

HED: PLANS SET FOR NBC'S COVERAGE OF SUPER BOWL XLIII

Deck: NBC Sports and NEP Line Up an Arsenal of Broadcast Trucks, Gear and Infrastructure

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On February 1, 2009, NBC Sports will present "Super Bowl XLIII"—the 43rd annual Super Bowl—from Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Fla. NBC Sports hasn't televised a Super Bowl since 1998 in San Diego.

At press time, the team matchup is not yet known, but regardless of who plays, this year's Super Bowl audience could draw more than the 97.5 million U.S. viewers that watched Super Bowl XLII.

NBC Sports tells TV Technology that the production style won't differ much from its weekly "Sunday Night Football" (SNF) games. But plans call for bringing an unprecedented arsenal of TV trucks, cameras, equipment, cabling, and personnel to maximize the impact of its HD show with surround sound.

"We've been building up to the Super Bowl since the pre-season began, holding extensive meetings and making several trips to Tampa. We're basically following the same framework we used for SNF, and relying on the same technical and operations crews that have been doing those weekly games for us during the regular season," said Ken Goss, vice president of operations for NBC Sports in New York, N.Y. "But we'll expand the broadcast equipment to handle the scope of the Super Bowl production."

TRUCK COMPOUNDS

NEP Supershooters—NBC Sports' truck vendor of choice—is dedicating 10 of its trailers to NBC Sports for its pre-game show, game coverage, and post game wrap-up. These 10 trailers will park in the NBC truck compound—comprised of multiformat trucks focused on domestic production—including NEP Supershooters ND3 and ND4 for game coverage, and SS24 for pre- and post-game coverage, and each of these trucks is actually a complement of three HD trucks for a total of nine.

The tenth trailer in NBC's truck compound will be NEP's Denali Silver, another multiformat truck that will be used by White Cherry Entertainment and Don Mischer Productions to produce "The Bridgestone Super Bowl XLIII Halftime Show" featuring Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band.

According to George Hoover, chief technology officer for NEP in Pittsburgh, Pa., "NEP will have 29 mobile units serving a variety of clients at the Super Bowl. This is essentially half our truck fleet." Besides the 10 trailers for NBC, NEP will dedicate three trucks to the NFL Films (international) truck compound including: SS25 for NFL Films' world feed; SS28 for NFL Films' international transmission; and SS19 for

NFL Films' pre- and post-game shows for international audiences. In addition, NEP will send SS11 for ESPN to use for one of its studio shows, and SS16, a SD truck, for the BBC to use.

CAMERAS

For NBC's Super Bowl show, 55 cameras will be used to cover every aspect of the action. Most HD cameras will be Sony and most HD lenses will be Canon. The Sony cameras include: Sony HDC-1000 and HDC-900 hard cameras; Sony HDC-1500 and HDC-950 hand-held cameras; and Sony HDW-F900 and HDW-700 camcorders. There will also be two Sony HDC-3300 Slomo Cameras, one at low-left end zone and one at the low-right end zone.

"Since 9-11, no one's been allowed to fly a plane over the Super Bowl. So, we'll have Cable Cam HD flying over the field to get special shots of the teams, huddles, and kick offs, as we did during SNF games," said Tim DeKime, director of football operations for NBC Sports. "We'll also have an operator with a Sony hand-held camera positioned on the roof of the nearby Bank of America Plaza building to capture a beauty shot of the stadium."

According to John Roche, senior technical manager for NEP, "There'll be a total of six wireless Link HD camera systems. The wireless RF technology that we've seen [in recent years] has improved greatly and we're feeling pretty confident that they will perform reliably." Link HD RF camera systems will be provided by NEP's RF vendor BSI (Broadcast Sports Inc.), in Bethesda, Md., which will have two of its own trucks in the NBC compound.

LENSES

For the past 15 years, Canon lenses have been used exclusively to televise all Super Bowl games. During this time, Super Bowl lenses were chosen by three different mobile production companies hired for the games: NEP, NMT (National Mobile Television), and Game Creek.

