

Free kick for Ten coverage as ABC likely to be booted



DARREN DAVIDSON THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM May 29, 2017

Ten Network is poised to snatch A-League and Socceroos matches from SBS if no more bidders come forward before a formal deadline this week, dealing a blow to the ABC's hopes of gaining the television rights.

While Football Federation Australia and its adviser Adara Partners held talks with the ABC, it's understood soccer administrators will knock back the public broadcaster's bid.

It's believed Seven West Media, Nine Entertainment Company, and SBS have not yet lodged an official bid with the FFA. The deadline falls on Wednesday. The FFA is also set to reject other bids for rights. At least one telco is said to have expressed interest in buying streaming rights. The FFA declined to comment.

Pay-TV sports programming network Fox Sports has already signed a record six year \$346 million deal to broadcast matches on Foxtel from next season.

Under this deal, the free-to-air rights and Socceroos rights revert to Fox Sports for an extra \$2m to \$4m per year if the FFA does not sell the package to any other broadcaster. This allows Fox Sports to on-sell the free-to-air rights to another broadcaster as it currently does with Nine and Socceroos matches.

It's believed a deal is in place for Ten to pick up the rights in time for the 2017/18 season, which kicks off in October.

Foxtel, jointly owned by News Corp and Telstra, owns 13.91 per cent of Ten. Fox Sports is wholly owned by News Corp, publisher of The Australian.

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News of the development comes after the ABC came under heavy criticism last week thanks to its calamitous coverage of a friendly match between A-League champions Sydney FC and English Premier League club Liverpool.

The ABC's broadcast, described by viewers as excruciating and embarrassing, prompted the FFA to express its disappointment in a statement.

"Like many fans, FFA is disappointed with some aspects of the ABC's broadcast of the Sydney FC v Liverpool FC match last night," the governing body said via its Twitter account. "Pregame, halftime & postgame coverage wasn't to standard expected by FFA & football fans. We've made that point to ABC management."

Although the FFA's administrators are angry about the broadcast, which included a tacky whiteboard with cut-outs of players instead of graphic overlays, peculiar interviews and sound problems, sources insisted administrators had already made up their minds about the future of the free-to-air rights. For

Ten, winning the rights is a major boost for the network after a recent uptick in ratings was overshadowed by a high-profile refinancing of the company's \$200m loan and disappointing half-year results.

A-league matches on Saturday evening are likely to be aired on Ten's multi-channels, taking the game to a potential new audience.

The three main commercial networks will now focus on broadcast rights for cricket. A formal tender process is expected to start in the coming months, with the Big Bash League set to attract strong interest from all the broadcasters. It comes after the AFL signed a \$2.508 billion agreement with Seven, Foxtel and Telstra for six years, and the NRL clinched a \$1.8bn five-year TV agreement with Nine, Fox Sports and Telstra.

The boom in sports rights reflects shifts in the TV industry as viewers watch more programs on demand, skipping ads.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/free-kick-for-ten-coverage-as-abc-likely-to-be-booted/news-story/c2d43cf3e958b3e422cfb9e04d76a6c1>