

Neo to Target USA for Cricket Broadcast Rights Sales after Canada Deal

Neo Cricket, the India-based television channel dedicated to cricket, has highlighted North America as a major growth region following its first foray into the continent.

Neo Cricket's content, which includes all international and domestic matches played in India, will be shown exclusively in Canada via Asian Television Network, the Canadian cable and satellite broadcaster, for the next five years.

ATN will air the 24/7 coverage through a brand new channel, ATN-Neo Cricket, which is expected to begin broadcasting in time for the start of the India-Australia test series on October 1.

Vikram Das, senior vice-president of international and syndication at Nimbus Sport, a unit of Nimbus Communications, the international sports agency that ultimately owns Neo Cricket, said that the deal with ATN was just the beginning of the group's aspirations.

Speaking exclusively to Sportcal today, Das said: "Plans are in place to launch into the entire North America market very soon. We are already in advanced talks with direct-to-home and cable operators in the USA, and expect to be in the position to make an announcement on a partner very soon."

He added that once a deal in USA is complete, North America will account for around \$25 million of Neo Cricket's annual revenue, "of which 90 per cent will be distribution-related and 10 per cent advertising."

Das said that Nimbus was "still identifying the potential of ad revenue" in the region.

According to a 2006 census, Canadian citizens that are descended from South Asia, the region that includes the popular cricket nations of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, accounted for more than 4 per cent of Canada's 31.24 million population.

Das said that those numbers, combined with the South Asian community in USA and the number of "cricket-aware" ex-pats in North America, offers Neo Sports "huge potential for growth."

He continued: "We have estimated an immediate potential target audience of 5 million homes. This is a great opportunity. Never before has there been a 24/7 cricket channel in North America."

Last year, Nimbus retained the rights to international and domestic cricket in India for

the period from April 2010 to March 2014.

It was also chosen to market the commercial rights and secure broadcasters for three editions of the Asia Cup, the biennial one-day international competition involving the leading teams from the continent, until 2014.

All those matches will now be made available to ATN subscribers, and eventually to the subscribers of whichever network Nimbus decides to sign a deal with in USA.

Prasana Krishnan, chief operating officer of Neo Sports Broadcast Pvt. Ltd, the immediate parent of Neo Cricket, said: "Our availability in North America reaffirms Neo Cricket's commitment of taking cricket to as many fans across the globe. We have built strong brand equity with the Indian consumers by bringing to them the best cricketing action. Now we extend the same to cricket fans in North America."

Shan Chandrasekar, president and chief executive of ATN, said that his channel was bringing "first rate cricket to our viewers who extend beyond the Commonwealth diasporas now settled in Canada and include all the cricket devotees from all walks of life."

ATN launched its first cricket channel, Cricket Plus, in 2007 and also shows matches on its CBN channel.

In the past 12 months, ATN has broadcast matches from: the ICC World Twenty20; the Airtel Champions League Twenty20, the club competition for teams from various leading countries; the Indian Premier League; the ICC Champions Trophy, the one-day international tournament; and various test series.