Among the Canon HD lenses being used for this year's Super Bowl are the DIGISUPER 100xs zoom lenses; DIGISUPER 86x zoom lenses, 22x7.8 hand-held lenses; and 11x4.7 wide angle lenses.

"The DIGISUPER 100xs and 86x typically get the most dramatic and intense HD shots of the game. The 100xs are able to zoom in on players 400 feet across the field, and capture extreme close-ups of their facial expressions without any picture shaking," said Alan Lewis, marketing manager, broadcast for Canon's Broadcast and Communications division in Richfield Park, N.J.

"In designing these lenses, we considered the Super Bowl's harsh production challenges, such as extreme temperatures, wind gusts, and rain, and developed precision features, such as image stabilization and auto focus that now in turn benefit other Super Bowls and the greater broadcast industry as well," said Lewis.

AUDIO AND GRAPHICS

The 5.1 surround sound audio will be mixed by Wendel Stevens, a freelance audio mixer that has regularly worked on NBC Sports' football and hockey telecasts. Stevens will use a Calrec Alpha Digital audio console, with 86 dual layer faders and Bluefin DSP processing, among other gear on NEP's trucks. Microphones, including different models from Sennheiser (mostly shotguns), Shure (mostly hand mics and talent mics), Sony (lavalieres) and others, will be placed strategically around the stadium.

Ken Goss said, "There's a whole plethora of audio effects to make the whole HD experience at home more realistic."

Goss added that the only time they plan to use a delay during the game is when they do the team introductions because the microphones will be right near the players and that protects against airing sensitive or objectionable language. He said there would likely be a delay during the halftime show but this would be taken care of by White Cherry.

Sports Media, in Raleigh, N.C., will provide all IT services supporting graphics, such as the telestrator, the yellow first down line, and other live effects. While the graphics package was still taking shape at press time, Goss indicated that the Super Bowl would see a whole new graphic look. The effort is being spearheaded by Matt Celli, technical graphics designer, and Mark Levy, creative graphics designer, both of NBC Sports. On-air operators will use a Chyron Duet Hyper X for live graphics generation.

HD PRODUCTION

One of the most noteworthy aspects of NBC Sports' Super Bowl is that it will utilize more fiber cabling than any previous football event. This was according to NEP's John Roche, who added: "We're going to use about 50 miles worth of fiber and cabling due to the great distances between production locations in and around the Raymond James Stadium. We need to cable out to multiple locations, and carry all HD video and audio for three sets for the pre-game show running from noon to 6 p.m., when we switchover to the game."

Pre-game sets will be set-up on "the buccaneer's ship" in the end zone; in the NFL tailgating area; and at the NFL Experience fan festival across the street. Fiber equipment will be a mix of solutions from Telecast, Sony, Audio Works, and truck vendor NEP. Fiber runs were slated to begin on January 19, 2009.

For signal distribution out of the stadium, there will be several paths of VYVX, as well as back-up paths out via satellite uplink trucks. The live 1080i HD signal will be backhauled to NBC's network operations center in N.Y. Currently, there are no plans for live online streaming of the game, and plans for live mobile telecasts could not be confirmed at press time.

3D HD

The only use of 3D at this year's Super Bowl will be an all-3D commercial break during the game that will debut the DreamWorks Animation 3D movie trailer for the upcoming feature film, "Monsters vs. Aliens," due in theaters March 27. The commercial break will also have a 60-second 3D SoBe Lifewater commercial featuring the same characters from "Monsters vs. Aliens," and 3D glasses will be distributed for free by PepsiCo at SoBe Lifewater retail displays.

The NFL presented a 12/4/08 Chargers/Raiders game in 3D HD (see TVT 01/07/09 issue) in select digital cinemas, and expressed an interest in possibly using 3D HD on future Super Bowl telecasts.

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