

Men's College Basketball

NCAA title on cable for 1st time; ratings depend on matchups

By RACHEL COHEN
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK — The NCAA Tournament’s semi-finals moved to cable for the first time in 2014, and viewership was down 11 percent from the season before.

Back on cable again last year, the result was the complete opposite: The two games averaged their largest audience in nearly two decades.

Now with the national championship game airing on cable for the first time Monday, the history in college basketball and other sports has been that when the matchups and story lines are appealing enough, fans will find the action no matter where it is.

This season, though, viewers haven’t been as eager to tune into the games. The 2016 tournament lacks the star power and dominant team of a year ago, when Kentucky was two wins from an undefeated season and big-name big men Jahlil Okafor and Frank Kaminsky met in the final. The tournament’s average audience is down 12 percent so far from 2015’s huge numbers, suggesting that the title game viewership would likely slip significantly on any network. Especially since last year’s final drew its largest audience in 18 years.

“It always comes down to which teams make it through, what story lines develop and how close the games are,” CBS Sports Chairman Sean

McManus said before the start of the tournament.

CBS and Turner agreed to a 14-year, \$10.8 billion contract in 2010 to jointly televise the NCAA Tournament across four channels beginning in 2011, a format that has proved hugely popular. Part of the deal was that starting in 2016, the title game would alternate between CBS and TBS.

“It’s been remarkable how the viewers and the fans have found the games,” McManus said. “They understand if there’s another good game going on better than the game they’re watching, we’ll navigate them to that game. So I don’t think there’s going to be any issue with the basketball fans knowing that the finals are

on TBS, just like they know where the regional final (is).”

Cord-cutting — as customers have canceled cable subscriptions or switched to smaller packages — has widened the difference between the potential audience on CBS and TBS. TBS is in about 18 percent fewer households than CBS; when the two companies started broadcasting the tournament together in 2011, the gap was around 13 percent. The change amounts to approximately 6 million homes.

Sports fans tend to be more likely to have cable, though, and last year’s semifinals proved TBS can still draw. Wisconsin’s win over previously undefeated Kentucky attracted the most

viewers for an NCAA semifinal in 19 years.

The previous season, the two matchups didn’t have the same appeal: UConn-Florida, and another meeting between Kentucky and Wisconsin, but when the Wildcats weren’t undefeated and the Badgers’ stars were less well-known.

Viewership for Monday’s final will likely be boosted by “Team Streams,” additional broadcasts that air on TNT and truTV that cover the game from the perspective of each school. Simply airing the game on multiple networks — especially a widely watched one such as TNT — can add eyeballs. The large audiences on TNT the last two years for the semifinal “Team Streams”

have suggested that some viewers are watching that telecast without realizing it’s not the main one.

CBS and Turner share the revenue from the tournament regardless of which channel particular games appear on. Much of the appeal to Turner of the NCAA deal was exposure — and viewership — for its networks that wouldn’t come otherwise. The company will compare its ratings more to other programs on TBS than previous championship games.

That’s why even before the start of the tournament, Turner President David Levy could say: “There’s a very big bounce in our company’s step.”

Pro basketball

Warriors outlast Jazz in overtime to set franchise record win total

By KAREEM COPELAND
AP Sports Writer

SALT LAKE CITY — Stephen Curry scored 31 points, including six straight in overtime, and the Golden State Warriors continued their historic run with a 103-96 victory over the Utah Jazz on Wednesday night.

The Warriors (68-7) surpassed last season’s victory total and must win five of their final seven

games to break the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls’ record of 72-10.

Klay Thompson hit the tying 3-pointer with 15 seconds remaining in regulation after an offensive rebound and kick-out from Shaun Livingston after Thompson missed the previous attempt.

Curry took over with his burst that gave the Warriors a 99-93 lead. He then took a charge on Gordon Hayward with 1:21 left before setting

NBA



Golden State

103



Utah

96

up Draymond Green’s dunk on the ensuing possession to put away the game.

The Jazz (37-38) fell into a tie with the Houston Rockets for the No. 7 slot in the Western Conference playoff race.

Curry had seven rebounds and four assists, while Thompson finished with 18 points.

Hayward led the Jazz with 21 points and Rodney Hood added 20. Rudy Gobert finished with 11 points and 18 rebounds.

The Jazz shot just 34.8 percent in the first half, but only trailed 42-40 at the break. The Warriors managed just 16 points in the second quarter, a season low for that period.

TIP-INS

Warriors: The Warriors have been held to 42 or fewer points in the first half just three times in 2015-16. ... Curry has hit a 3-pointer in an NBA-record 145 straight games.

Jazz: Alec Burks missed his 47th consecutive game with a fractured fibula. Jazz coach Quin Snyder said they’re being conservative with his return. ... Derrick Favors left the game in the third quarter with right knee

soreness and did not return.

QUOTABLE

“I’ve said many times over the years that I didn’t think that (Bulls) record would be broken, and it still may not be,” Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. “We have a tough finish still to go in the last games. To be part of both situations is unreal. It’s a pretty good stroke of fortune.”

UP NEXT

Warriors: Host Boston on Friday.

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