

## **25 Milestones of ESPN's 2025**

### **ESPN launched its direct-to-consumer service**

On August 21, ESPN launched ESPN DTC, marking a new era in sports streaming and giving fans direct access to all of ESPN's content — more than 47,000 live events, plus studio and originals — for the first time, as well as a bundle option with Disney+, Hulu and ESPN.

ESPN also launched an enhanced App experience that day, highlighted by new features and functions including multiview and synchronized two-screen viewing options; vertical short-form video, a personalized "*SportsCenter For You*" driven by AI commentary derived from SC anchor voices; and integrated commerce, betting and fantasy.

Launch day included ESPN senior leadership ringing the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange, and a dynamic marketing campaign — “All of ESPN. All in One Place.” — headlined by WWE Superstar and actor John Cena and ESPN's first-ever mascot, “App-E.”

### **Even more ways to serve sports fans, anytime, anywhere**

Over the following weeks, ESPN and partners offered consumers two more bundles: ESPN DTC and NFL+ Premium, and the “ESPN, FOX One Bundle,” offering fans unmatched value and the best of sports.

### **ESPN and the NFL reach landmark partnership deals**

In a groundbreaking move, ESPN announced in August the acquisition of NFL Network, linear distribution of NFL RedZone and NFL Fantasy in exchange for a 10% equity stake in ESPN.

#### **Upon closing, ESPN will receive:**

- Full control of NFL Network and RedZone linear distribution rights, with NFL Network fully integrated into ESPN's direct-to-consumer service and the ESPN App
- Ability to explore new RedZone opportunities
- 28 total NFL games per season (up from 25)
- NFL Fantasy merging with ESPN Fantasy to become the official NFL fantasy game

ESPN and the NFL reached three additional agreements: multiple licensing arrangements; an extension of ESPN's NFL draft rights; and the addition of NFL programming and content to both ESPN DTC and Disney+.

## **ESPN and WWE forge epic entertainment deal**

In August, ESPN became the exclusive U.S. home for all WWE Premium Live Events, bringing WrestleMania, Royal Rumble, SummerSlam and other marquee shows to the ESPN App for all fans with an ESPN Unlimited plan.

## **ESPN brings iconic *Inside the NBA* to its platforms**

Debuting October 22 on ESPN with its signature style and unfiltered commentary, *Inside the NBA*, featuring Ernie Johnson, Charles Barkley, Shaquille O'Neal and Kenny Smith, now serves as pregame, halftime and postgame coverage for ESPN and ABC's marquee NBA events — including opening week, Christmas Day, Conference Finals and the NBA Finals.

## **NHL's inaugural 4 Nations Face-Off becomes ESPN's biggest hockey triumph**

ESPN's coverage of the NHL's inaugural 4 Nations Face-Off revitalized international hockey on American television.

The championship game between the United States and Canada delivered 9.3M viewers — ESPN's largest hockey audience ever.

## **ESPN and ABC deliver most-watched year since 2015**

Through November, fans have watched more sports on ESPN and ABC than in any year since 2015, totaling over 556 billion minutes viewed (and on pace to surpass the 2015 calendar year in December). The ESPN network alone is projected to finish 2025 averaging approximately 775K viewers-per-minute throughout the entire calendar year (the highest average-minute audience since 2017).

### **On the studio show front:**

- *Pardon the Interruption* was television's most-watched daily sports news/studio show among total viewers and the P25-54 demographic.
- The midnight *SportsCenter* led in P18-34 and P18-49, while the 2 p.m. *SportsCenter* posted its most-viewed month ever in January with 443K P2+ viewers.
- Viewership for *Get Up* climbed 10% and *First Take* rose 5% YoY.
- *The Pat McAfee Show* jumped 17% on linear through November. Combined across linear and YouTube, the show's AMA is 287K P2+ viewers (+3% YoY).

## **WNBA shatters ESPN viewership records across historic season**

The WNBA delivered its most-watched season ever on ESPN platforms, with the full season averaging 1.2M viewers across 49 telecasts.

- The regular season averaged 1.3M viewers, highlighted by Chicago Sky at Indiana Fever which drew 2.7M viewers on ABC.
- The Playoffs were the most-watched ever on ESPN platforms, averaging 1.2M viewers.
- *WNBA Countdown* averaged 437K viewers (+30% YoY).

## **ESPN and MLB reach landmark deal**

- The innovative three-year deal announced in November makes ESPN the exclusive rights holder of MLB.TV, delivering thousands of out-of-market games through the enhanced ESPN App alongside MLB platforms beginning in 2026.
- ESPN will produce a new exclusive package of 30 national regular-season games annually, obtain exclusive local in-market streaming rights for six MLB teams and deliver 150+ out-of-market games via special "game of the day" offerings for ESPN Unlimited subscribers.

## ***SportsCenter's* epic 50-state summer tour**

ESPN's *SportsCenter* embarked on an ambitious "50 States in 50 Days" tour, connecting a new generation of fans with the iconic brand and highlighting local traditions across America.

