

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Sam Flood
Rick Cordella
Jason Benetti
Ahmed Fareed
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining today's conference call for the new MLB Sunday Lead-Off package streaming exclusively on Peacock.

Beginning with this weekend's game, Peacock will live stream an NBC Sports-produced baseball game for 18 consecutive weeks. On each of the Sundays that Peacock has a game, it will be scheduled as the exclusive home of live MLB action until 1:30 p.m. eastern that day.

Our first game takes place this Sunday at 11:30 a.m. eastern when the Red Sox host the White Sox at Fenway Park. In addition to streaming on Peacock, Sunday's opening game will also be simulcast on the NBC Broadcast Network. Pregame coverage begins Sunday at 11:00 a.m. eastern exclusively on Peacock.

Joining us today are executive producer and president of NBC Sports production Sam Flood; Peacock executive vice president and chief commercial officer, Rick Cordella; our MLB Sunday Lead-Off play-by-play announcer Jason Benetti; and our host and NBA reporter, Ahmed Fareed.

Each will make an opening comment and then we'll start taking your questions. With that, I'll turn it over to our executive producer Sam Flood.

SAM FLOOD: Thank you all for joining us today. We couldn't be more excited about being back in baseball. It was at the root of everything NBC Sports did from its inception, and to be out of the sport since 2000 was a long run, but we're back in now, can't wait to engage and have fun with it. We're looking at this thing in some new ways.

Earlier today we announced the strategy we're using, which is having Jason as the play-by-play in the booth for all our games and then we will have an analyst from each

team representing the two markets that are playing in that game to give us the ultimate insight on what's happening inside each clubhouse.

It's going to be a hyper local telecast with a national flair. We certainly are going to tip our cap to the rich history of baseball on NBC between some music elements, some graphic elements. We're also going to move forward with some new techniques and new elements we're going to try going along the way. We're going to tip our cap to the little league and youth baseball, some of the players in the game and connect the stars of today to their early days back on the diamonds before they became stars.

We're going to have a lot of fun with it, but most importantly we're going to honor and celebrate the game of baseball, a game that means an awful lot to NBC Sports and the group of people here that are charged with telling the story of the game each week.

We're excited with the concept of having Jason with two analysts from the two local teams and to have Steve Stone and Youk there for the first one. Couldn't be better, particularly since when Youk was unfortunately traded away from the Red Sox to the White Sox, he came back to Fenway for the first time, I believe he went like 3 for 4 and then the second game back cranks a home run back in Fenway Park.

He knows both teams, but most importantly he had an incredible run with the Red Sox.

The reason we're back doing this is Rick Cordella, who worked really hard to figure this deal out and get us back in partnership with Major League Baseball, and we thank him for that, and like me, he has some Boston roots, so being in Fenway Park for the first game is a nostalgic turn.

I will say in high school my last three years I would skip school on opening day and head into Fenway Park and go to the game, and that was back in the days where you'd start in the standing room seats, and by the end of the game the people in suits, which apparently I am now, would have left and you could sneak down and be in the front few rows watching the Red Sox play their game. This was in the late '70s. A rich connection with that ballpark and team, so excited to launch this project.



Rick, thanks for getting it done.

RICK CORDELLA: Great, we're super excited. From a Peacock perspective, sports has always been an integral part of our content mix. I think opening the first day of Peacock we had two or three Premier League games, we had the Olympics, the Super Bowl, WWE, and adding baseball to the portfolio we felt was a no-brainer for us. We had been talking to baseball for a long time before we came to an agreement. We were looking for something that was unique, not just another game.

We had seen success with Premier League in the late-morning time window, and we asked, knowing that baseball had played morning games, I think both Patriot's Day in Boston as well as the Nationals game I think it was around 4th of July they played before noon, and to baseball's credit, they were open to it.

So we found this unique sort of situation where you have an exclusive window on Sunday mornings for what effectively becomes the game of the week for us, and we decided to pair that with the Kentucky Derby and having our first game following that Saturday, so the first Sunday of May, and having that promotion from the Derby back to this, and make sure everyone is aware of it.

But we couldn't be more excited as we head into this coming Sunday.

