

TNT's Bulls-Heat Coverage Makes Way for Oprah in Chicago

By: Jason Dachman, Associate Editor | Published: May 17, 2011

Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Finals may have been the most-watched NBA game in cable history, but even the highly anticipated Bulls-Heat matchup has to make way for Chicago's favorite daughter: Oprah Winfrey. Tuesday, the queen of all media is taping two of the last three episodes of her syndicated talk show at the United Center, forcing Turner Sports to extract its entire NBA production and return in the wee hours of Wednesday morning to set up for Game Two that evening.

"We've had to totally clear out of the United Center for her show," says Tom Sahara, VP of remote operations & IT for Turner Sports. "Then, at midnight tonight, the arena will be turned back around to a basketball venue. Hopefully, by 6 a.m., everything will be in place so we can start resetting for tomorrow night's game.

"It's a logistical puzzle getting all these pieces together," he continues. "What we would normally set up in a full day or a day and a half, we now have to do in a span of 13 hours. But this is her town, after all."

Two Shows, Many Cameras Further complicating matters is the sheer scope of Turner's conference-finals production. The network is deploying a total of 26 cameras for TNT's exclusive coverage of the Eastern Conference Finals, approximately four more than a typical NBA on TNT production, according to Sahara.

In addition, TNT will host its pre- and post-game studio show live on-site for every game at the United Center and American Airlines Arena. In Chicago, NEP's ND4 is handling the game coverage, while NEP SS-18 produces the studio show. In Miami, Complex Iridium will take on game coverage and Turner's own HD truck, TS2, will handle the studio show.

Every telecast will also feature an ActionCam system (also used for

Turner's NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament coverage) for aerial coverage of the court as well as several high-angle robotic cameras to capture any questionable calls.

"The robo cams and the Skycams allow us make sure we have any controversial calls documented and covered, whether it's a shot-clock violation or a question of whether it's a two- or three-point shot." says Turner Sports SVP/Executive Producer Jeff Behnke.

"There are so many emotions that are built into these games, and these tools give us the opportunity to show every possible angle of those emotions as they're taking place."

A Behind-the-Scenes Look Turner also has installed POV cameras in both teams' locker rooms, and both head coaches will be miked throughout the series. Although both tactics are staples of Turner's coverage, it was more difficult than usual to secure these tools for such a high-profile series.

"We have microphones everywhere and on everything, including the coaches and the locker rooms," says Sahara. "Fans are able to see and hear a lot more behind the scenes. We've done this before, but it is a bit more difficult to get those packages [approved] just because of the level of teams and games."

Turner Works Overtime on NBA.com Turner Sports must also feed content to TNT Overtime on NBA.com, which provides online viewers with isolated feeds to multiple camera angles, including the ActionCam, Backboard Cam, and Home and Away Player Cams (voted on by the fans). Users can watch each camera individually, in picture-in-picture, or in the Mosaic View.

NBA Overtime operations are run primarily out of the B unit of SS-18. The NBA Overtime crew takes in the audio and video feeds, encodes them, and sends them back to Turner Sports headquarters in Atlanta, where all production elements are added.

"[NBA.com content] is vital, and it's a genuine part of what we do," says Behnke. "The days of its just being an add-on are over. It is a full-encompassing part of our planning and discussions."

The live player, which features various social-networking and chat

widgets, is also available on Yahoo! Sports and SI.com. TNT NBA analysts will also host live streaming–video chats on NBA.com, during which they will answer fans’ questions live after halftime of selected games. The chats will feature Kenny Smith (Game 2), Charles Barkley (Game 3), and Steve Kerr (Game 5, if necessary). Barkley’s chat will also be available on charlesbarkley.com.