

airwaves

# THIS IS ONE WILD PARTY

Add crazy fans to wacky sportscasters and you have the essence of ESPN on location. **By Lisa Magenheimer**

It's difficult to imagine a major sporting event without "SportsCenter" in the picture. By far television's most-watched sports news show, ESPN's signature show has become its own entity — some call it a cult — during the last 20 years, through its unique brand of humor, up-to-the-minute sports news and unmatched analysis and perspective.

For the first time since Tampa hosted Super Bowl XXV eight years ago, Bay area sports fans can take part in the hoopla that surrounds the land-

mark program when ESPN takes its popular studio show on the road for the Final Four.

Beginning today, SportsCenter will telecast live from the observation deck of The Pier in St. Petersburg for six consecutive days. Chris Fowler will host the special editions with analysis from Digger Phelps and crowd favorite Dick Vitale, whose "Awesome Baby!" catch phrase has become synonymous with the excitement and monstrous audiences SportsCenter draws in sports towns.

In addition to live reports from Jay

Bilas, Quinn Buckner, Dave Feldman and Steve Cyphers, ESPN will extend its coverage across Tampa Bay to the Ice Palace tonight for the College Slam Dunk and 3-Point Champion-

## FINAL FOUR ON THE AIR

■ **Where to tune:** Television — WTSP-Channel 10, Radio — WZTM-820 AM

■ **Schedule:** Saturday — Game 1 starts at 5:30 p.m.; Game 2 follows 30 minutes following conclusion of previous game. Monday — Championship game, 9 p.m.

## ESPN PROGRAMMING

All events live from The Pier in St. Petersburg, unless otherwise noted.

■ **Thursday:** 6:30-7:30 p.m. — SportsCenter. 9:30-11:30 p.m. — 1999 College Slam Dunk and 3-Point Championship (Ice Palace, Tampa). 11:30-12:30 a.m. — SportsCenter

■ **Friday:** 6:30-7:30 p.m. — SportsCenter. 11:30-12:30 a.m. — SportsCenter

■ **Saturday:** 10:30 a.m.-noon —

SportsCenter. 7-7:30 p.m. — SportsCenter. 11 p.m.-midnight — SportsCenter.

■ **Sunday:** 9-9:30 a.m. — SportsCenter. 10-11 a.m. — Sports Reporters. 11-12:30 p.m. — SportsCenter. 3-5 p.m. — Nike Hoops Summit (University of Tampa). 7-8 p.m. — SportsCenter. 11 p.m.-midnight — SportsCenter.

■ **Monday:** 6:30-7:30 p.m. — SportsCenter. 7:30-8 p.m. — Sports Reporters. (tape delay from The Pier). 8-9 p.m. — SportsCenter Championship Game Preview. 11:30 p.m.-12:30 a.m. — SportsCenter

■ **Tuesday:** 6:30-7:30 p.m. — SportsCenter

## ON THE INTERNET

■ **CBS:** cbs.sportsline.com

■ **ESPN:** espn.com

■ **NCAA:** finalfour.net

■ **Tampa Tribune:** tampa.trib.com

ships at 9:30. Vitale, Bilas and Brad Nessler will host the annual event featuring college hoop's top dunkers and distance aces.

The public also will have rare access to a behind-the-scenes look at the "Sports Reporters" show. The one-hour program, featuring a round-table discussion between host Dick Schaap and several guests, will air live from The Pier at 10 a.m. Sunday. A special prime-time edition of the show will be taped Monday at 2 p.m. at the same location and air at 7:30.

An avid ESPN viewer and self-professed Chris Berman fan during his college days, Fowler is amazed how SportsCenter has become the heartbeat of American sports and the measuring stick by which most people rate sports news programming. The Entertainment and Sports Programming Network has never been without its signature show.

It has become a hotel-room fixture for the people it covers and a living-room tradition for those who watch it.

On the road, SportsCenter is an entirely different animal. Add 10,000 charged fans to a mix of shtick and scores, and the result is one wild party.

One of three anchors on SportsCenter's "College Game Day" telecasts, Fowler savors the opportunity to escape from the sterile environment of the studio set, and he plays off the energy and enthusiasm on-site shows summer. However, with The Pier's waterfront setting, Fowler expects this week's shows to be significantly tamer than the college football mayhem.

This year's Final Four location also may contribute to such a scenario.

"It could logically be a challenge for the Final Four this time," Fowler said. "Everything is so spread out [between Tampa and St. Petersburg]. It's not as compressed as it usually is, with the coaches, players, media and fans all in one area. From a social standpoint, it may not be what everyone is used to. We'll have to wait and see."

## TOP TEN LIST

Five of the 10 most-watched basketball games on American television are NCAA championship games (bold). The other five are NBA finals. (Source: CBS)

GAME, DATE	HOMES, NETWORK
1. Bulls-Jazz Game 6 (June 14, 1998)	21.8 million (NBC)
2. Duke-Michigan (April 6, 1992)	20.9 million (CBS)
3. N.Carolina-Michigan (April 5, 1993)	20.7 million (CBS)
4. Arkansas-Duke (April 4, 1994)	20.4 million (CBS)
5. Villanova-Georgetown (April 1, 1985)	19.8 million (CBS)
6. Bulls-Jazz Game 5 (June 11, 1997)	19.5 million (NBC)
7. Jazz-Bulls Game 5 (June 12, 1998)	19.4 million (NBC)
8. Seton Hall-Michigan (April 3, 1989)	19.3 million (CBS)
9. Bulls-Suns Game 6 (June 20, 1993)	18.9 million (NBC)
10. Pistons-Lakers Game 7 (June 21, 1988)	18.8 million (CBS)

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