JASON BENETTI: Thank you all. I am overjoyed to be here working on this package for a couple reasons. Number one, the greatest joy of calling games is knowing that every game you do is different depending on what analyst you work with. The insights that we get from every individual analyst around sports are unique and different depending on their background and how they see the game and everything that goes along with their prism that they see baseball through.

So to see the game with two analysts who are so engaged with the clubhouse and so understanding of what's going on on a day-to-day basis, a week-to-week basis, is a beautiful thing. I just love the idea.

The other thing about day baseball to me is as somebody who didn't play little league himself but was a little league umpire, I remember getting up at like 8:00 and going to do three games in the morning, and there was just something joyous about morning baseball and something youthful to me about morning baseball, and it never really hit me until the summer camp of the 2020 season that was at the height of the pandemic.

That summer camp we did a couple games in Chicago

where of course there was nobody in the crowd, but they were during the day, and the sun is beating down on the guys, and it was an intrasquad White Sox game. The fun they were having, and we could hear it up in the booth, it was like watching young baseball players at the local sand lot or the local baseball diamond.

To me there is something really youthful and engaging about morning baseball and day baseball, and especially at a different time. I couldn't be more thrilled to be a part of this for those multiple reasons, and of course being the White Sox announcer, getting to start with a White Sox game at Fenway Park, one of the greatest ballparks in this country, is an added bonus.

AHMED FAREED: Yeah, I think Jason said it so well right there. The first thing that I thought of when I found out that we got baseball, I was selfishly happy for myself. Baseball was my first love growing up. But it was that we have an opportunity to celebrate the game.

I think for the past few years, there's been some negativity that's crept into the game at times with the negotiating of the CBA and even the way the game might be played now as opposed to at other times.

So I think what baseball needs and what it deserves is to be celebrated for all the great athletes that take part in it right now and what it does to bring the fans, people together every day, every weekend day, every Sunday morning now, out to the ballpark.

First of all, it's like, that's what I envision our pregame show, in-game segments, postgame show, really to be a celebration of all that's good with Major League Baseball. Right now getting to work with Nick Swisher on game No. 1, he is for sure going to bring the energy. I don't think it's possible for him not to do that, so he's excited to get going on game No. 1.

Jason mentioned it, too, and Sam's idea to bring the local broadcasters into the broadcast because we really are -- for one day, caretakers for two teams. Jason is more connected with the White Sox obviously and is with them through the whole season, but for one day, a Sunday, late morning, early afternoon, we are the caretakers for two teams, and so to have two local broadcasters, baseball is such a local game, that have ties to those teams, I think that's the perfect way to do it.

Like Rick mentioned, I think early mornings are becoming kind of a thing in sports, and I don't think I'm saying that just because I'm a dad of two young kids, although that has made it more difficult to stay up later at night, but early mornings, kind of later mornings, early afternoon seems to



be a really appealing window, and I think baseball will flourish in that time period.

I'm so excited with the idea, the concept, how it's all come together, and I can't wait to get going.

Q. Rick, obviously this season we've seen a huge leap in live streaming in baseball between you guys and Apple and locally Amazon with the Yankees. I guess a two-part question. A, how much responsibility do you guys feel to kind of help people navigate this new world, because this is a big change, obviously, and also, what would you say to fans who are getting a little frustrated, like wait a minute, I have my cable package and now I have to have all these streaming services? How would you tell people to try to navigate this new world?

RICK CORDELLA: Well, I think it's a couple things. One, we want to make sure they're aware of it, so that was sort of the idea of having this lead-off on NBC, right, have a big sort of opening day for White Sox-Red Sox, screaming from the rooftops that this is here, this is something that's happening at 11:30 a.m. on every Sunday for most of the rest of the season, and we'll hopefully during the broadcast explain how to download Peacock, get Peacock, what else Peacock has to offer.

In terms of the fragmentation of I guess platforms where content can be found, sports, and I read social media like everyone else, so I understand what the fans are saying, but it's happening everywhere. It's happening with entertainment. It's happening with movies. The pay TV bundle used to have everything, and now some of the best shows like "Bel Air" on Peacock or "The Office," the entire library is now on Peacock, there's a litany of other content that's spread across four or five of the biggest streamers, and sports really is no different. We hope at some point that Peacock is as ubiquitous as the pay TV ecosystem and this is a moment in time.

