

NFL | SUPER BOWL LV

Nickelodeon to have big presence in CBS's coverage

BY JOE REEDY

Associated Press

There might eventually be a kids-focused broadcast of the Super Bowl. It won't be happening this year.

Nickelodeon will still have a noticeable presence during Sunday's coverage on CBS. Following the success of Nick's presentation of an NFL playoff contest last month, CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus said there were some discussions about an encore for Sunday's matchup between the Kansas City Chiefs and Tampa Bay Buccaneers before deciding to keep everything on CBS.

"It's the biggest night of television for CBS, obviously, and that really is our motivation. It is all about getting as many eyeballs as we can on the CBS television network," McManus said. "Nickelodeon will have a real presence at the Super Bowl in some really creative ways."

Two months ago, no one would have thought of asking McManus about possibly doing a kids-focused broadcast for the biggest game of the year. But the Jan. 10 wild-card game between the Chicago Bears and New Orleans Saints on Nickelodeon was a huge success. The game, which was also on CBS, averaged 30.65 million viewers — including 2.06 million on Nickelodeon — and generated 2 billion impressions on social media.

McManus is still surprised



CBS/Viacom via AP

Nate Burleson, Gabrielle Nevaeh Green and Noah Eagle were part of Nickelodeon's kid-focused broadcast of the wild-card game between the Chicago Bears and New Orleans Saints in New Orleans on Jan. 10.

over the reaction the broadcast received.

"It's the gift that keeps on giving to be honest with you," he said. "The reaction which you saw, was nuts. I mean, social media, legacy media, television, parents, kids, you know, the whole thing just blew up."

CBS' Nate Burleson, the analyst on the Nickelodeon game, said the broadcast was a success because it was able to "speak a different language while explaining the same type of football that we all love. It spoke to different generations, people who are all kids at heart."

Nickelodeon will air its own pregame special throughout the weekend, featuring network stars Gabrielle Nevaeh Green and Lex Lumpkin, who were also a part of the playoff broadcast.

During "The Super Bowl Today" pregame show on CBS on Sunday, Green and Lumpkin will be part of a segment based on Nickelodeon's game show "Unfiltered." They will try to guess the identity of one of the players who is disguised behind an animated filter and voice changer.

At halftime, Burleson will recap the first and second quarters with highlights presented with on-field graphics and filters first seen during the playoff game last month.

Besides halftime, there will be more "Nick-ified" highlights during the game on Nickelodeon, CBS and NFL social media accounts.

"Super Bowl Today" producer Drew Kaliski said Nickelodeon was in the pregame plans, but that more ideas came out of working with Green and Lumpkin during

the playoff game.

"We were always talking SpongeBob or characters of shows on Nickelodeon that we could involve, but it just kind of hit us right in the face off the success of that game," Kaliski said. "It was just like, OK, we have something but how do we take it to the next level, or kind of work with that element in our pregame show?"

CBS and Nickelodeon continue to explore when to do another NFL or sports telecast. Hall of Fame coach and CBS analyst Bill Cowher said the best time to do it would be the opening week of the season as a way to help old and new fans. Imagine not knowing the game and having someone trying to explain why if you only go 9 yards after three downs you punt the ball, but somebody else gets four downs, Cowher said.

He also brought up the differences in why the play clock is 25 seconds sometimes compared to 40 seconds.

"Think about the element of what you're trying to teach our young people," he said. "We also have everybody coming across to our country, they see we really love and have this energy, but what's this game of football? I would say, 'Go to a Nickelodeon telecast, they speak to you in terms where you might get a chance to understand it, then you can start to watch our show.'"



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Mike Rougeux, the new executive director of the Bend Endurance Academy, spots Kai Brennan during a rock climbing outing with a group of students at Meadow Camp on Thursday.

Outdoors

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"Some of those indoor programs, like dance or gymnastics, or basketball, have definitely been more impacted," Rougeux said. "But people are still hungry to get their kids that social interaction. So outdoor programs are more able to operate and parents are more comfortable with it."

Rougeux, 42, said the biggest challenge has been navigating the constant changes to COVID-19 guidelines. Bend Endurance Academy works with the Deschutes National Forest to operate its nordic skiing programs at Virginia Meisner Sno-park and also uses the Bend Rock Gym for its rock climbing programs.

"Once you figure out what the guidance is, it hasn't been super hard to put things in place," Rougeux said. "It's just been trying to figure out, OK where do we fit and how do we adapt to it? We've been trying to be as agile as possible as an organization. You can't really plan ahead. You can only put the pieces in place, wait to see what happens, and then move your piece."

Bend Endurance Academy canceled its programs last March but was able to resume in June with several adjustments. Rock climbing moved from the Bend Rock Gym outside to Smith Rock State Park in Terrebonne.

The nonprofit has found its niche with rock climbing and mountain biking youth programs. It also offers nordic skiing, and most Central Oregon youth nordic skiers train with the Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation, a long-time youth outdoor sports nonprofit that also offers alpine skiing, freeride skiing and snowboarding.

