



## **MARKET RELEASE**

**7 November 2018**

# **Spark makes first move into sports content production as part of securing hockey rights; also announces sports brand and platform provider**

- **Spark secures rights for FIH Hockey event series, including all Vantage Black Sticks men's and women's competitions**
- **Spark will produce and be host broadcaster for all FIH Pro League matches played in New Zealand, in partnership with NEP New Zealand; demonstrating Sparks ambition to become a key player in the local sports market**
- **Spark's sport streaming service will be branded Spark Sport and customers can register their interest at [www.spark.co.nz/sport](http://www.spark.co.nz/sport)**
- **iStreamPlanet, which currently supports streaming for the Super Bowl, the NBA League Pass and the Olympics, selected as the platform provider for Spark Sport**

Spark announced today it has won a four-year deal for FIH (International Hockey Federation) media rights in New Zealand. These rights include the Hockey World Cup, the Hockey Pro League and Olympic Qualification, plus rights to the National Hockey League. All rights are for live and on demand coverage of both women's and men's competitions from January 2019 to the end of 2022 and include all Black Sticks fixtures.

Notably, the FIH Pro League is a new international competition that will run from January to June 2019, with matches in New Zealand and overseas. Spark has production rights and will be host broadcaster for all FIH Pro League matches played in New Zealand.

This is Spark's first sports partnership that includes local production rights, demonstrating Spark's ambition to become a key player in the local sports market as well as a provider of international sports coverage.

NEP New Zealand, part of the NEP Worldwide Network, will be Spark's production and outside broadcast partner for the FIH Pro series. NEP run more than 2,000 hours of Australian broadcast production each year, including key live sport titles (NRL, AFL,



Cricket, MotoGP, Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix). As the FIH Pro League hits off in Auckland in January 2019, all initial Black Sticks matches will be broadcast live on TVNZ 2. However, once Spark's new service goes live, matches will be available exclusively from Spark Sport.

Head of Spark Sport, Jeff Latch, said Spark was thrilled to be supporting New Zealand hockey. "This deal means New Zealanders will be able to watch our national hockey teams live every time they play in New Zealand or overseas – and will have more access to live hockey event coverage than ever before. Across all the events, every year there will be hundreds of hours of play available on Spark Sport.

"We're excited to be taking on the responsibility for local production and broadcast, in conjunction with our production partner NEP New Zealand, for the inaugural FIH Pro League. We're really proud to be working with New Zealand Hockey to ensure hockey fans get to enjoy all the games in New Zealand."

FIH CEO, Thierry Weil said: "I'm delighted that FIH could sign a media rights agreement with such a strong partner as Spark. This new partnership will give hockey more exposure than ever before in New Zealand, thus substantially contributing to the development of the game, which is FIH's number one mission."

CEO of New Zealand Hockey, Ian Francis, said, "We are excited by the opportunity that a partnership with Spark Sport brings. It will allow the Black Sticks and hockey in New Zealand to reach a larger audience both locally and globally. Spark Sport already has a strong line up of sports and being part of this service will open up hockey to an audience that might not have previously considered watching it."

The hockey rights are in addition to the rugby, football and motorsport content already announced by Spark, including the Rugby World Cup 2019, the Premier League from August 2019 and Formula 1 from March 2019. More content rights will be announced in coming weeks.

## **Unveiling Spark Sport**

Today Spark has also unveiled the official brand for the sports streaming service.

David Chalmers, CFO and Spark's Executive Lead for Sport says: "Spark's new sport streaming service will be known as **Spark Sport**. We picked a name that clearly demonstrates our ambition both to help Kiwis get the most out of technology and to deliver them a better sport experience - with the freedom and flexibility to watch sport the way they want to watch, at a time that suits them."

## **"World-class" sports streaming platform provider**

Chalmers says US-based iStreamPlanet, a subsidiary of Turner, a WarnerMedia company, has an impressive pedigree, having provided the streaming platform for a number of large



sports events – including the Super Bowl, the Olympics, the NCAA March Madness, the NBA League Pass and the F1 TV Pro channel.

Chalmers says that with New Zealanders embracing streaming, “Spark wanted a provider capable of supporting a very large number of concurrent users while still offering a world-class viewing experience.”

iStreamPlanet was selected after an extensive evaluation process by Spark. They will provide the bulk of the technical infrastructure for Spark Sport, including video encoding and distribution, user authentication, subscription management and billing and App development across a wide range of devices.

“The team at iStreamPlanet has sports streaming in their DNA, having been in the online sport streaming game for 15 years. They use leading cloud technologies to provide a reliable, scalable and exceptionally high-quality video experience for sports fans – and that is exactly what we want to provide New Zealanders for the Rugby World Cup 2019,” says Chalmers.

“The platform will also offer a number of attractive features such as live pause, restart live events, and a comprehensive library of on-demand and highlights packages across a wide range of platforms and devices”, Chalmers says. After launch, Spark will continue to enhance the feature set and expand the device coverage.

Spark will announce more details about Spark Sport, including pricing options, over the next few months. In the meantime, New Zealand sports fans can register their interest at [www.spark.co.nz/sport](http://www.spark.co.nz/sport).

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For media queries, please contact:

Ellie Cross

Communications Partner

+64 (0) 22 630 0665

For investor relations queries, please contact:

Dean Werder

Finance Lead Partner, Product and Performance

+64 (0) 27 259 7176