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## CBS Sports goes all-HD for opening weekend of NCAA Men's Tourney

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*By Ken Kerschbaumer*

This year's CBS Sports coverage of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament will offer a broadcasting first as all first- and second-round games will be broadcast in HD. The key this year is the addition of new HD distribution capabilities at the network operations center that allow for the many different incarnations of constant and flex feeds that need to be sent out to stations across the country to go all HD.

"It's easy to do the game production in HD but it's harder to turn the signals around in HD and have the right number of HD transponders and the ability of stations to receive HD," says Ken Aagaard, CBS Sports SVP operations and production services. "There are four games at once and then a constant and flex feed for each game and, in some circumstances, three flex feeds. So we can have up to 12 network signals passing out to stations in any given window."

While CBS network operations keeps track of numerous incoming and outgoing feeds the CBS Sports production team and its staff will "man up" for producing 48 games in less than 96 hours during the opening four days of the tourney. For many fans simply watching all of the action can be exhausting.

"March Madness is an incredible undertaking and there is nothing as complicated as this," says Aagaard. A total of eight production trucks from five separate vendors will be used during the tournament: NMT's HD1 and HD12 units; NEP's Supershooter 20 and 24; Corplex Platinum, NCP VIII, and F&F Productions' GTX 14 and GTX 15. The regional games will be handled by NCP VIII, NMT HD 12, Corplex Platinum and F&F Production's GTX 15. GTX 15 will also handle the Final Four.

The GTX 15 truck hit the road last August for the U.S. Open tennis championships. It features a full-blown Thomson Kalypso production switcher with four M/Es, 48 inputs and outputs, and six transform engines; all HD monitors and a Sony multiviewer for quad splits; and an all XT[2] complement of EVS servers.

"We were trying to bridge sports and entertainment," says Bill McKechney, F&F Productions VP, engineering. "We have a multi-use production area with movable production benches but the electronics are fixed in the console. "It's completely transparent to the client."

Twelve Ikegami HDK-79EC cameras are also on board, an upgrade from previous Ikegami cameras. "They have more static resolution than the previous model and we now use them on GTX12 and two other trucks for a total of 36 HDK-79EC cameras," says McKechney. GTX12 will make an appearance in Augusta for CBS coverage of The Masters in April.

Another difference from other F&F units is the Calrec console and the use of an NVision NV8288 288x432 in/out router. "The router is 3Gbps compliant and also takes less real estate than other routers," adds McKechney. "The heart of the system is 1080p capable but I still think 1080p production is five years away because of the transmission issues."