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How could London team shake up TV market?

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The NFL's desire to place a team in London has more to do with the league's British media rights than its domestic deals, but the presence of a team in Europe could benefit the U.S. broadcast networks, as well.

"What if the NFL plays its London games early Sunday afternoon, and it creates a new Sunday morning window," said industry consultant Ed Desser, who is president of Desser Sports Media. "That's a virgin time slot for the NFL."

Such a move would benefit the league's Sunday afternoon rights holders, CBS and Fox. It's unlikely that the league's prime-time rights holders, ESPN, NBC and CBS/NFL Network, would carry a game from London, as an 8 p.m. ET kickoff would be 1 a.m. in England.

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ED DESSER
DESSER SPORTS MEDIA

The English Premier League's U.S. television performance during that weekend morning time slot on NBC suggests that people will get up early to watch. Whether that carries over to the NFL: The league might at least get a taste of that on Oct. 26, when Detroit and Atlanta kick off their game in London — the second of this year's three U.K. games — at 9:30 a.m. ET, airing on Fox.

Still, any move to put an NFL team in the U.K. market would be much more beneficial for the league than for its current crop of U.S. TV partners.

"What you get by putting a team there is that you expand the home market by tens of millions of homes," Desser said. "It would take decades for the league to grow that much in the U.S."

While the league's U.S. television deals with CBS, ESPN, Fox and NBC are tied up into the next decade, its

British deals with Sky Sports and Channel 4 are much shorter term. Sky's deal ends after this season; Channel 4's ends after the next one.

If the NFL places a team in London, the league clearly believes it will be able to negotiate a bigger media rights deal in Britain, given the local revenue possibilities and local interest in the games.

Even with a potentially new time slot, a team in London would present several challenges for U.S. broadcasters.

Networks would see a rise in production costs combined with the loss of a domestic home market. And obviously the added British viewers would help British broadcasters, but not the ones in the U.S.

"Each time you take away a home market, your average rating goes down," Desser said. "But the NFL has done remarkably well slicing and dicing the salami in thinner and thinner pieces."

The story is completely different when it comes to Los Angeles, for example. The second-biggest U.S. television market has been without an NFL team since 1994, when the Raiders moved to Oakland and the Rams left for St. Louis.

Network executives have been open about wanting a Los Angeles team — particularly a successful team — in the conference with which it is associated. But don't count the league's TV partners as anxiously pushing to be in Los Angeles. TV networks aren't fighting the NFL's desire to put a team in Los Angeles, but they certainly aren't clamoring for it, either. After two consecutive seasons of record-high TV ratings, network executives say they are happy with their rights packages as they currently stand.

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