

Premier League goes mainstream

The number of U.S. bars carrying English soccer could increase exponentially.



IAN WALDIE/REUTERS

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TELEVISION

American fans will have many more choices of how and where to watch English Premier League games this season.

Whether this will be good or bad for the establishments that choose to carry the games won't be known for several months.

Arsenal's Dennis Bergkamp (No. 10) beats Everton keeper Paul Gerrard in EPL action last season. The U.S. TV market for EPL games is undergoing big changes.

U.S. rights to the matches have been purchased by Direct TV and DISH Network from Fox Sports International, thus cutting out Setanta Sport, which had distributed the games for the past few years to a limited list of approximately 300 locations in North America.

Live games will again be televised by closed-circuit (commercial establish-

ments) and pay-per-view (residential), but the number of commercial locations could increase exponentially.

Joe Javidara, co-manager of Summers' in Arlington, Va., estimates that as many as 4,000 locations nationwide could be offering English Premier League games this season.

To battle the increased competition, he will not impose a cover charge on fans coming to watch EPL games if they order an entree. Most establishments that had offered the package under Setanta's aegis would charge \$10-\$20 a head.

Summers' will pay Direct TV \$5,000 for the EPL package this season, less than what Setanta charged.

The fees are based on seating capacity. Summers' seats 300 people. Smaller establishments pay less.

In addition to distribution by Direct TV and DISH Network to commercial establishments, weekend games will be offered to residential viewers on pay-per-view at \$19.95 per game. At present, there is no season package available to home subscribers as there

is for MLS's Shootout package.

Fox Sports World will offer the same menu of EPL games as it has the past two seasons: delayed telecasts on Saturday and Sunday and live telecasts on weekdays. Setanta Sport retains rights to the English FA Cup as well as many European Championship qualifiers, including those played by England.

The loss of the English Premier League television rights will deprive Setanta of significant revenues, but the company will not have to pay Fox Sports International rights fees, which are believed to have been \$1 million-\$2 million annually the past few years.

The concern some pub operators have is that the combination of wider distribution both for residences and commercial outlets could spread out patronage. If the viewing dollars are spread too thin, a bar might not be able to afford to carry the games.

Soccer fans venturing to mainstream sports bars will have to beat the rush before these establishments fill up for college football games on Saturdays and NFL games on Sundays. ■