

Network TV coverage

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Because of that, Matthews notes, viewers aren't very likely to see Division I-AA football or Division II football and basketball on a regular basis. At present, the network airs 210 college basketball games during the year. Adding on more games wouldn't serve a useful purpose, he said.

Whigham sees no reason why BET would suffer because of what ESPN has decided to do with black college sports.

"People are letting us know that they can't get enough of it (games of the week)," he said. "We only do one game a week. Our

such as halftime reports, pre-game and post-game reviews are areas that he is looking into in an effort to induce more advertisers to spend their money with BET.

"We'll continue to do what we have in the past," Whigham said. "Last year, we demonstrated that we could produce high quality programs that is of national caliber. Now all we have to do is bring our numbers up so we can give advertisers more bang for their buck."

Money or the lack of it, is a reason why ESPN could be viewed as more attractive by

"They were concerned about what would happen at the gate and they should be," Whigham added. "They felt that they could make more money by not having us air the game. They believed that fewer people would attend the game if it were on television and they would have no way of recovering those losses because of what we could afford to pay them for an appearance fee."

BET will carry the '89 Bayou Classic, but it will be shown on a delayed basis. This way, the schools feel they have more of an opportunity to fill the Louisiana Superdome

thing we'll see more of. After all, ESPN doesn't cover black college sports like BET, so their people aren't as familiar with the schools.

Having Neal appear on ESPN to do black college sports is a feather in BET's cap, Whigham says. "The more visibility our talent gets, the better we look as a network," he said.

BET will benefit from such an arrangement. James Brown, commentator for CBS Sports, has signed a personal services contract with the BET and will be involved in various projects in the coming months.



Photo by The Magnificent Eye

ESPN already has a proliferation of major college football games on its schedule. So it's unlikely that folks will see any Division I-AA or Division II football on that network.

viewers want us to do two or three games a week instead of one. But we're not ready to do that as of yet."

Live sports programming can be a financial drain on a young network that is still growing and BET is no exception. The advertising revenue hasn't been bad, and the dollars have increased which is encouraging.

However, Whigham's major push to help BET Sports become profitable. He plans to do that by providing advertisers with more sales opportunities associated with the programs shown. Different segments of games,

black colleges who appear on that network. BET reportedly pays a flat fee of \$6,000 for schools appearing on the Game of the Week. (The schools split the total fee). ESPN paid \$10,000 per school for the finalist in the MEAC Basketball Championship.

This money issue has surfaced before. Last year's Bayou Classic between Grambling and Southern wasn't aired on BET because the network and the schools couldn't agree on a fee. The schools wanted more money than BET was prepared to pay, so they opted to forego having the game aired.

and the network still gets to broadcast one of black college football's grandest events.

In summation, it appears that for now, BET and ESPN won't be engaged in a war over black college sports. BET will continue its specialized programming, which provides viewers with a brand of coverage that would be difficult for ESPN to duplicate.

One example of this was this year's SWAC Basketball Tournament finals on ESPN. Charlie Neal, sports director for BET, co-anchored the game with an ESPN analyst. These type of joint ventures may be some-

Brown, incidentally, got his first network job with BET.

At this point in time, it's clear that BET will continue to be the major force in providing black college sports with a national audience. ESPN's efforts is supplementing that, and *Black College Sports Today* should further add to that.

All that's necessary now is for black college sports followers to fully support those programs.

Black college sports will be better off.

-Craig T. Greenlee