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The NFL is ready to hand off its Thursday Night Football streaming package as a carrot to get phone giant Verizon to cough up more cash to renew its existing mobile-phone rights deal, The Post has learned.

Verizon wants to renew its phone rights to NFL games on Sunday, Monday and Thursday and win wider streaming rights beyond what it already hosts, sources tell The Post. The deal could boost its virtual cable-style programming bundle branded go90. The \$1 billion phone rights deal is set to expire after next year's Super Bowl. "The [NFL] wants to tie [Thursday streaming rights] to an extension of Verizon's NFL sponsorship and its \$1 billion exclusive lock on mobile," said a source close to talks, adding that Verizon wants to renew the deal but has been pushing back on price. Part of the deal would include a renewal of its NFL sponsorship, too.

It is not known how much more Commissioner Roger Goodell wants from Verizon coffers, but CBS and NBC recently agreed to pay \$45 million per game, an increase for CBS of \$7.5 million to share the broadcast TV rights to Thursday games. CBS had them exclusively this past season. The two broadcast networks are to split a package of eight games, which will be shared with both NFL Network and an as-yet-unknown streaming partner. A new deal is expected in a few weeks, sources say.

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agreement with AT&T unit DirecTV prevent real price competition for the bars and restaurants that pay to screen it.

In separate news, Bloomberg is reporting that Verizon has been using AOL chief Tim Armstrong to reach out to Yahoo! for a possible acquisition. Armstrong's prior approaches, before his AOL was acquired by Verizon, were rebuffed by Yahoo! boss Marissa Mayer, who has preferred to pursue her own vision for building the company.

Verizon Chief Executive Lowell McAdam confirmed to CNBC on Friday his firm's interest in acquiring Yahoo! "We have to understand the trends that we are seeing in some of their results now. But then, at the right price, I think marrying up some of their assets with AOL under Tim Armstrong's leadership would be a good thing for investors," he told the network. NFL had no comment. — *New York Post*

The streaming rights for Thursday night games have excited interest from several companies — with Bloomberg reporting Monday that AT&T, Verizon and Yahoo! are expected to bid. An oversize bid for streaming Thursday night NFL games from Yahoo! would likely cause shareholder angst for those who want to see Yahoo! cutting costs. Yahoo! bid \$17 million to gain streaming rights to a London game last year. AT&T meanwhile holds NFL rights via DirecTV's Sunday Ticket. It has an eight-year exclusive lock on that package. Nevertheless, sources say Amazon has been eyeing a way to win streaming rights to Sunday Ticket.

The Sunday Ticket renewal signed in October 2014 is worth \$12 billion but has been targeted by antitrust lawyers arguing that the NFL teams and their

The force may be with Walt Disney Co., but the media conglomerate needs more than that.

The cord-cutting phenomenon and its worrisome impact on ESPN have overshadowed success from Disney's "Star Wars" bonanza. Shares have been on a roller-coaster since last summer and are now about a quarter off their peak. When Disney reports fiscal first-quarter results Tuesday, the stock's next move will likely be dictated by what it says about the sports network.

Analysts polled by FactSet expect earnings for the quarter through December of \$1.45 a share, up 14% from a year ago. Revenue is forecast to have risen ten percent. While Disney rarely misses estimates, the bigger issue is cable. Concerns are justified. ESPN is the most important part of Disney's "media networks" business, which accounts for 52% of operating income in fiscal 2015. While that is by far Disney's largest unit, its contribution has been falling for four consecutive years. Analysts expect worse to come.

In November, Disney said it lost three million ESPN subscribers within a year, sparking the stock's recent selloff. That followed an earlier warning in August. As ESPN sheds subscribers, Disney earns less from pay-TV operators that carry the content.

The unparalleled lure of live sports programming gives Disney strong bargaining power. But contractual obligations with cable affiliates and other concerns make a pure ESPN online offering problematic. At the same time, rising cable costs have prompted more consumers to either cut the cord entirely or move to "skinny" bundles of channels that sometimes exclude ESPN.

J.P. Morgan analysts forecast operating income from cable networks will decelerate, pushing the broader media segment below half of total operating income by 2017. As recently as 2011, its share was 69%. It appears questionable that revenue from parks and resorts as well as consumer products can pick up the slack.

Yet, even after Disney's recent swoon, the stock still trades at 15.6 times projected earnings over the next 12 months—right around its 10-year average. That isn't enough of a bargain. This is the investing equivalent of "fourth and manageable." The smarter move here is to punt rather than go for it. — *Wall Street Journal*

The Senate plans to vote Wednesday on removing embattled Attorney General Kathleen Kane from office, the top GOP leader said.

Kane, a Democrat elected statewide in 2012, faces criminal charges in Montgomery County related to a grand jury leak that prosecutors say she orchestrated to embarrass a critic. On Friday, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld an earlier ruling to suspend Kane's law license.

The first-term Democrat has vigorously denied the allegations and is pursuing a second term. "The attorney general believes the Senate's action is unwarranted and unconstitutional, that our system of justice is founded on a presumption of innocence and she is not being offered that presumption," her spokesman Chuck Ardo said.

The Senate conducted hearings in November and December as to whether Kane can continue to perform her duties as the state's top law enforcement officer while she no longer has an active law license. Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati said that he scheduled the vote "after considerable discussion with members of the Senate," according to a statement issued Monday by his office. A resolution would be introduced and would be voted upon by the full Senate, the Jefferson County Republican said.

Any member of the Senate can ask for a vote to remove her under a section of the constitution that allows removal of certain elected officials for "reasonable cause." A super-majority vote of two-thirds is needed for removal. At least 33 "yes" votes in the Republican-controlled Senate will be required to remove her. Scarnati aide Drew

Crompton said the Senate process for Wednesday's session will be outlined in a resolution expected to be made public Tuesday. He said Kane will not be given a chance to address the Senate. "Our members will thoroughly review the evidence that was presented at the hearings (in November and December) and make a determination going forward," said Senate Minority Leader Jay Costa, D-Forest Hills, who declined to speculate on the outcome of the vote.

Kane is the first chief law enforcement officer to be charged with a crime since former Attorney General Ernie Preate, a Republican, in 1995. He resigned as part of a plea deal on a mail fraud charge for which he served 11 months in prison. A removal petition from the Senate would go to the governor for signature. The constitutional provision has not been used since the late 1800s.

Costa has said impeachment would be a more appropriate method for removing an elected official. It may take months for the House Judiciary Committee to consider articles of impeachment, if lawmakers approve the resolution, and an investigation does not automatically lead to impeachment, House Republican and Democratic legislators say. – *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*



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