

NBC has its work cut out at Torrey

by Jay Posner

SAN DIEGO - Pebble Beach had "Boat-Cam." Maybe Torrey Pines could have "Billabong-Cam." Or perhaps "Hang Glider-Cam."

"We'll be looking for unique angles to show the place off," said Tommy Roy, NBC's longtime golf producer.

At the last U.S. Open in California, in 2000 at Pebble Beach, "Boat-Cam" was just what it sounds like - a camera in a boat in Carmel Bay, which gave viewers a unique seal's-eye view of one of the most scenic courses in the world.

That won't be possible next year at another scenic oceanfront course, because Torrey Pines sits atop a huge cliff. But maybe NBC could put a camera in Devlin's Billabong, the pond that fronts the finishing hole. Or send one up with one of the hang glider fanatics who populate the sky above the course.

Camera angles will be on the minds of Roy and members of his crew less than two months from now when they begin preparing for next year's Open by playing Torrey Pines with Mike Davis, the USGA's director of rules and competitions.

NBC last televised the Buick in 1998 when Torrey Pines looked quite a bit different than it does today. So Roy is familiar with the basic layout of the course, but he has some work to do before deciding how many cameras he'll need (probably 40-45) to document the event, and where to put them so he doesn't miss a shot.

"It's not as simple as just putting a camera behind 1, a camera behind 2, a camera behind 3," Roy said. "You may need to have a camera in a certain part of the fairway or green."

As for the tournament itself, Roy said he gets the feeling local fans could be in for "something special if you look at the history of Tiger (Woods) and Phil (Mickelson) at the course. The possibility is developing for a pretty special event."

The idea of a Woods-Mickelson duel on Sunday is just one reason NBC will continue to discuss what time to end the Open. Playing on the West Coast gives the network and the USGA the option of extending the tournament deep into prime time in the Eastern half of the country. Don't be surprised if the final round doesn't end until about 7 p.m. here, which would still be an hour before sunset. (The weekend rounds at Pebble Beach

ended at 5.)

Why not? The national rating (10.1) for the final half-hour of action Sunday was 25 percent higher than the rating for any other half-hour of TV on any network last week. As long as Woods is in contention at Torrey Pines - a pretty safe bet considering he's won four of the last five Buick Invationals - what else could NBC air that would get that kind of rating?

In fact, Woods once again showed there's no contest when it comes to the world's most popular golfer. The final round averaged a 6.4 rating (which even beat the 6.2 average for the NBA Finals despite the latter airing in prime time), compared with a 4.7 in 2006, when Woods missed the cut and Mickelson was the story.

Even in San Diego, Mickelson's hometown, the story is the same. Sunday's 5.8 rating was 12 percent higher than last year's 5.2.

One other noteworthy part of the Open ratings this year: Just five of the nation's 55 largest markets had a lower final-round rating than San Diego. It will be interesting to see how that changes next year; the home market this year, Pittsburgh, was No. 1 with a 14.3 rating.

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