Q. Jason, I know you're obviously familiar working with Steve and I know you from the time with the White Sox, but is there any challenge in working with different analysts each game? Is there more preparation that goes into that or is that something relatively simple?

JASON BENETTI: You know, it's an interesting question, but in a lot of -- I appreciate it, and I also appreciate your support of my work in the past.

But I would say this: I watched a "Curb Your Enthusiasm" episode from either last season or the season before where they were having a dinner party, and there's this

whole discussion about who's the best dinner party middle, who the best person is to sit in the middle of the table to keep the conversation going.

I think all of us aspire to be that at dinner parties if we're at all an extrovert, even a little bit.

I think in my understanding of people, like I've done a lot of games with a person once, and the way I see it is when you sit down to do a game, the audience does not care at all if you're best friends with somebody or if you just met them for the first time. And so it's on us, it's on me, it's on everybody in the booth, to understand each other and maybe have a meal before the game or talk on the phone or whatever.

But I think it's really important that everybody in the booth shines in the best way possible, so it's on me and everybody else with our production crew to understand very quickly the wheelhouse for each analyst.

I do plan -- I watch a lot of Major League Baseball in the first place so I think I have a feel for what everybody is good at, but I do plan to talk to everybody before the game and get a sense of what makes them go.

But it is my favorite part of the job. It's sitting down with somebody who I've never met and doing a show that people enjoy. So when I heard about this, I was like, yes, absolutely. This is fantastic. It's going to be an amazing challenge.

But I went and saw Elton John in Vegas a couple years ago, and the way he played "Crocodile Rock" for what had to have been the billionth time, like he sits down at the piano, and he plays it like he's never played it before. Like there's no boredom there. It's the full energy and the full flavor of it.

To me, this is kind of like that, where the audience doesn't care if you've never met or if you don't really know a whole lot about the person interpersonally. They want to enjoy the game, and they want to get the best out of everybody. So it's on me in large part to understand what makes people go and what makes them best, and I love that challenge.

SAM FLOOD: There's a reason we picked Jason. We did our homework. We know him. We love what he does, and we think he's the perfect person to be in that middle seat at the dinner party.

Q. This is for Sam. Could you extrapolate a little on what we might see as far as the nod to the old NBC game of the week with the music and the graphics?



Are we going to see some similarities to that, or is this going to be something that's different but with some element of what we had been accustomed to back then?

SAM FLOOD: It's going to be different, but it's going to be -- we're going to pop that team in a few times because anyone who remembers baseball back in the day will appreciate it. There are some graphic treatments that will connect the past with the present because we think there's a lot of value to that.

For a certain segment of the population, the only baseball game of the week was on NBC. We were baseball at NBC, and we're proud of that heritage. We're going to lean into it. But we're taking our own twist to it.

Think about it, back in the '70s, the local broadcasters used to call World Series innings. Dick Stockton called the home run ball from Carlton Fisk, and he was the Red Sox broadcaster back then.

So this concept that we're going to be using with Jason with two analysts is a nod to the past to a degree, as well, as we are connecting the local fan with the national telecast in a unique way.

Q. Sam and Rick, was the discussion always to do the Sunday morning games, because I know there were a lot of speculation leading in that it could be possibly midweek, or did Major League Baseball offer any other day, or did you guys really push Sunday?

RICK CORDELLA: We talked through a number of different permutations, so Sunday and this early-morning window at least in my mind was always a key component that we went through. Look, there's not a lot of exclusive hours around baseball. There's a lot of baseball played each and every night, and trying to find where can you slot in an area where there's nothing else going on, for the baseball fan that's a national baseball fan, that's a sports fan will potentially come to and want to tune in and set their maybe morning routine around, again, that was a key component of that deal, and it ended up just being the deal at the end of the day.

Again, I credit baseball. We kind of came with this sort of crazy idea, and they kind of said yes. But it was always a big part of what we were trying to do.

Q. Also for Sam and Rick, how much did the opening presented by no longer having NHL rights influence the company's decision to get into baseball and renew that even though it hadn't been on the network for more than two decades?

