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X Games Live: Extreme Tech for an Extreme Event

Posted By [Jason Dachman, Managing Editor](#) On July 29, 2011 @ 11:32 am In [Insider](#) | [No Comments](#)

ESPN, ESPN2, and ABC are combining to televise 25 hours of live coverage from X Games 17 this year, while ESPN3.com will stream 29 hours of its own. As usual, ESPN has pulled out all the technological stops for X Games, deploying its latest innovations – from cameras to graphical elements to multi-platform delivery.

“X Games has always been a think tank for progressive technology,” said ESPN VP of Event Production Jamie Reynolds. “We are always working on things like camera angles and audio, looking for ways to help deconstruct an exact moment in time during [the competition], and provide visual explanation for why a trick or performance is so impressive.”

The Cameras

In all, ESPN has 37 cameras (not including 3D rigs) scattered throughout the four X Games Venues at L.A. Live. The massive complement includes two I-MOVIX SprintCam Vvs HD extreme slo-mos, 10 in-car/on-board Rally Car cameras, eight robotic cameras (and an additional four robotic 3D rigs), and two FlyCam systems, as well as a plethora of [GoPro](#) ^[1] cameras attached to athletes and their skateboards, motorcycles, and bikes.

The Trucks

ESPN has rolled out three NEP mobile units for the X Games, which are taking place entirely at L.A. Live and the Staples Center for the first time ever (having been split between L.A. Live and the L.A. Coliseum or Home Depot Center in the past).

Super Shooter 32 is covering all the Moto X action from Staples Center. All of ESPN's coverage from Staples is being produced in native 3D, while the 2D telecast is being derived from the left eye feed.

ESPN's Monday Night Football truck, SS-25, is running the show for the Nokia Theater (Skateboard and BMX Vert events) as well as Event Deck (Skateboard and BMX Street and Park events).

Meanwhile, Denali Summit is on hand at Lot 7 for the Big Air and Rally Car events.

“When you see how massive this setup is between the three trucks and everything else, you have to realize that we didn't pull in February – we just pulled in a few days ago,” said Coordinating Technical Manager Henry Rousseau. “It's an awfully big endeavor to get something like this done in that amount of time.”

The Emerging Technologies

The fruits of labor from ESPN's Emerging Technology arm are never more prevalent than at Winter and Summer X Games, when it is often allowed to skate freely along the bleeding edge with its latest innovations. This year is no different as the department's Neartime Visual Effects (VFX) and Huck Tower video tracking will be making regular appearances during the four days of coverage.

Following their debut at Winter X Games earlier this year, Neartime VFX allows ESPN to display visual effects that move along with a panning camera in near real time during the telecast. These life-like graphic elements blend naturally into the real-world environment. Producing these effects in near real time allows time-sensitive content to be introduced.

Making another run at X Games will be the Huck Tower, a 30-foot high LED tower that instantaneously displays the height of each BMX and Skateboard jump on the Big Air ramp quarter pipe. Viewers also see graphic inserts (developed by the ESPN Emerging Technology team) that display the amplitude of each jump both live and in replays.

The video tracking system utilizes one form factor HD camera, which is placed and calibrated down the side of the quarter pipe on the Big Air ramp. Using proprietary software, the athlete is identified, isolated, and tracked for the entire jump. The height data is then displayed in real time on the Huck Tower.

"To me, [the Huck Tower] is one of the most impactful things I've been a part of in terms of technology because it clearly impacts everything from the athletes to fans to commentary to the judging," said Phil Orlins, X Games and ESPN 3D coordinating producer. "Technology can be fun and sometimes gimmicky, but when something like this can actually help answer questions and tell the story, that is the ultimate home run. Just like the First Down Line in football or K Zone for baseball."

ESPN3.com is delivering 29 total hours from X Games, including several event simulcasts, isolated cameras, and, most notably, a dedicated channel for in-car/on-board rally car cameras.

"It's a little different from NASCAR, where you might be on Jeff Gordon's camera for 500 laps," says Orlins. "We have short heats with a bunch of different cars. So each heat, we will flip them a different camera."

Check out more of SVG's comprehensive live X Games 17 coverage from Los Angeles by [CLICKING HERE](#) ^[2].

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[1] GoPro: <http://www.youtube.com/gopro>

[2] CLICKING HERE: <http://sportsvideo.org/main/index.php?s=%22x+games+live%3A%22&x=0&y=0>

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