



## ESPN 3D Faces Toughest Challenge Yet With X Games 16

By: [Jason Dachman](#), Assistant Editor | Published: July 29, 2010

ESPN 3D debuted with high-profile telecasts of the FIFA World Cup and MLB Home Run Derby, but this week's X Games 16 promises to be the greatest production challenge yet for ESPN's young 3D network.

Less than three weeks removed from its first-ever in-house 3D production at the Home Run Derby (the World Cup 3D feed was provided by Host Broadcast Systems), ESPN 3D will produce eight hours of 3D coverage from the Los Angeles Coliseum.

"This is obviously a big test for us, and we're very excited," says Phil Orlins, coordinating producer for ESPN. "It's hard to fully comprehend how amazing these events are without seeing them in person. With 3D, you can actually see how ridiculous some of these setups really are."

Although ESPN crews have shot 3D content at the X Games the past two years for X Games 3D: The Movie, this year marks the first time the event has been broadcast to homes in 3D. ESPN 3D's eight hours of coverage (8-11 p.m. ET on Thursday and 7 p.m.-midnight on Saturday) will span six events: men's and women's Super X racing, Moto X Freestyle, Big Air skateboard competition, Rally Car, Super Rally Car, and BMX Big Air.

### **RF, Mega-Mo, Conquering 'Big Air'**

ESPN will roll out 14 PACE-Fusion 3D camera rigs at the Coliseum, including two 86-ft. Strada cranes, one Polecam, a 40-ft. jib, a 30-ft. jib, a Mega-Mo (an ultra-slo-mo camera that debuted at the Home Run Derby), and, for the first time in 3D, two RF cameras. All 14 PACE rigs feature Sony HDC-1500R and HDC-P1 cameras in a side-by-side configuration, with the exception of the Polecam rig, which is outfitted with two miniature Toshiba cameras.

X Games 16 will mark the first use of wireless RF 3D camera rigs for a live production. Broadcast Sports Inc. will deploy two RF 3D rigs for ESPN's production, one in a traditional handheld-camera setup and the other as an in-car camera during Rally Car competition. The in-car rig, which weighs about 20 lbs, will be positioned behind the driver in the back-windshield area and shoot forward, providing viewers with backseat POV angle.

"The plan is to be behind the driver so you can see his hands on the steering wheel and see out through the window," says Orlins. "This is the angle that really jumped out at me from what I've seen. Seeing the driver just gives you a really important extra layer in terms of depth. This way, you see the driver, then the windshield, and then out beyond the windshield."

ESPN will also have the 3D Mega-Mo camera at its disposal for the 3D show. The [high-speed ultra-slo-mo rig](#) features an I-Movix SprintCam Vvs HD system and was deployed by Fletcher Sports for the first time in 3D at the Home Run Derby.

“For the freestyle events — like the skateboarding and the BMX — the subtlety of the tricks is so impressive, and that can get lost. Even at 50% speed, you really can’t see what these athletes are doing. But, with the Mega-Mo, fans can really see and appreciate this technical aspect. Then when you get it in 3D, it just pulls the subject away from the background layer so pristinely, it’s almost like the athlete is on a pedestal and the background is pulled back. There’s a clarity to it that’s just unbelievable.”

The [mega ramp](#) — nicknamed “Big Air” — is one of the biggest draws at the X Games, and ESPN 3D has allocated its resources accordingly. Skate and BMX competitors must hurdle themselves down a [ramp that runs 80 ft. high at a 50- to 60-degree angle](#). Then they must jump over a 70-ft. gap onto a 27-ft.-high quarter pipe, where they often fly an additional 20 ft. into the air. ESPN will have a Polecam atop the initial 80-ft. ramp and a massive 40-ft. jib atop the quarter pipe at the end.

“These are both grand slams, not just home runs but grand slams,” says Orkins of the two camera positions. “The Polecam at the starting position on that ridiculous 80-ft. ramp acts like a mini jib. It will hang 4-8 ft. right over the athletes’ heads when they drop, and it really does make you appreciate the addition of depth. In 2D, that’s all flattened out, and you lose that perspective of just how big that drop is.

“For the [40-ft. jib at] the quarter pipe,” he continues, “you’ve got an athlete who’s starting at floor level, riding up a 27-ft. wall, then going another 20 ft. in the air right at a camera that is another 10 ft. or so above his apex. Even in 2D, that’s a shot that you feel in your stomach, but, in 3D, it goes to a whole new level.”

#### **The Usual Suspects: NEP and PACE**

ESPN will once again use NEP’s new SS-32 mobile unit, which was used for the Home Run Derby as well as for Fox Sports’ production of the MLB All-Star Game. The truck is equipped with a Sony MVS-8000X 3G switcher, EVS XT[2]+ servers, Sony SRW-5800 HDCAM, Panasonic DCV Pro tape machines, a Calrec Alpha audio board with Bluefin, and Sony LMD series 3D monitors. PACE CEO and 3D guru Vince Pace will be in the truck serving as stereography director.

In terms of transmission, ESPN will send two discrete left- and right-eye feeds from the Coliseum to its L.A. facility and then on network headquarters in Bristol, CT. This was the same layout used for transmission of the Derby.

#### **Sharing Resources for 2D and 3D**

All the specialty 3D rigs — including the jibs, Strada cranes, and Mega-Mo — will also be used for ESPN’s 2D production. The 2D side will take the left-eye feed from at least six 3D rigs. The sharing method was first tested on the Mega-Mo camera during the Home Run Derby, and Orkins calls the results encouraging.

“It’s not like we have unlimited space here,” he says. “We can’t just put up two 86-ft. Strada cranes right next to each other; they would be sword fighting. So we have to share resources between the 2D and 3D shows. That says so much about how far we’ve come. We’re moving quickly and efficiently enough with the 3D that we actually feel comfortable using it for 2D. In this case, the 2D director is really directing these cameras, and the 3D director is, in many ways, following his cut. There’s just no other way to do it.”

ESPN is also experimenting with [PACE's Shadow D rigs](#) in two locations. The Shadow D setup stacks a 3D rig atop a 2D camera, allowing a single operator to control both.

For the first time in a 3D production, ESPN will use the same commentators for both 2D and 3D. Until now, most 3D productions have had separate announcing teams from the 2D, but, according to Orlins, recruiting a dozen extra announcers for the 3D side simply was not feasible.

"It's a direction we haven't taken anywhere else," he says. "I wouldn't read too much into it other than we have about six different events over two nights and trying to go out and hire six additional announce teams for the 3D side just didn't seem very practical. Nonetheless, it's extremely interesting trying to make it work for both. If we're going to try it, I think [X Games] is the most ideal [situation]."

 [ShareThis](#)