

## ESPN Celebrates First Anniversary With Expanded Sports Scheduling

Now with the first year under its belt, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network is going to continue its philosophy to provide "the type of programming that other systems can't do," said Bill Rasmussen, chairman. "We can't expand our schedule anymore. We can only expand our programming."

ESPN will celebrate its first birthday Sept. 7, and is marking the event by expanding its broadcast schedule to 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The all-sports network has made a meteoric climb in the past 12 months, and should be a profitable entity by the end of 1981, according to Rasmussen. Currently, ESPN reaches five million subscribers.

Recently, ESPN has made headlines in other ways as well. Its NCAA football schedule has been boosted by 100 hours, and the network will now carry 66 games

in all, for an average of five games a weekend in the 13 weeks from Sept. 6 through Nov. 29. Jim Simpson and Bud Wilkinson are heading the network's announcing team.

In addition, the network will expand its evening SportsCenter program to an hour per day week-day evenings beginning Sept. 1. ESPN's sports wrap-up show will now be seen more than three hours per day, according to Rasmussen. Preview shows detailing upcoming collegiate and professional football games will also be launched during the month. At the same time, ESPN will continue its exclusive coverage of Canadian Football League action, as well as covering sporting events from Australian rugby to wrestling.

ESPN will also step up its originally-produced sports coverage, and has contracted to purchase five television remote units to boost its regional coverage.

"Our kind of coverage is tailor-made for cable television," Rasmussen said. "The networks can't cover in three hours on a Sunday what we can do all the time."

While subscriber levels are continuously growing, Rasmussen said, advertiser support has also risen dramatically. The network now boasts more than 40 advertisers, including a \$1.4 million contract signed with Anheuser-Busch. And the prognosis for more advertisers looks bright, according to Rasmussen. "At the C-TAM conference, an agency representative came over and said, 'We're going to make you very happy very soon,'" Rasmussen said. "A year ago, that same person thought we were from Mars. To (the advertising community's) credit, they have done their homework and learned about cable."

Now that the Bristol, Conn.-based network is firmly entrenched, Rasmussen said ESPN is getting ready to further develop its marketing strategies, including the establishment of a strong affiliate-relations apparatus. "Our advertising is going to be more consumer oriented," Rasmussen said. "There will be ads in 30 newspapers across the country announcing our 24-hour service. *TV Guide* is now carrying our programming information in 20 editions, and is adding us to several more. That's important. Our people are now organized — everything is in place."

ESPN has particularly beefed up its staff of play-by-play announcers and analysts to get ready for the NCAA football season. Bud Wilkinson, former coach of



Bill Rasmussen, chairman, and Rosa Gatti, director of communications; ESPN.