

ESPN Deportes will go 24-hours

Fox network adds La Liga, but Saturday broadcasts hit snag over rights dispute.

BY RIDGE MAHONEY

The growing ESPN network is finally making the jump to round-the-clock, Spanish-language sports.

ESPN Deportes, which currently airs only on Sunday nights, will expand to a full 24-hour channel next June.

In addition to its current lineup of Major League Baseball and NFL football, ESPN Deportes will show NBA and European Champions League games.

Yet to be decided is how much soccer, other than the Champions League games to which ESPN holds U.S. rights, will be shown on the network.

Also unclear is whether ESPN2 will terminate its airing of Champions League games, of which several may be shown by ESPN Deportes on each match day.

"ESPN Gol," a highlight show of action from around the world, and "Fuera de juego," a round-table discussion of the sport, are slated to be included in the ESPN Deportes lineup.

ESPN Gol is produced by another arm of the network, ESPN International. The

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show is produced in English and Spanish, but rights issues forbid the airing of ESPN International English-language programming in the United States.

Several years ago, ESPN shelved plans to launch a 24-hour Spanish-language sports channel in the United States. ESPN Deportes was launched in April 2001.

Univision, Telemundo, Telefuturo, Galavision, Azteca America and Fox Sports World Espanol primarily televise soccer, boxing and highlight shows.

Mexican League matches are aired on all six channels, and Fox Sports World Espanol also shows baseball.

ESPN Deportes will televise Latin American baseball, Mexican college football and volleyball, a popular sport in Latin America.

Since U.S. rights for the English Premier League and the Spanish League are owned by Fox Sports International, ESPN would have to purchase or share those rights to show those games in the U.S.

No U.S. broadcaster has been able to acquire Italian Serie A rights for the past few seasons. Rights to Brazilian, Argentine, Colombian and Honduran soccer competitions are held by Fox Sports International.

LA LIGA HANGUP. The addition of the Spanish League to the schedules of Fox Sports World has been tainted by a lack of Saturday games.

According to a source, a rights-holder for U.S. telecasts that has been distributing games on pay-per-view outlets has refused to relinquish rights to permit Fox to televise Saturday games.

Some Spanish League games were marketed in the U.S. last season through iN DEMAND.

Fox will air games on Sundays but will not be able to show games on Saturdays unless the rights issue is resolved. ■

Fans can watch Barcelona's Luis Enrique and other Spanish League stars on Fox Sports World on Sunday afternoons.



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