

Sports Geek Nation AMA with John McCauley

John McCauley was a former Sports Geek podcast guest back in episode 130. He bears 18 years of experience in digital, content, business intelligence and marketing on his shoulders having worked with several sports organizations in the world including NFL, NBA, MLS, MLB and NHL. After his 13-year stint in MLSE, John took the role of Executive Director at GJM Media to fill in the gap between strategy and execution to deliver first-class media experiences.

Connect with on John McCauley on Twitter [@JohnMcCauley](https://twitter.com/JohnMcCauley), [LinkedIn](#) and Slack [@johnmccauley](https://join.slack.com/join/shared_invite/zt-1000000000-0000000000/@johnmccauley). Find out more about GJM Media at <https://www.genuinejourneymedia.com/>

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

Q. [Sean Callanan](#): I'll kick things off as we regularly catchup and bounce sports tech/marketing ideas off each other [@johnmccauley](#) including our collaboration to see Sports Geek now available on Roku with DotStudioPro. John give everyone some insight into OTT and some of the success you are seeing in the space.

A. John McCauley: First off thanks for having me Sean! Looking forward to chatting with everyone. I've been lucky enough to spend my entire career in sports and digital and it is communities like this that allow us to share best practices and learn from all corners of the globe.

I've been lucky enough to work with brands that have always believed in building platforms and that now includes OTT. Apple TV, Roku, Amazon Fire, Chromecast to name a few have become the fastest growing sector of video. My first venture into the space was PPV steaming of regional Toronto Maple Leafs games on mapleleafs.com in 2008. The next phase was building a live streaming service called Realsports on the Xbox in 2012, which included Maple Leafs, Raptors and Toronto FC games. Now when I think back to those projects, I'm awe struck at how platforms like DotStudioPro have enabled brands like the Minnesota Vikings to distribute all of their original content to all the appropriate places from one content management system. Owning your own OTT platforms creates the direct to consumer relationships sports brands crave, creates sponsorship and advertising ROI and drives media rights for your best programming. WIN, WIN, WIN.

I've always run my teams brands or my own business today with 3 simple things in mind

1. Build Audience
2. Collect data
3. Commercialize

There is no more exciting place to fulfill those strategies than with OTT in 2018 IMO.

Q. [andrewwaltonx](#): Hello @johnmccauley - you appear to have a unique perspective across sports, would there be an example you could share where a recent tech/digital innovation has not worked or performed as expected please?

A. johnmccauley: Hi Andrew, I don't think you have to look too far to find out that VR hasn't taken over the world as expected. Too many headsets, content is too expensive to make and competition from other media have really made it a miss so far. Starting to remind me of 3D but if the cost for content comes down dramatically it could make comeback especially in the #sportsbiz. I want to sit in the Maple Leafs dressing room and get ready for a game with Auston Matthews, if someone can make that happen we will be in for a resurgence.

Q. [Tod Caflisch](#): @johnmccauley I recently read that 10 years from now mobile phones will be obsolete. How will that affect the fan experience both at home and in-venue? How will it affect marketing to fans?

A. johnmccauley: I would say that of course the hardware will change ... I'm sure at some point my phone will be an earbud that can simply project info onto whatever screen I'm in front of or to my glasses but I think at the core of it you need to do two things

1. Provide good content
2. Provide great utility

If you root yourself in those two things, the devices become less of a daunting challenge. How many devices have we seen change already? We thought Google Glass was going to go bananas but it hasn't yet ... doesn't mean it won't though. A device survives if can aggregate services together that provide content and utility. Right now the phone is winning maybe headphones are the thing going forward, only time will tell.

Q. [joshuaduboff](#): Hi @johnmccauley, as a Canadian and a sports fan, I'm curious on your take of the CPL. Do you think it can take off?

A. johnmccauley: I think that the CPL has done an incredible job of launching their brands here in Canada and that is a big step forward. The team that has been put in place to run the league are some of the best sports minds in the business so that bodes very well. There is bound to be some up and downs but from my information about the league they are in it for the long haul and that can only be good for the game here in Canada. Where the rubber hits the road is will they be able to tap into the supporter culture that has made the MLS take off. TFC started the authentic soccer experience (I'm totally biased because I ran digital for the club) and you have seen all the most successful clubs follow that blueprint ... Portland,

Seattle, Atlanta. The CPL by all indications is doing the same just on a smaller level and will need to in order to drive ticketing revenue, which will, in turn, drive sponsorships and media rights. I think in 10 years it will be a big part of the reason why Canada's men's team is back in the World Cup.

fouge: John meant to say in four years :)

Q. [joshgrunberg](#): @johnmccauley The best and worst elements working for the most notable Canadian sports franchises within Canada's largest sports and entertainment company.

