



[/cs-20-btn-comcastjun20,1,2904221.story](#)

BTN and Comcast seal deal

Subscribers will get to click onto sports channel August 15

By Teddy Greenstein

Tribune reporter

June 20, 2008

After returning home from work Thursday, Big Ten Network President Mark Silverman was in the mood to celebrate.

"I've been looking at this bottle of wine and waiting to crack it open," he said. "I have a nice cab(ernet) that I've been hanging onto for a while."

The wine aged during nearly two years of financial wrangling between Comcast and BTN officials. It wasn't much fun for the two sides, but the haggling did result in a deal announced Thursday that reflects the oddity of the cable business.

"You go from hardball negotiations to partners overnight," Silverman said.

Let's address some possible questions:

*I'm a Comcast subscriber in Naperville. When will I get the channel and how much will it cost me?*

It will appear magically on a channel to be determined Aug. 15, two weeks before the Big Ten season kicks off. Although Comcast will pay the BTN 70-80 cents per month per subscriber, Comcast spokesman Rich Ruggiero said your bill, which rose in November, will not climb because of the deal.

*What happens in the spring?*

After its 2008 free "preview" Comcast can move the network to a digital level of service. The majority of viewers will not have to pay for it, but some will.

*What are the chances that I'm one of them?*

Comcast won't divulge that yet. It apparently will depend on the digital penetration of your market and how popular the channel is deemed to be.

*I'm a Northwestern alum living in L.A. Will I get the channel?*

That depends ... and it's hard to say what it depends on. Comcast has paid for the right to offer it but has yet to determine where it will be available and for what cost.

*I live in Iowa. What does this deal do for me?*

Nothing. Comcast has no customers in Iowa, where Mediacom is king. Time Warner has about 2 million subscribers in Ohio and 500,000 in Wisconsin. Charter is big in Wisconsin (450,000) and has 300,000 customers in Minnesota. BTN officials hope this deal will jump start negotiations with those companies, which represent more than 25 percent of Big Ten country.

*Will this change the BTN's programming?*

Silverman said the network would develop more original programming, including list- or rankings-based shows and programs similar to "The Journey," which chronicled Tubby Smith's first season at Minnesota. But Silverman said the enhancements are natural for a second-year network and are not tied to the new revenue from the deal.

Copyright © 2008, [The Chicago Tribune](#)