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November 13, 2020

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Million Subscribers
as Streaming Takes
Center Stage**

**Washington Post
Trump's attacks on
election outcome
prolong tech's
emergency
measures**

**Allentown Morning
Call
Pennsylvania
budget picture looks
a 'lot better'; Sen.
Browne attributes it
to people.**

The Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association has an exclusive deal with a subscription-based high school sports network to broadcast state football playoff games, an agreement that caught some local television networks off-guard heading into this week's state quarterfinals.

Service Electric Cablevision, based in Danville, and FOX56, out of Wilkes-Barre, had hoped to carry playoff games featuring District 4 champions Danville and Jersey Shore. They found out this week the PIAA, the governing body for scholastic sports in Pennsylvania had signed an agreement with the National Federation of State High School Association's NFHS Network. The network is a subscriber-based service where customers can pay \$10.99 a month or \$69.99 a year to access all events on the network. Danville Area School District has been part of the network since last year and all of the district's events played in its stadium, including football, have been available for all subscribers since last fall.

PIAA Assistant Executive Director Melissa Mertz said the organization has been contracted with the NFHS Network since July 2013. This year, the PIAA added the state playoffs into the deal. "As part of this agreement the NFHS Network pays PIAA \$80,000 a year for exclusive rights to Inter-district championships," she said. "The NFHS Network is a school-based program. Schools that become members of the School Broadcast Program of NFHS Network receive a portion of subscription fees and realize a financial benefit."

Mertz said people can view the games by paying the \$10.99 fee. "They simply purchase a monthly subscription," she said. "They can watch all NFHS network games statewide and across the country for this monthly fee. And they have

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the option to cancel at the end of the month if they choose to." Mertz said NFHS Network decides which games they want to broadcast. "They don't always pick the same teams each year," Mertz said. "We got that list Wednesday morning. Once we have that list, we can then notify TV/cable companies of whether or not they can do the games."

SECV8, based in Danville, and less than eight miles from the Danville Area School District grounds, was informed by the PIAA on Wednesday it would not be allowed to broadcast the game because the rights to the game were sold exclusively to the NFHS Network. FOX56, out of Wilkes-Barre, received the same notification Wednesday, according to FOX56 General Manager Jon Cadman. SECV8 wanted to broadcast the 3A game between Danville and Archbishop Carroll and FOX was going to show the 4A game between Jersey Shore and Crestwood. Both were denied.

Chris O'Rourke, video production specialist for SECV8, said he was getting his crew together after writing the check to PIAA for \$3,000, to pay for their entrance to film the game when he was made aware by Danville Area School District Athletic Director Chris Johns that Service Electric was not allowed in. "We were flabbergasted," O'Rourke said. "We submitted our request for shooting the game on Monday and we didn't hear anything and we had their payment of \$3,000."

O'Rourke said SECV is frustrated because they were not made aware prior to applying for the permit. 'Rourke said Service Electric did broadcast Southern Columbia's state semifinal games in 2018 and 2019. O'Rourke said the issue is not the broadcasting fees but that they had no idea it was up for bid. "Nowhere does it say this and we did not know this," he said. "To find out three days before the game we were not allowed to film eight miles from our offices is very disappointing to not only us but to our customers who depend on watching these games during this time," he said.

Danville Superintendent Ricki Boyle said Thursday the district found out Service Electric would not be allowed to broadcast because of NFHS's exclusive rights. "Typically, Danville Area School District allows SECV to broadcast the games in our stadium even though we have the ability to broadcast through NFHS," she said. "All games we manage we allow SECV to broadcast," she said. Boyle did not say how much the district has made from subscriptions to the NFHS.

Danville Area head football coach Mike Brennan said he was shocked to learn Service Electric would not be broadcasting the game. "I am not sure how that all works but I found out on Wednesday and was stunned to hear SECV would not be there," he said Thursday. "I will be talking to the athletic director and see what the contractual obligations are."