The traveling showcase featured over 150 on-site interviews covering everything from surfing in Hawaii to a rodeo in Wyoming, the ESPYS in Los Angeles and WNBA All-Star Weekend in Indianapolis, leading into ESPN's DTC launch in August.

## **ESPN and DraftKings entered multi-year agreement**

Beginning in December, ESPN and DraftKings forged an exclusive agreement making DraftKings the Official Sportsbook and Odds Provider for ESPN.

This collaboration strengthens ESPN by offering fans seamless betting experiences integrated into the ESPN App and digital platforms, including access to DraftKings' sportsbook, daily fantasy and Pick6 across the ESPN ecosystem.

## The home for college football

Once again, ABC and ESPN reigned supreme in the college football landscape.

- To close out the 2024-25 season, the 2025 CFP National Championship drew 22.1M viewers, the most-watched non-NFL sporting event over the prior year.
- The Playoff Quarterfinals scored multi-year viewership highs, including the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl becoming the most-watched pre-3 p.m. ET bowl game ever, while the CFP Semifinals produced the most-watched Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic on record.
- The 2025-26 regular season proved to be another winner, with games on ESPN networks averaging 2.2M viewers leading into conference championship weekend, the highest audience since 2011 (+16% YoY). ABC is posting its best CFB season since 2006 and ESPN platforms collectively accounted for 62% of all live college football minutes viewed.
- The 2025 season was the best in the history of *College GameDay Built by The Home Depot*, with the legendary Saturday morning show delivering 2.7M average viewers (+23% YoY).
- The SEC was the most-watched conference for the fourth consecutive season (based on total minutes), with SEC-controlled games in 2025 averaging a record 5M viewers (+11% YoY) and accounting for 36% of all minutes watched across rated networks. Of the top 10 most-watched games of the regular season across all networks, the SEC participated in nine.

## Historic signoffs: Bidding farewell to legendary voices

- After entertaining fans for 38 seasons, **Lee Corso** made his final headgear pick at the August 30 *College GameDay* in Columbus, Ohio, where his iconic tradition began. The Week 1 episode drew 4M viewers — the most-watched episode of all time — with Corso's final five minutes reaching 10M viewers across all simulcasts.
- Legendary Naismith Basketball Hall of Famer **Hubie Brown** called his final NBA game on February 9 on ABC after 50 years in the sport and more than 600 televised games for ESPN.
- **Cliff Drysdale**, ESPN's longest tenured broadcaster, a hall of famer and global voice of tennis, retired after nearly 46 years with ESPN, calling the final match of his legendary career during 2025's US Open Women's Semifinals.

## ESPN Digital and Social reach massive audiences

- ESPN was No. 1 in the U.S. Sports category January-November (latest available data), and ESPN Social continued its unprecedented streak at No. 1 among sports properties, stretching to 52 consecutive months through October.
- The ESPN App reached up to 29M unique monthly users — more than the next seven non-ESPN apps *combined* — while ESPN.com led the web with over 63M monthly visitors.
- ESPN Social reached more than 1 billion engagements for the first time ever in February, becoming the first sports media brand to achieve the mark while averaging more than 35M fan interactions daily.
- ESPN signed **Katie Feeney**, a sports and lifestyle content creator with over 14M social media followers, to lead a refreshed approach to *SportsCenter on Snapchat* and contribute short-form video content across ESPN platforms.

## ESPN expands Disney+ lineup with original programming

- SC+ launched on March 3, a new daily *SportsCenter* show exclusively on Disney+, delivering fast-paced updates highlighting the day's top sports moments.
- *Vibe Check* premiered on June 30 — a female-led sports studio show airing three times weekly and delivering upbeat coverage with expert analysis.
- *The Rich Eisen Show* joined Disney+ in September, an ESPN homecoming for Eisen and another unique ESPN voice for Disney+ subscribers nationwide.

## Monday Night Football reaches nearly 130M fans through Week 14

- ESPN's *Monday Night Football* season is tracking toward its second-highest viewership in 20 years, averaging 15.8M viewers through Week 14 (+8% YoY).
- ESPN reached multi-year viewership highs for both *Monday Night Countdown* (+19% YoY) and *Sunday NFL Countdown* (+14% YoY).
- *NFL Live* is experiencing its strongest performance since 2016 (+17% YoY).

## ESPN and ACC re-up, revolutionize replay

In January, ESPN extended its media rights deal with the Atlantic Coast Conference through 2036.

ESPN and the ACC brought fans inside the booth with real-time audio from replay reviews during select football games. The transparent approach earns rave reviews from fans, and ESPN is working to expand it to other conferences.

### **ESPN continues driving women's sports**

**The Women's College World Series** became the most watched on record, averaging 1.3M viewers (+24% YoY), with the finals averaging 2.2M viewers across three games — college softball's largest audience ever.

**Women's college basketball** continued its remarkable trajectory with the 2024-25 regular season becoming the most watched in 16 years. The Women's Tournament was the second most-consumed ever.