RICK CORDELLA: I don't think it's related at all. When rights become available, we'll sit down and go through our strategy of what makes sense for NBCU and Peacock, and this opportunity with baseball presented itself, and we crunched the numbers like anyone should, and it made sense for us, so we moved forward. But it didn't really have any relation to the NHL deal.

Q. Sam and Jason, streaming is typically considered to be more geared towards younger audiences. Was there any part of the broadcast or any aspect of the broadcast that's going to be geared towards younger baseball fan since I would expect you would have a younger audience than a typical cable audience?

SAM FLOOD: For sure. That's why Mr. Fareed is in the mix. He is connecting us to the youth baseball world, and I'm going to hand off to him because he's been amazing. We've been doing meetings for four plus months on this even though the deal was not finalized until more recently. We've been planning for it and thinking about it. Go ahead and give them some of your concepts that we're rolling out.

AHMED FAREED: Yeah, and if I shave, I look really young. Like almost to the point where I shouldn't be on TV.

No, I think that's a great point, and I've been involved in baseball for a long time. I worked at MLB Network for a couple years and that's been a theme throughout baseball is how do you get that younger fan.

I think first and foremost, you have to serve the current fan. You have to serve the person who's watching right now. I think how I got involved, I got involved because my mother and my grandmother were really into baseball, and it looked like something that they thought was important, and so then it was important to me.

I think first and foremost we can't take our eye off the target of just making this game and this broadcast as entertaining to the people who are watching who have been fans, who do consider themselves fans.

But above and beyond that, I think you can celebrate all the different things that have happened throughout the week. I think there's so many things that happen in a baseball game that are interesting and fun. You take a look at all the Statcast numbers that are out there right now, I was just looking at one the other day, of who takes the longest time to go from home to first on a home run. I was like, they have those numbers now. So it's like, who's the king of really milking that home to first on a home run.

There's so many things that happen within a game that are



cool. These athletes are as good as they have ever been, but as Sam mentioned before, there's a huge connection to youth. Youth are still playing baseball and playing a lot of baseball, and we can incorporate some of the highlights, the sights and sounds from people playing baseball from all over the country.

There's a number of things we can do, but I think we come at it with enthusiasm for a love of the game, which everyone on this call has, and if you do that and you think about serving the fans, serving the person who's watching, I think that goes a long way into trying to get the next generation of fans into baseball.

Q. You said Nick Swisher is going to be in the studio show, but will he be there every week, or will that be a rotating spot, as well?

SAM FLOOD: Rotating spot, as well. Nick is going to do more than one, but each week we will announce who the game analysts are, and we'll be in the studio.

Q. This is one probably for Rick. Rick, I was wondering if you could just sort of help me understand the thinking about putting games on Peacock versus putting games on USA versus the NBC Broadcast Network. What in your mind constitutes like the right place for live sports when you think about the different platforms you guys have?

RICK CORDELLA: There's a myriad of factors we go through. It's sitting down with Pete Bevacqua and the senior leadership here at NBC Sports as you look through rights, and with any opportunity that comes along, we kind of look across all the various platforms you named, and look, I think we're advantaged by that when you look at other people around a sports base that are maybe streaming only, the fact that we have a broadcast network, a cable network and Peacock, which is scaling, gives us a maximum flexibility.

With this particular asset, with baseball, we felt it was predominantly a Peacock asset, but we wanted to come out strong and make sure people knew that this new day part existed and that NBC is back in baseball, so using NBC as a means of promotion, as a means of getting the word out, using the Kentucky Derby as a promotional vehicle to drive a pretty large audience to the Sunday game all made sense to us, and that's kind of how we arrived at where we arrived.

Q. Sam or Rick, just as a follow-up on an earlier question about kind of the look of the broadcast, did you guys develop a full graphics package kind of for this property or will you be leveraging kind of the look

of the NBC RSN broadcasts which were new this year, as well, and do you have an established producer and director at the front bench in the truck for every one of these games, or is that also a rotating thing?

SAM FLOOD: Graphics is a hybrid from the established look from the regionals, but we're adding some NBC twists to it. In terms of producer, Matt Borzello is going to produce all the games. The director we're going to evolve into an NBC staff director after the three first or four shows, but we're starting with John Moore, who's done more baseball games than any human being has ever done in the history of mankind, so we're in great shape there, and excited where we are.

