



FORMAT FOR  
PRINTING  
sponsored by



May 20, 2005

## ADVERTISING

# NBA Finals Pose Challenge for ABC

**With Series Lacking Teams  
Of Biggest Markets, Network  
Seeks to Lure Casual Fans**

By **BRIAN STEINBERG**  
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
May 20, 2005; Page B2

A skilled professional basketball player can always try to power a team out of a difficult situation. But can **Walt Disney's ABC**, which is showing the NBA Finals this year, advertise itself out of one?

This year, the long-mighty Los Angeles Lakers are out -- and thus so is the nation's second-largest TV market. So simply promoting the games and the players isn't enough. ABC will try to tempt casual sports fans with an ad campaign that aims to turn the National Basketball Association Finals into an event.


"The NBA is going out of its way to make sure that they are getting the word out to some pretty diverse audiences," says David Carter of Sports Business Group, a Los Angeles sports-marketing consultant. The Miami Heat and Shaquille O'Neal remain in the hunt, but even so, "the ratings might be down," he says. The other teams still in contention include Detroit, San Antonio, Phoenix, Dallas and Seattle.

Helped by independent Wieden + Kennedy, the longtime agency for sister ESPN, ABC will target the "championship viewer" -- an aficionado of high-profile sporting events, if not the ins and outs of an entire season. Ads tell how players such as Larry Bird grew up to make it to the Finals, which is "where legends are born."

Driving to this particular hoop might be tough. In 2004, when the Lakers played the Detroit Pistons, the games reached an average of 17.9 million people, says Nielsen Media Research. In 2002, an average of 15.7 million tuned in to watch the Lakers play the New Jersey Nets. The Lakerless finals of 2003 between the San Antonio Spurs and the Nets garnered an average of just 9.9 million.

"We know that we will be challenged to deliver a rating that we had last year with the Lakers," says Cindy Vannoy, vice

### DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit:  
[www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).

- [See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)
- [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

### ADVERT MAILBOX

Do you have a question about an ad you love or hate? Write to [advertmailbox@wsj.com](mailto:advertmailbox@wsj.com)<sup>3</sup> and look for selected comments at [WSJ.com/Media](http://WSJ.com/Media)<sup>4</sup>.



In its campaign promoting the NBA Finals, ABC traces Shaquille O'Neal's journey from a modest house to the NBA championship.

president of advertising and promotion for ABC Sports. The solution, she says, is ads that play on the potential for sports drama and historic moments. The value of the promotions is estimated to be more than \$20 million, according to a person familiar with the situation. Ms. Vannoy declined to comment on spending.

Ads for the Finals, which are scheduled to start on June 9, will turn up in places where general audiences roam -- including the Disney theme parks owned by ABC's parent and the season finales of such popular ABC programs as "Desperate Housewives." New ads should start to appear today in an ABC movie starring the Muppets.

#### **MISSED SHOT**

[No Winning Season for NBA Apparel Sales<sup>1</sup>](#)

Some interesting executions involve coasters at bars at Disney resorts and "do

not disturb" cards at Disney hotels. Some even involve the "watermark" that identifies ABC in the lower corner of a television screen.

One media buyer has counseled some clients not to buy ads during the event, in the belief that the championship match-up will not be able to deliver the ratings advertisers want. This buyer also says the NBA's image may have been tarnished by the November brawl that took place at a Detroit Pistons game against the Indiana Pacers. "I think we had a difficult period last November. We've come out of it well," says Gregg Winik, executive vice president of NBA Entertainment. The NBA has been encouraged by attendance and TV ratings, he says.

One advertiser doesn't see much call for a fuss. **Wendy's International** is buying ads during the event, says Michelle Fedurek, the company's vice president of media strategy and resources. Even if the audience is broader, core sports fans are people Wendy's wants to reach, she says.

In a world in which advertisers continue to demand ads that produce measurable results, Wieden's spots can be easily tracked. Just watch the ratings, says Buz Sawyer, managing director of Wieden's New York office. "For the network, everything we do is judged based on that."

Write to Brian Steinberg at [brian.steinberg@wsj.com](mailto:brian.steinberg@wsj.com)<sup>2</sup>

#### **URL for this article:**

<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB111655411799538877,00.html>

#### **Hyperlinks in this Article:**

(1) <http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB111655296929638845,00.html>

(2) <mailto:brian.steinberg@wsj.com>

(3) <mailto:advertmailbox@wsj.com>

(4) <http://www.WSJ.com/Media>

Copyright 2005 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).