**The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL)** delivered record-breaking growth across ESPN platforms, scoring a 61% YoY increase in average viewership for the regular season.

**The Maybelline Women's Lacrosse League** debuted on ESPN platforms in February with the Lexus Championship Series; ESPN's expanded PLL partnership includes the MWLL's first-ever regular season on ESPN in 2026.

### **ESPN Originals and 30 for 30 deliver impactful storytelling**

- **ESPN's 30 for 30 "Boo-Yah: A Portrait of Stuart Scott"** chronicled the beloved, trailblazing *SportsCenter* anchor who brought hip-hop and Black cultural touchstones to mainstream sports media.
- **ESPN Original Series *The Kingdom*** followed the Kansas City Chiefs' 2024 season and their pursuit of an unprecedented three-peat Super Bowl championship.
- **ESPN Original Series *Believers: Boston Red Sox*** explored the team's 86-year championship drought and miraculous 2004 postseason run.

### **ESPN Fantasy scores record-breaking participation**

- In its 30th year, ESPN Fantasy Football set its fourth consecutive record with more than 14M fans playing the game.
- The ESPN Fantasy App continues to be the No. 1 fantasy sports app in the U.S., reaching 11.9M unique fans per month during the football season, 71% larger than the No. 2 fantasy app.

- The Men's Tournament Challenge set a record with 24.4M completed brackets, while the Women's Tournament Challenge achieved a new record with more than 3.4M completed brackets.

### **Strong viewership gains across major NBA broadcasts**

The **2024-25** NBA Playoffs reached 6.1M viewers (+10% YoY) on ESPN platforms. The NBA Finals Game 7 drew 16.6M viewers, becoming the most-watched NBA game since 2019.

The **2025-26** season started off strong, helped by the Thanksgiving Eve tripleheader averaging 2.1M viewers (+54% YoY).

### **ESPN's innovative alt-casts revolutionize sports viewing**

- The Pat McAfee-led Rose Bowl Field Pass drew 2.4M viewers, becoming the most-viewed alt-cast ever.
- *Monsters Funday Football* on December 8 brought beloved Pixar characters to *Monday Night Football*, with 563K viewers tuning in across ESPN2, Disney+, Disney Channel and Disney XD.
- *Dunk the Halls* returns Christmas Day featuring the Cavaliers-Knicks with Disney characters including newcomer Stitch.
- ESPN+ debuted OviCast in the spring; an isolated camera followed Alex Ovechkin as he pursued Wayne Gretzky's all-time NHL goals record.
- ESPN offered eight MLB Statcasts including six *Sunday Night Baseball* editions, the *T-Mobile Home Run Derby* and a KidsCast of the *MLB Little League Classic*.
- ManningCast is nearing the end of its fifth season as sports media's most established alt-cast. Peyton and Eli continue delivering A-list guests, expert analysis and relatable humor on most Monday nights during football season.

### **ESPN achieves historic tennis ratings milestones**

The **US Open's** new Sunday start drove Day One audiences up 83% YoY.

- The Men's Championship averaged 3M viewers on ABC (+82% YoY and the highest in a decade), and the Women's Championship averaged 2.4M on ESPN (+50% YoY).
- Quarterfinals drew their largest audience in 10 years.

**Wimbledon** saw its most-viewed Day One on record on ESPN platforms.

- The Gentlemen's Championship averaged 2.9M viewers (+31% YoY), and ESPN saw its most-viewed quarterfinals, and most-viewed Gentlemen's and Ladies' semifinals in six years.
- ESPN+ recorded its most-streamed tennis tournament on record, with engagement up 163%.

### **TGL on ESPN: Tech-forward golf league delivers young primetime audience**

TGL, the innovative team golf league co-founded by Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy, debuted in January and its first match drew 919K viewers, while Tiger's first appearance peaked at 1.1M. The fast-paced format attracts one of ESPN's youngest audiences across sports.

### **'Take Back Sports' initiative aims to keep kids playing**

Take Back Sports is ESPN's comprehensive youth sports initiative powered by Disney, committing \$5 million to address the alarming trend that only 38.3% of kids ages 6-12 played sports regularly in 2023.

ESPN developed TakeBackSports.org contains family resources, impacted 650,000+ youth through transformative grants and recruited over 20 athlete ambassadors including Stephen Curry, Coco Gauff and A'ja Wilson to promote accessible, fun multisport participation.

### **Standout Sports Emmy Awards including a college football triumph**

- In its inaugural year, *SEC on ABC* won Outstanding Live Series, the first college football property in 45 years to earn the award.
- Legendary coach Nick Saban claimed his first Emmy for Outstanding Personality/Emerging On-Air Talent in his debut season on *College GameDay*, which was recognized with its 15th Emmy for Outstanding Studio Show - Weekly.
- *NFL Live* won for Outstanding Studio Show - Daily, the program's first and ESPN's ninth overall win in the category.