Rougeux — who has coached multiple youth climbers as members of the U.S. National Climbing Team and served as a regional coordinator for USA Climbing — has helped to grow the climbing program at Bend Endurance Academy over the past few years.

"Mike has created a culture within our climbing team that sets a precedent on community over competition, determination over talent, and passion over performance," said Brady Kendrick, assistant climbing director for the nonprofit. "I look forward to seeing him apply these principles to the entirety of the Bend Endurance Academy."

Mountain biking has been the most popular sport at the nonprofit, according to Rougeux.

"Our mountain biking program is way bigger than our other two programs," Rougeux said.

"While the sport I coach has predominantly been rock climbing, I'm focused on trying to bring what I did in terms of coaching development, coaching philosophy, and working with youth on the climbing side, and applying that to the other two programs."

He added that mountain biking has grown quickly because of its accessibility and the many miles of trails in Central Oregon.

"It's so familiar to a lot of people who are moving here," said Rougeux, who has lived in Bend for 15 years and was raised in upstate New York. "A lot of them ride bikes for fun out on the trails, so they sign their kids up."

One of Rougeux's goals as executive director is to provide more scholarship and tuition-assistance programs so underprivileged youth can participate in the Bend Endurance Academy programs.

"There could be kids out there who aren't riding the trails near town," he said. "And if they're exposed to that and provided the opportunity and the access, maybe that is something that they just pour their heart and soul into. But we won't know if we can't reach them and give them the opportunity to experience it."

For more information on the Bend Endurance Academy or to register for programs, visit bendenduranceacademy.org.

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Super Bowl

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Add in two 60-something head coaches, Kansas City's Andy Reid and Tampa Bay's Bruce Arians, both offensive masterminds as comfortable with today's high-scoring, creative NFL attacks as all those kid coaches who are all the rage.

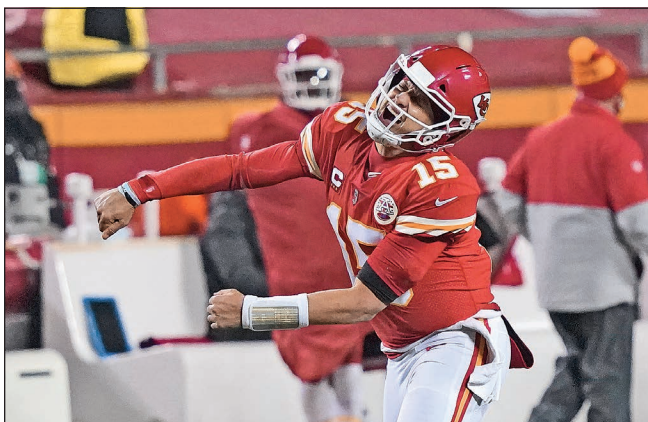
"There's nobody that would ever say a bad thing about B.A., he's just so endearing to everybody and I think everyone wants to win for him," Brady said of Arians, the kind of praise the quarterback rarely used about his previous head coach.

"He's got almost like a father figure kind of role in the building and it's because everyone loves him so much," Chiefs unanimous All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce said of Reid. "He's got an unbelievable way of getting the best out of everybody that is relating to all different aspects and all different forms of life."

Don't forget the defenses, which could easily be ignored with all the dynamism on both offenses. Tampa has probably the best set of linebackers in the NFL with Shaq Barrett, Lavonte David and Devin White, studs up front in Vita Vea, Ndamukong Suh and Jason Pierre-Paul, and an ever-improving secondary.

KC has All-Pro safety Tyrann Mathieu, linemen Frank Clark and Chris Jones — and a coordinator, Steve Spagnuolo, who doesn't back off.

"I've played for a lot of coaches in high school and college," Clark notes, "and I'm not saying they were bad, but I'm not saying their intentions were to bring out the best in



Jeff Roberson/AP file

Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes celebrates after throwing a TD pass during the AFC championship game on Jan. 24 in Kansas City, Missouri.

players. I can say that for sure with coach Spags. His intentions are not negative or anything like that. His intentions are solely to have the best defense on that field."

All of this at the end of a season played during a pandemic, yet not delayed, with no games canceled, and each of the Super Bowl participants experiencing relatively few COVID-19 setbacks.

"I think with the pandemic and the sacrifices they have all made for each other, they go to work and go home," Arians says. "They don't get to sit and eat together, don't get to have conversations, it is amazing to me how close they are. It is the commitment they made to each other to beat the virus."

The NFL and Florida health officials have approved about 22,000 fans and all will be required to wear masks. Raymond James Stadium normally has a capacity of 75,000 fans.

Playing before real people rather than just cardboard cutouts — oh, there will be plenty of those, too, with proceeds donated to local charities — has been rare in the NFL all season. But both the Chiefs

and Buccaneers were among the few teams to have fans on hand for some games.

Their paths to the championship game have been divergent, though. The Bucs (14-5) finished second in the NFC South to the Saints, sending them on the wild-card route. That meant trips to Washington, New Orleans and Green Bay. And now, staying home.