A. [johnmccauley](#): Hi Josh, great question!

Let's start with the good and there is plenty of it. My time at MLSE working with the Maple Leafs, Raptors, Toronto FC, Toronto Marlies, Leafs TV, NBA TV Canada, GoTV and Realsports was an amazing 15-year journey that just happened to coincide with the onset of a technology evolution in the space, so I consider myself a pretty lucky duck.

At MLSE we had the biggest brands and the most resources in the NHL, NBA, MLS and AHL by far, especially in digital, which was a huge advantage. Our leadership team allowed my team to be cutting edge because they could, especially when we did our due diligence and advised on calculated risks. This is an advantage that most smaller organizations don't have.

On the other side of the coin having so many different brands, it was often difficult to focus on the little things that can make a big difference as it relates to digital experience. No matter how many resources we had it really wasn't enough to manage everything and you had to make tough choices on where to spend your dollars. Combine that with at bigger organizations you have the more departmental silos to deal with and internal politics can become a barrier to innovation. Making it more difficult was the fact when I was at MLSE winning didn't come easy for any of the teams. Basically, it's a double edged sword at a big company like MLSE. I always wanted to be a little more nimble but that is the price you pay to work within all the best leagues in North America at once.

Q. [Lenard](#): @johnmccauley do you see stadium attendance down or up because of fans wanting to follow multiple teams because of fantasy sports and a better in-home experience?

A. [johnmccauley](#):

Hi Lenard,

I think that your question really depends on the sport if we are talking American Football/NFL. I think in some markets where the team is not performing they are having attendance issues and most certainly a contributing factor to that is sports caves oaded with 80-inch screens, Bose sound and a full beer fridge. People just aren't going to spend \$1000 to go to a game -- unless you are a massive fan or super rich -- when times are tough on the field. I don't think fantasy has anything to do with it ... this is just simply people are being careful with their money and when you weigh your basement against that \$1000 Visa bill the basement is winning especially against tickets in the nosebleeds or the expensive lower bowls sections. The thing the NFL has going for it is there are so few games that demand is high.

As for other leagues, I have been preaching for a while about how badly produced the in-house broadcasts on the big screens are in almost every sport. There simply isn't enough replays to compete with the quality of broadcasts at home ... part of which is foolish league rules. It has to change though ... if you have a 20 million dollar screen in your arena you better have a killer broadcast team or it is a waste. Plus from a fan's perspective when you are paying \$15 beers, I better get as many replays as I do at home on TV.

One thing I do know is that live events are the only things that get us out of the house anymore, and that will never change, so sports and music will always be king and queen of that.

Q. [ilvettojr](#): @johnmccauley Hi John! In one of my three visits to Toronto I had the chance to meet some people working at MLSE, and while talking about the Toronto FC development plan one thing were said and stuck in my mind: "soccer is going to take football's place in the north american sportainment world". I'd like to know if you agree, or what you think of it. Thanks!

A. johnmccauley:

Hi Marco,

That is a pretty bold statement!

I would say that more than any other sport in North America, Soccer has the most upside because it has been so far behind the others and more kids play it than any other sport. Will it take the place of football? Not in my lifetime. There is just too much ground to cover from an audience, media rights and sponsorship perspective in the US. NFL football dominates and just because traditional television ratings are falling doesn't mean it still isn't the biggest driver of audience. All network and cable TV rating are dropping. NFL is one of the big

reasons is it hasn't been a steeper decline. Great statement to make if you own a soccer club but I don't see it. I also believe there is plenty of room for both!

Q. [liambednarski](#): @johnmccauley you mentioned soccer has a huge potential upside. Given it's position in the Canadian sports marketplace currently what do you see as the biggest opportunities and some of the challenges in utilizing digital to grow this particular sport?

A. johnmccauley:

Hi Liam,

To that question, I would say that digital IS the biggest opportunity for new sports, especially soccer, to reach new younger audiences and make fans for life. Mobile, OTT, Data, Video and Social should be the focal point.

The biggest challenge in digital IS and ALWAYS has been BUDGET. Sooner or later the digital budgets are going to rise and we will see tremendous growth. Every team I talk with has trouble allocating enough 💰 and hopefully with communities like this we can help each figure out how to cross that bridge.

What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

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