Q. Kind of along the same lines, I'm curious for the look and feel on Peacock, what excites you about maybe what you're able to do on that kind of platform being in a new digital space, and what are, if any, the challenges or some things you're going to experiment with and try to sort out as the week goes on?

SAM FLOOD: To us it's all an opportunity to showcase the game. Peacock has been a really good platform to work on because you have flexibility. We're going to do a half hour pregame for every game we do. The half hour will, again -- young fans telling stories of the game, building into our game, and then we'll be able to do a postgame for as long as we want after the game ends. That's the beauty of not having a traditional standard grid that you're challenged to get in and out when there's a delay in the game or when it's a game like a Red Sox-Yankee game that inevitably goes for eight hours, we have room to do it, and you can expand and grow into the window as needed.

So we like that. We like the fact that we can lean in with our talent selections each week and do things a little bit differently and not be the norm. We're going to try and do things differently. We're looking at this differently, thus the booth, thus the idea of leaning into the two local teams. All of that combined to create we believe a unique viewing experience for the fan, and hopefully they enjoy it as much as we enjoy creating the content.

Q. Sam, looking ahead to the second week when you're in Atlanta, who will be the analyst for that Rays-Padres game?

SAM FLOOD: We're going to leave you in suspense for that, but I'll give you a hint. The Atlanta analyst might have performed at a very young age in a World Series one day, but that's the only hint I'm going to give you, and if you can't figure that one out, you're not a true baseball fan. But we're going to announce them every Sunday in the telecast. We'll announce the next week's talent, and then



there will be a press release, I believe, on Tuesday, giving the details of the game plan for that coming week.

But I gave you a hint and I'm going to see if you can figure that one out.

Q. Along the same lines, a little bit more generically, next weekend the Braves have a three-game series. The first game is on Apple, and the third game is on Peacock. Is choosing to use a local analyst, is part of that strategy to kind of bridge the unfamiliarity fans may feel with games in new places?

SAM FLOOD: Well, we'll start coming up with this idea before we even got baseball. We were thinking about ways we would handle the broadcast and thought this would be a really great way to lean in and connect the local audience to the game and give that familiarity. But at the same time giving new insights to the opponent that you might not know as well.

This had been in the plans ever since we started thinking about getting back in the baseball business, and we do think it's an advantage to the fans being able to have some familiarity yet get some fresh data and intel that they wouldn't normally have, so it would be a little bit different than a home telecast that's looking at the game through a particular lens. This lens is going to look at both teams with Jason in the middle trying to work through why a pitching staff is struggling, why they might not have availability at the back end of the bullpen, because that analyst has been with that team.

Conversely, knowing why the No. 3 hitter hasn't gotten the ball out of the infield in the last five games and what's been going on down in the hitting cages to try and fix it, and that real time being around the team will come to the fore as this telecast evolves.

Q. Rick, what's the latest number on paid subscribers who will have access to these games?

RICK CORDELLA: I think we announced that at the earnings call last week. Dan will get that to you. I don't want to misspeak and have investor relations come down on me, so we'll get you that number.

Q. The switch from 11:30 to a.m. to noon after six weeks, was that MLB or CBA driven? What's behind that?

RICK CORDELLA: Well, that's a good question. A lot of it came through in terms of what is allowed in the CBA. It's probably a good question to ask baseball itself. I don't have all the details, but that's what we were allowed to

accomplish was those first few games on at 11:30 and then push back to 12:00.

Q. This is for the NBC people; what would make you decide on the locations and the teams of the game? And also, are you thinking about including local bloggers in your coverage besides the broadcasters?

SAM FLOOD: The schedule is worked out with baseball. We had some ideas that we were interested in, but baseball ultimately set the schedule. As always, the sport sets the schedule and we as television partners work to try and get a schedule that is of value to us. That's how that worked out.

And in terms of bloggers or other datapoints coming in, we have some unique YouTube stars that might pop up in our telecast that will bring some youthful energy to it, but we're going to let some things roll out naturally and not throw everything on the table here day one.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody, for joining us. Thanks, everyone, for your time. A reminder, a transcript of this call will be available on [NBCSportsGroupPressbox.com](https://www.nbcsportsgroup.com/pressbox) later this afternoon. Thanks again, and hope everyone has a great day.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

