

Ratings for NCAA championships plummet

■ The men's championship draws a record low number of viewers, worrying CBS

By Howard Fendrich
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — It was not a shining moment for CBS. The national rating for Monday night's NCAA men's basketball tournament championship game between Michigan State and Florida was 14.1, the worst since the network began airing the event in 1982.

It represents a drop of 18 percent from last year's title-game rating of 17.2, the previous low.

The tournament as a whole finished with an average rating of 6.4, down 6 percent from 1999's 6.8, also the previous low mark.

It wasn't good news for CBS, which agreed in November to retain the rights for the three-week tournament by paying \$6 billion for an 11-year contract, which takes effect in 2003.

Michigan State's 89-76 victory over Florida drew a 23 share — representing the percentage of in-

use television sets tuned to a particular show — down from the 27 garnered by Connecticut's upset of Duke a year ago.

The ratings — the percentage of the nation's estimated 100.8 million TV homes tuned to a telecast — are the latest in a string of declining numbers for basketball broadcasts.

Ratings were also off this year for the women's NCAA tourney on ESPN — No. 1 Connecticut's



71-52 drubbing of No. 2 Tennessee in the title game showed a 19 percent decline from last year's final — and for the cable outfit's regular-season men's college broadcasts.

And NBC's coverage of the NBA has averaged a 3.5 rating through 27 games, a 19 percent drop from the 4.3 pulled in on average by the 28 regular-season games shown last year.

The women's final Sunday night drew a 3.5 national cable rating, compared to last year's record 4.3. The 14 tournament games shown on ESPN drew an

average rating of 1.15, a fall of 14 percent from 1999's record 1.33, and the second-lowest in the five years the cable outfit has had the women's Final Four.

As with the men's final, the lopsided nature of the women's title game did not help the ratings.

"That rating for the 'UConn clinic' is sensational," Len DeLuca, ESPN senior VP for programming development, said. "That number, when there was every indication that it was over after the second television timeout, shows us that there is strong interest. The numbers were steady."

Baseball ticket prices take a whopping 11.8 percent hike

■ This season's increase is the largest in a decade, with each seat an average of \$16.67 per game

By Ronald Blum
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Fans who go to baseball's three new ballparks this season will leave with much lighter wallets.

The sport's average ticket price went up 11.8 percent — the highest markup in a decade — to \$16.67 this year. But that's nothing compared with the increases in Detroit, San Francisco and Houston.

The average at Comerica Park is

\$24.83, the fourth-highest in baseball and a 103 percent jump from the \$12.23 average at Tiger Stadium last season, according to the annual survey by the Team Marketing Report.

"When you move into a new stadium it's like comparing apples to oranges," Tigers spokesman Tyler Barnes said. "Unlike Tiger Stadium, there are a number of premium seats. The goal was to provide something for all tastes and all pocketbooks."

Those premium seats, with waiter service, cost \$50-\$75 per game, while regular seats cost \$8-\$30, up from \$5-\$25 at Tiger Stadium.

At Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco, the average of \$21.24,

baseball's sixth-highest, is up 75.2 percent from the \$12.12 average last year at 3Com Park, formerly Candlestick. The Giants' Barry Bonds remembered the fans in the bleachers at the old ballpark when he first came up.

"They can't afford these prices," he said with a smile. "I'm leaving them tickets, but I don't get as many as I used to."

Houston's Enron Field is reasonable by these standards. The average there is \$20.01, No. 8 among the 30 major league teams. That's up 50.4 percent from last year's average of \$13.30 at the Astrodome.

"Of the three new ballparks, our prices were the lowest," said John Sorrentino, the Astros' vice

president of ticket sales. "We had 54,000 seats in the Astrodome because of the expansion to take care of the Oilers, and that would drive the ticket price down there. We have 42,000 seats in Enron Field and we are still very affordable at all levels."

Red Sox fans will be feeling the pinch, too. Fenway Park has the highest average ticket price in baseball for the fifth straight season, rising 17.8 percent to \$28.33 this season.

Seattle, which moved to Safeco Field last season, is second at \$26.31, followed by the New York Yankees at \$25.94, the Tigers and the New York Mets at \$24.29.

By comparison, the Consumer Price Index has gone up 3.2 per-

cent since the start of last season.

While the CPI has gone up 25.9 percent since the start of the 1991 season, the average baseball ticket price has increased 92.9 percent in that period. The NFL's average ticket price has risen 81.0 percent since then to \$45.63, the NBA's 81.3 percent to \$48.37.

The survey didn't include the NHL until 1994. Hockey's average is \$45.70.

NBA tickets went up 13.8 this season, NHL tickets 6.9 percent and NFL tickets 6.6 percent.

The Minnesota Twins have the lowest average ticket price at \$9.33, even after a 10.3 percent increase this year.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (April 5). Use your considerable self-confidence to make yourself wealthy. You can do it if you don't get distracted by an ego trip. Overcome an old handicap in April. Use your energy to bring in the bucks around May. There'll be plenty of them, but restraint is advised. You may have to spend on a loved one around August. Put in extra hours in September to gain even more. Save up so you can travel back to a favorite place in December. Don't let a "friend" talk you out of your stash in February. Trust your own intuition and a sweetheart's advice in March.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is an 8 — Proceed with caution. Fulfilling a fantasy could drain your resources. You may come up with a way to make more money this evening. Do that, instead of spending too much, and you'll be much happier tomorrow.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 6 — You may be slightly nervous, especially if you're getting yelled at. You're being pushed by a person whom you think is moving too fast. You might be right about that, too. Don't get shoved around. Stand your ground. Listen, then do what's best for you.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 7 — Enjoy being with friends this morning, but don't goof off all day. You have to get a few things done before the day's over. If you're not careful, you'll have to do them at home later on tonight. Whatever works.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is an 8 — You and a group of friends can accomplish great things. Get together and have a great time while you're solving a community problem. Actually, just getting together solves one problem! A community of friends is a much safer place to live.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 7 — You'll feel a little more inhibited and restrained as the day goes on. You may feel like somebody's watching you, too. Well, if so, put on a good show. The impression you make now could help you get something you want later.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 7 — You might talk a good friend into going for a drive. Keep costs down by visiting relatives or dear friends who'll feed you. Make sure your vehicle's in good shape, however. Do the preventive maintenance to avoid technical difficulties.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) — Today is a 7 — You have a knack for finding people who want to buy things for you. Share your services or resources in exchange for something you can't afford. Don't just lean on the other person, though. Make sure it's a fair deal all around.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21) — Today is a 7 — You've had so much work lately that you've hardly had a chance to take a lunch break. The good news is you could get a bonus for being such a hero. Others have noticed how much you've accomplished. You're awesome! The other good news is the worst is over.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is an 8 — You've most likely had several fabulous days recently. It's just about time to get back to work. Better stop having so much fun, and start to get serious again. If you forget to do something important, you could find yourself in a world of hurt.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is an 8 — A rather stressful past few days could merge right into an enjoyable evening tonight. Money's tight, but there's plenty of love. How about pulling out the board games? If the family's all playing together, even if you lose, you win!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 6 — You're learning quickly again today. You're always smart, but right now you're also creative. A breakdown could lead to a breakthrough, too. A person who has trouble communicating could finally burst out with the truth.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is an 8 — Do whatever you can think of to bring in more money. Is your job big enough to grow into? If not, why are you still hanging around there? Get out and find something you can get excited about. You're a caring, loving, great person. You should be rich, too!

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