

# ESPN takes 3D to the extreme

The American network piggybacked 2D and 3D coverage at the 17th annual X Games. Carolyn Giardina talked to Producer Phil Orlins at the recent Los Angeles production



In total, ESPN, ESPN2 and ABC in the United States offered 25 hours of HD X Games coverage. The event was also televised in 192 countries

## Sports Broadcast

Is production of 2D and 3D live coverage from the same operation an achievable goal? This is a topic that has generated a notable amount of debate in the professional community. Some argue that one size does not fit all, while proponents assert that this is a way to control time, complexity and costs so as to grow the 3D market.

One organisation that is exploring this option is American cable network ESPN, which gave this approach a test drive as part of its 2D and 3D coverage of extreme sports competition

X Games 17, held 28-31 July in downtown Los Angeles.

In total, ESPN, ESPN2 and ABC in the US offered 25 hours of HD X Games coverage. Additionally, ESPN 3D televised 21 hours in 3D, and ESPN3.com streamed 29 hours of coverage. X Games was also televised in an estimated 192 countries with live coverage on continents including Europe, Africa and Asia. X Games was simulcast on ESPN's international broadband platform in 13 countries.

"We are going down a road where we are producing 2D and 3D simultaneously," reports Phil Orlins, coordinating producer, ESPN3D

and X Games. "The reality is that we have to find a balance that suits both (2D and 3D coverage) to the best of our ability. We believe it is not impossible, but there are considerations that go into that."

"We embarked in February on going down that road, not exclusively," he explains, noting that ESPN has already tested this approach with boxing and college basketball. The latter, he says, "was manageable but more complicated. In some cases we cut (the 2D and 3D) cameras differently in the two shows, even though it's one set of cameras and one director and one switcher."

"There are decisions that have to be made to try to get as close as we can to optimising both experiences. The 3D is optimised by proximity to the subject. So we do a lot to get ourselves close."

For X Games, ESPN piggybacked the 2D and 3D coverage on events held inside the Staples Centre, one of the venues in downtown Los Angeles. "X Games is killer for 3D," Orlins says. "They are dynamic sports; and we have close proximity. (In comparison) soccer is really challenging because it is a big field and the ball changes direction. X Games is perfect because you can get close as there is a jump or course with a predictable pass."

For the X Games coverage, ESPN used 18 CAMERON - PACE Group's (CPG) Fusion 3D rigs that CPG configured for the event coverage with a mix of mostly Sony cameras, particularly the Sony HDC-P1 model "because they absolutely match the quality of the biggest cameras out there in a smaller package but not a tiny package."

In total, 12 3D camera systems were used at the Staples Centre including a wireless handheld, a jib, a FlyCam and an Ultra Slo-Mo

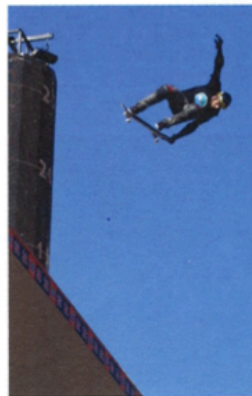
camera. An additional six 3D camera rigs were rotated between various outdoor venues. This included a 3D PoleCam above the start of the Big Air ramp and a 40ft 3D jib above the Big Air quarterpipe and a 50ft TechnoCrane at a park course.

Smaller cameras were of course key to getting the rigs into handheld and other mobile configurations. The team was not yet able to go handheld with the ultra slow motion camera. "The cameras are just too big for that with the amount of data coming through to record at 1,000fps rather than 60fps," Orlins says.

For X Games, ESPN also tried out the possibility of incorporating some consumer electronics gear into the production setup, testing Sony's 3D Handycams for a few POV shots. An NEP OB truck was used for 3D coverage. Orlins notes that a key component in enabling the simultaneous 2D and 3D production was a Sony production switcher. A Quantel Pablo was used on site for 3D editing.

On the subject of cutting, Orlins relates: "There is a perception out there that 3D should be cut at a slower pace. We buy that to some degree; I think there is some misperception in that. ... I think (the fundamental reason) cuts are jarring is when the depth of your subject changes dramatically (from shot to shot)."

Asked about cost saving from piggybacking 2D and 3D, Orlins speaks in broad strokes, noting that "an entirely separate 3D production, on its base level you can figure out



The X Games featured competitors from the world of skateboarding among other extreme sports




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that that's about twice (what is involved if you piggyback the 2D). 3D does involve a little more setup time and a few more people to manage the convergence of the cameras."

While it was not used for X Games 17 coverage, Orlins says ESPN is "in discussion" about bringing the Sony MPE-200 image processor into its workflow for live events. "The automation is popular," he says, adding "we do still feel there are a lot of different aspects of the automation. But particularly in the aspect of convergence control, interocular control and stereo-graphy, we still rely very heavily on human aesthetic choices."

In July, Sony extended its sponsorship of ESPN 3D for another year, specifically the 3D productions of the X Games and (American) college football in the Fall. Sony was named the first official sponsor of the network in January 2010.

In related news, X Games is expanding and will offer competitions in six cities around the world beginning in 2013. A bid process will determine three new future X Games host locations, which will join the three current events that are held in Los Angeles; Aspen, Colo.; and Tignes, France (where ESPN is currently partnered with Canal+).