Service Electric has announced it will be broadcasting the Southern Columbia girl's soccer game on Saturday, while Cadman from FOX56 said his station has picked up a game to broadcast in the Lackawanna County area. Chad Evans, owner of Stone State Entertainment in Shamokin, said he received notice Wednesday from PIAA he was denied access to film Southern Columbia taking on Richland, in Altoona on Saturday on Stone State's YouTube channel. Evans said he spoke with the athletic director in Altoona and he had a spot reserved.

Stone State Entertainment was set to broadcast the game for \$2,000 but Evans said he received an email from PIAA saying he was denied. Evans paid PIAA District IV \$3,000 for two previous district playoff games. Evans expected a fee but not to the tune of \$1,500 per game since he had already got it cleared through Southern Columbia officials, he said. Evans filmed regular-season games at Southern Columbia and he said the district did not charge any fees. Evans' Stone State Entertainment is a for-profit business but he said he offers the games for free on his YouTube channel. "I would have much rather have seen the money gets divided between the schools but instead I

handed a check to a District IV representative after the second playoff was filmed," he said.

Evans said he eventually wanted to get sponsorships to help offset the cost of production, but that he was more concerned with providing a free service for people who could not attend in person. "I think if there were exclusive rights being offered it should have been known so another company can also bid for those rights," he said. "No one ever told me anything about bidding and I would think during this pandemic things should be different. This is not the NFL and we are not trying to broadcast the Super Bowl. Anyone should be able to watch their child or grandchild play football on as many outlets as they could find." PIAA has been charging fees to various production companies for several years to broadcast games and that is not out of the ordinary, according to several District IV athletic directors. – **Sunbury Daily Item**

According to 2019 data released Thursday (Nov. 12) by the FCC, the number of Americans without access to fixed terrestrial broadband of at least 25/3 Mbps was 14.5 million, a 46% drop from 2016. The data was as of Dec. 31, 2019.

"In just three years, the number of American consumers living in areas without access to fixed broadband has been almost cut in half," said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. "We've taken aggressive steps to achieve this progress, modernizing regulations, freeing up new licensed and unlicensed spectrum, and making it easier and cheaper for competitive providers to deploy fiber through our 'one-touch make ready' policy."

The number of Americans in areas without broadband speeds of at least 250/25 Mbps fell by 77% since the end of 2016 while the number of rural Americans in areas with 250/25 Mbps service increased by 268%. The data is based on the FCC's form 477 data collection, which has come under plenty of criticism from Congress, which passed bipartisan legislation mandating an improved data-collection framework, something the FCC was already in the process of doing. – **Next TV**

In a particularly litigious presidential campaign, one legal fight may have saved President-elect Joe Biden's chances of winning Pennsylvania — and the presidency.

The state Supreme Court, in a split verdict Sept. 17, removed Green Party presidential candidate Howie Hawkins from the ballot for improper paperwork. The legal challenge was filed on behalf of two Democrats by Pittsburgh attorney Clifford Levine, who was representing the Pennsylvania Democratic Party in other cases. "The concern was that, if you looked at the results in 2016, the Green Party candidate got more votes than the margin between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton," Levine said Monday. "There was obviously a concern that a third-party candidate may effectively dilute the focus that we thought was important, that it be a race between Donald Trump and Joe Biden."

Jill Stein, the Green Party's 2016 nominee, won 49,941 votes in Pennsylvania in 2016, as Clinton fell to Trump by 44,292 votes, a margin of just 0.7%. Biden held a lead of about 54,000 votes over Trump in the state, as of Thursday. Pennsylvania secured an Electoral College win for Biden on Saturday as media outlets across the country called the state in his favor.

The Green Party's nominees for attorney general, auditor general, and treasurer all won far more votes than Biden's lead. Larry Otter, the Green Party's attorney, said the race may have remained unresolved but for the removal of Hawkins. State law requires an automatic recount if a race is decided by a margin of 0.5% or less. News outlets didn't call the race until after Biden's lead eclipsed that benchmark. "Obviously the Democratic challenge to

the Green Party may have made the difference at the presidential level between an automatic recount and no recount," Otter said. – **Chris Brennan's "Clout" column in *Philadelphia Daily News***



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