Glen Killane:** [00:44:30] Linear won't disappear. It's going to be more of an equal balance product between digital and linear and possibly even more digital by 2030.

But I think we're going to be a pretty major player in that space through our members. And they've already begun that process on our, on their home markets. What we will do is create that network effect where we're working in unison. I think partnerships, new partnerships will emerge because I think they see the value of what we bring to the table.

And I think that whole trust we have from the audiences that we serve is hugely important. I see us still very much here. Put a different type of organization and possibly, different kinds of funding opportunities, and partnerships in that space.

And it’s an incredibly difficult question, but I do see us still involved in large properties, and hopefully Olympic rights holders at that stage.

 **Unofficial Partner:** [00:45:17] And finally, how is Andrew Ryan of FIBA media looking at the future?

**Andrew Ryan FIBA:** [00:45:21] I think there is a lot more that almost every sport could do in terms of developing the next generation of fan. I think that's one element in which, whether it's international or national federations or sport or professional sporting leagues themselves have probably not been lazy but have almost wanted to take the easy way out in, on occasions of saying, ‘yeah, yeah, we've got a big social media team, so that's fine. We're talking to the kids where the kids are. We've got a digital strategy. It's all good’. And I think with the complexity of trying to get the attention and the interaction of younger people today, that probably won't be good at that.

It's probably not good enough at the moment and it's probably not good enough moving forward. And I think the strategic elements of trying to nurture that next generation of fans will probably start to become one of the hottest topics within the sports industry moving forward. And there, there are a few who are doing it well on a multi-pronged approach.

It has been interesting to see both the NFL and the NBA, creating almost kids focused programming around some of that, some of their live games with the NFL on Nickelodeon and the NBA detailing their Marvel universe partnership. But it's one thing to have a game that's got some cartoon creatures in it.

And to have, that is a nice little entertainment base. It's another to say, how can we use either our central assets or our key assets in the form of games or our players to really communicate with younger people in a way that gives them a reason to develop a passion for that particular sport or for that particular leagues?

And I think where you need to go with is more so looking at your media rights as something that not doesn't necessarily need to be carved up in a particular way that actually creating media and production strategies that are very much geared towards endearing your property to younger fans, making it incredibly accessible.

Looking at some of the new interactive ways of skill development. There is once again, an area that that I just don't think that many people are aware of, there are amazing products out there. Like Home Court on the basketball front, which is created by an American organization that effectively uses your mobile phone as an interactive teaching product.

So it will monitor shooting workouts. It will give you targets to hit. It will give you dribble workouts and it's all through that single interactive device of the phone. And there's a, there's another group that I'm giving some advice to that's based in the States that are working on a cricket-based product called Ball Track in which they're taking the fundamental technology, that is AI, particularly machine learning, driven to be able to track balls that are bowled using just a mobile phone and nothing else. And it's quite a remarkable piece of technology, but then it's being expanded into: ‘okay, could that replicate for low-level broadcasts the concept of being able to have a Hawkeye type ball tracker for academies or for a higher sort of cricket training programs, giving coaches the ability to really track both bat and ball based activity, using that as a fundamental technology and for your typical consumer, giving them a whole bunch of almost gamified interactive experiences using once again, just that fundamental structure, but not only making the game and skill acquisition fun, even on an individual level, but also democratizing the concept of sports coaching so that you're effectively able to communicate and encourage with a really wide group of people that might otherwise not necessarily have had access to that teaching in the first place.

And it's one of the interesting parts of, the rise of e-sports and the focus on e-sports in gaming, that when you break down, why it is that, that the kids love to play mobile games and when you talk to them about it, you'll get elements of: ‘yeah, I like the competitive element of it’, or ‘I love to do things with my friends and I love to be able to hang out with them after school or on the weekends. And I can do that through playing interactive or team gaming’.

**Unofficial Partner:** [00:49:52] Okay. So that's it. Thanks to Andrew Ryan there at the end. And also to my other guests, Glenn Killane of Eurovision. And Wissam Khalaf of Portas Consulting until the next time. Thank you very much.