The Chiefs (16-2) had the top seed and lone bye in the AFC, then outlasted Cleveland with Mahomes sidelined for nearly half the game before routing Buffalo.

Of course, with the week off between the conference title matches and the Super Bowl, each side should be well rested. The only perceivable edge might be the Chiefs needing a plane ride to the game site while the Bucs could drive over to RJS.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the NFL had teams delay traveling into the host city until Friday at the earliest as a safety and health precaution measure. The Chiefs instead chose to come on Saturday, repeating their itinerary from earlier in the season

Super Bowl LV



Kansas City (16-2) vs. Tampa Bay (14-5)

When: 3:30 p.m. Sunday TV: CBS

when they beat the Bucs 27-24 on Nov. 29.

Assistant coach Britt Reid, the son of head coach Andy Reid, was not among those traveling with the team after he was involved in a multi-vehicle crash late Thursday that injured two young children near the Chiefs' training complex adjacent to Arrowhead Stadium.

The team had no further comment Saturday after releasing a statement Friday night saying it was in the information-gathering process.

By Sunday, both teams will be as eager as possible to get back on the field and write the final chapter to an unfathomably atypical season.

"You don't get these opportunities every year in the NFL to be in the Super Bowl and to be in these games," Mahomes said, though it sure seems as if Brady has a Super Bowl habit, and Mahomes is developing one. "So you don't want to look back and have regrets on how you played or how you went about the week before preparing to go out there to play your best football."

"When the end of your career is done, then you can kind of look and see where those moments were in your career where you could've had something or that you executed and you did go out there and achieve your dreams."

NASCAR

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At least four drivers tested positive for COVID-19 during the 2020 season, with Jimmie Johnson, Austin Dillon and Truck Series driver Spencer Davis missing races.

NASCAR again won't test competitors in 2021 but plans on having rapid tests at the tracks when needed. The bubble has been widened this season to allow a team owner into the garage for the first time since last March and NASCAR acknowledged it must be "nimble" with its schedule.

The second race of the season scheduled in Fontana, California, has already been moved to the road course at Daytona because of pandemic restrictions.

NASCAR executive vice

president Steve O'Donnell touted the momentum from a successful 2020 season but acknowledged the pandemic has challenged NASCAR going into 2021.

"I think all of us hoped by this time we'd have full grandstands and be ready to rock and roll for the 500. That's not the case," he said.

Daytona International Speedway can hold more than 100,000 in the grandstands and thousands more in the infield, but the speedway will be limited to roughly 30,000 spectators for the Feb. 14 season-opener.

Hamlin is seeking to become the first driver to win three consecutive Daytona 500s while also transitioning into team ownership. He still drives for Joe Gibbs Racing but has partnered with Jordan

"In the same way that music is a universal language, I also see NASCAR as a universal language. Everybody loves a fast car and a great story."

— Pitbull, recording artist who's invested in Trackhouse Racing team

to create 23XI Racing (pronounced twenty-three eleven) and field a car for Wallace, the only Black full-time driver at NASCAR's top level.

Wallace had a tumultuous 2020 as he became NASCAR's face for racial justice and change. He successfully pushed NASCAR to ban the Confederate flag at its events and with it came a wave of backlash from traditional fans. Wallace weathered it as best as he could — even when NASCAR brought in the FBI to investigate a garage door pull in his stall at Talladega that had been fashioned into a noose months

earlier — and it ultimately led to a millions in new sponsorship dollars that gave Wallace the funding to help get 23XI Racing off the ground.

He and Jordan become the only Black team owner and driver combination in the sport and the pairing puts Wallace in a glaring spotlight. Winless in 112 Cup races driving for underfunded Richard Petty Motorsports, Wallace knows it is time to deliver.

Wallace is seeking a balance in trying to be successful with a high-profile team while also using his platform to push for diversity. If he can do it all

with fewer headaches, he'd be thrilled.

"I lost 7 pounds through everything that happened last year. So much stress and pressure, Lord," Wallace said. "I have a goal every year to not be a part of the headlines. Every year I have that goal. And I've failed every year."

23XI with Jordan and Trackhouse with Pitbull are two of three new teams entering the Cup Series this year in anticipation of a new car in 2022 that will make NASCAR more affordable for owners.

Kyle Larson returns after a nearly full-season suspension for using a racial slur and he will drive for Hendrick Motorsports, which in November celebrated its 13th NASCAR championship with Elliott's win. Larson and Elliott are two of the most dynamic young

drivers in the series and hope to fill a void created by a rash of retirements, most recent seven-time champion Johnson.

New teams, new tracks, young drivers and an abundance of optimism has led broadcast partner Fox to market the 2021 NASCAR campaign as "the best season ever." That remains to be seen starting with the Daytona 500 and ending with the Nov. 7 finale at Phoenix.

"I can't remember, at least not as season that I've been a driver in Cup, this amount of changes ever happening before, and I think it's a nice little shot in the arm," NASCAR veteran Brad Keselowski said. "As far as best season ever, I don't think I'm the right person to judge, but I don't know how you could argue that it's not mostly good stuff happening."