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NFL to Acquire 10% Stake in ESPN Through Expanded Media Partnership

August 6, 2025

— Categories: *Breaking News*



The National Football League (NFL) has announced a strategic partnership with ESPN that will see the league take a 10% equity stake in the Disney-owned sports media company. As part of the agreement, ESPN will gain control of the NFL Network and expand its access to NFL content, including games, RedZone broadcasts, and NFL Films programming.

The non-binding deal, revealed on Tuesday, outlines a substantial media realignment between two of the most influential forces in American sports. While ESPN will assume ownership of the NFL Network, it will also license key content from the league, including broader access to the NFL RedZone brand and programming. Additionally, ESPN and the

NFL will merge their fantasy football operations, further consolidating digital offerings under one platform.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell highlighted the Network's legacy, stating, "Since its launch in 2003, NFL Network has provided millions of fans unprecedented access to the sport they love. The Network's sale to ESPN will build on this remarkable legacy, providing more NFL football for more fans in new and innovative ways."

As part of the arrangement, ESPN platforms will acquire rights to air three additional NFL games each season. Meanwhile, some games previously licensed to ESPN will now be broadcast by the NFL Network, which will continue to air seven games per year. The deal also grants ESPN linear distribution rights for the RedZone Channel, although the NFL will retain digital distribution rights and full ownership of the RedZone brand itself.

Robert A. Iger, Chief Executive Officer of The Walt Disney Company, described the agreement as a pivotal moment for both brands. "Today's announcement paves the way for the world's leading sports media brand and America's most popular sport to deliver an even more compelling experience for NFL fans," Iger said.

Jimmy Pitaro, Chairman of ESPN, echoed that sentiment. "By combining these NFL media assets with ESPN's reach and innovation, we're creating a premier destination for football fans," he said. Pitaro also noted that the agreement supports the network's plans for a direct-to-consumer service, marking a shift in ESPN's long-term digital strategy.

Despite the sale of the NFL Network, the league will continue to own and operate other media assets, including NFL Films, NFL.com, and the official websites of NFL teams.

The transaction is not yet final. It remains subject to ongoing negotiations and requires approval from NFL team owners before it can be completed. If approved, the deal would represent one of the most significant collaborations between a professional sports league and a major media company to date, offering a streamlined experience for fans and potentially redefining how NFL content is consumed in the years ahead.