BET is the incumbent, but ESPN is expanding

national television exposure, black college (see page 9). athletics have been largely omitted. On occasion, there were a few games aired on a regional basis, but on the whole, national media coverage was null and void.

But now it appears that black college sports may begin to receive the kind of On the one hand, there's the Black Entertainment Television network, whose sports programming focuses primarily on black colsmall scale.

Having two national networks get involved in media coverage is good for black in at least a first round game." college sports. Because of increased coverage, black college sports can only benefit.

The publicity that athletic programs get via national television is something that can't be measured by money. And very few, if any black college sports administrators will argue they can get for their respective programs.

make a concerted effort to cover black col- days a week, so we try to stay as broad based lege athletics on a regular basis. They aired as possible. When it comes to sports on TV, football and basketball games and showed we want to be all things to all people. Our them on a delayed basis during prime time hours on Saturdays.

The Budweiser Sports Report, a weekly talk show, featured guests from the four black college conferences which gave viewers an inside look at teams, players, coaches, and issues.

Last fall, BET started providing live coverage of football and basketball games every week during prime time hours on Sat-

Enter ESPN.

Before this year, the all-sports network had done very little programming focusing specifically on black college sports. The one event they did cover was the football game between Grambling and South Carolina State, which was broadcast live and in prime time.

But now, that network has expanded it coverage to include Division I black college basketball. The carried both the MEAC and SWAC Basketball Tournament championship games live and during prime time.

In past years, BET provided coverage of the MEAC and SWAC hoops finals. The only post-season tournament they covered this past season was the CIAA Basketball

And in September, they will air Black College Sports Today, a weekly 30-minute program showcasing sports action in the four

Past history notes that when it comes to predominantly black athletic conferences

So what gives?

Is this an indication that ESPN is moving in on BET's turf? Is there a network war about to start?

"We don't see ESPN as a challenge to what we're doing," answered Marion Whighmedia exposure that has long been missing. am, manager of BET Sports. "There's enough out there (market-wise) for everyone."

"It made sense for them to get the MEAC and SWAC finals. They were already leges. On the other hand, ESPN, the all- involved in Division I basketball, so since sports network, has entered the picture on a those conference winners go to the playoffs, they already had the footage and information about those teams because they would play

> ESPN's move into covering the Division I black college tournaments shouldn't be construed as an attempt to knock BET out of its market, according to a network executive.

"We don't look at it from a standpoint of black or white," said Loren Matthews, vice that they don't need all the media coverage president of programming for ESPN. " We look at it in terms of broad and narrow In '80, BET was the first network to appeal. We're on the air 24 hours a day, seven bottom line is that we want to create the strongest appeal that crosses all demographic

"If you're talking about us competing against BET, that doesn't come into play. Our competition comes from the major networks and Turner Broadcasting."

Even though BET can't match ESPN's



Photo by J.D. Schwalm

On BET, basketball has produced higher ratings than football. And among the basketball games, the CIAA basketball finals have consistently drawn the largest viewing audience.

Network Profiles

Black Entertainment Television



Households reached: 20 million

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Type of network: General interest for black Americans Sports coverage: Primarily black college athletics. Football and basketball games aired live on Game of the Week starting in September and ending with conference basketball championships. Games broadcasted during prime time hours on Saturdays and on a regular basis. Covers both Division I and Division II black colleges. Programs geared specifically for the black audience. Top rated sports program: CIAA Basketball Tournament -- Saturday, 8 p.m., February 25, 1989

Households reached: 52 million Type of network: All sports

Sports coverage: A wide variety, running the gamut from spectator sports to recreational sports, plus sports news and information. Emphasis is on providing sports programming that will appeal to as many different types of viewers as possible. Starting to do a little more black college sports programming.

Top rated black college sports program: SWAC Basketball Championship -- Sunday, 7 p.m. EDT, March 12, 1989

viewership (they are received in 55 percent of all households that have cable TV), they aren't at a decided disadvantage in terms of maintaining its market for black college

For one, they have become "the" network for black college athletics. They've developed a niche in the minds of their viewers because they provide coverage on a regular basis and in prime time viewing hours.

"We were there before anybody else reached)," explained Whigham. "We've sports and that won't change. Our sports programming is geared specifically towards that. We were the first to show people the kind of pass catching talent that Jerry Rice (Mississippi Valley State) had before he started playing for the 49ers."

Even though ESPN has a big edge in thought about the numbers (total households terms of viewers, the feeling among media observers is that they won't pursue black col- to happen. always been committed to black college lege sports and cover it in the way that BET does. At this point, ESPN's stock has risen as a major force in cable TV.

They've landed contracts with major league baseball, major college football and its)." basketball, plus there's NFL Sunday night football. For them to actively go after black

college sports would require them to cover Division I and Division II. That's not likely

Black College Sports Review

"My feeling is that we won't go in that direction," Matthews said. "We have the major events we're covering and those are the items that will drive the train (generate prof-

Please See Page 11

Black College Sports Today to debut on ESPN

college sports. In September, he will have the ming with Division I. And of course they'll opportunity to turn that dream into reality want to do as much Division I football and when Black College Sports Today, a 30- basketball like anyone else." minute weekly program, airs on the ESPN

ESPN has committed itself to broadcast-Wednesdays at 2:30 p.m. EDT. The show debuts on Sept. 13 and will run through the end of the black college basketball season.

Black College Sports Today will highlight athletic happenings in the SWAC, MEAC, CIAA, and SIAC -- the four predominantly black college athletic conferences.

The show will focus on football, basketball, and the other sports that are in season. McAlpin, president of Focus Marketing in Greensboro, NC, is the show's executive pro-

This program represents an expansion of national media coverage for black college athletics -- something that has been sorely

However, there are those who feel that McAlpin's efforts could undermine Black Entertainment Television's sports coverage.

The thinking is that ESPN may be considering how to best take advantage of reaching a sizeable market of black consumers, many of whom are avid followers of black college athletics. Since ESPN has more financial resources and reaches more households, it appears that they could be in position to eventually take over BET's market

McAlpin doesn't agree with that reasoning. "We don't view the show as competition for BET," he said. "We look at it as providing an additional outlet for black college sports. When I first started this, I explained that to the executives at BET and to the administr tors at black colleges. All we're doing is giving a closer nuts and bolts look at black college sports and presenting it to a larger audi-

While ESPN hasn't done a great deal of programming geared specifically to black colleges, McAlpin asserts that it's unlikely that the network will attempt to capture a considerable portion of the black college sports viewing audience. To do that, he said, would mean that the network would have cover Division I and Division II.

"I can't see them doing anything on a

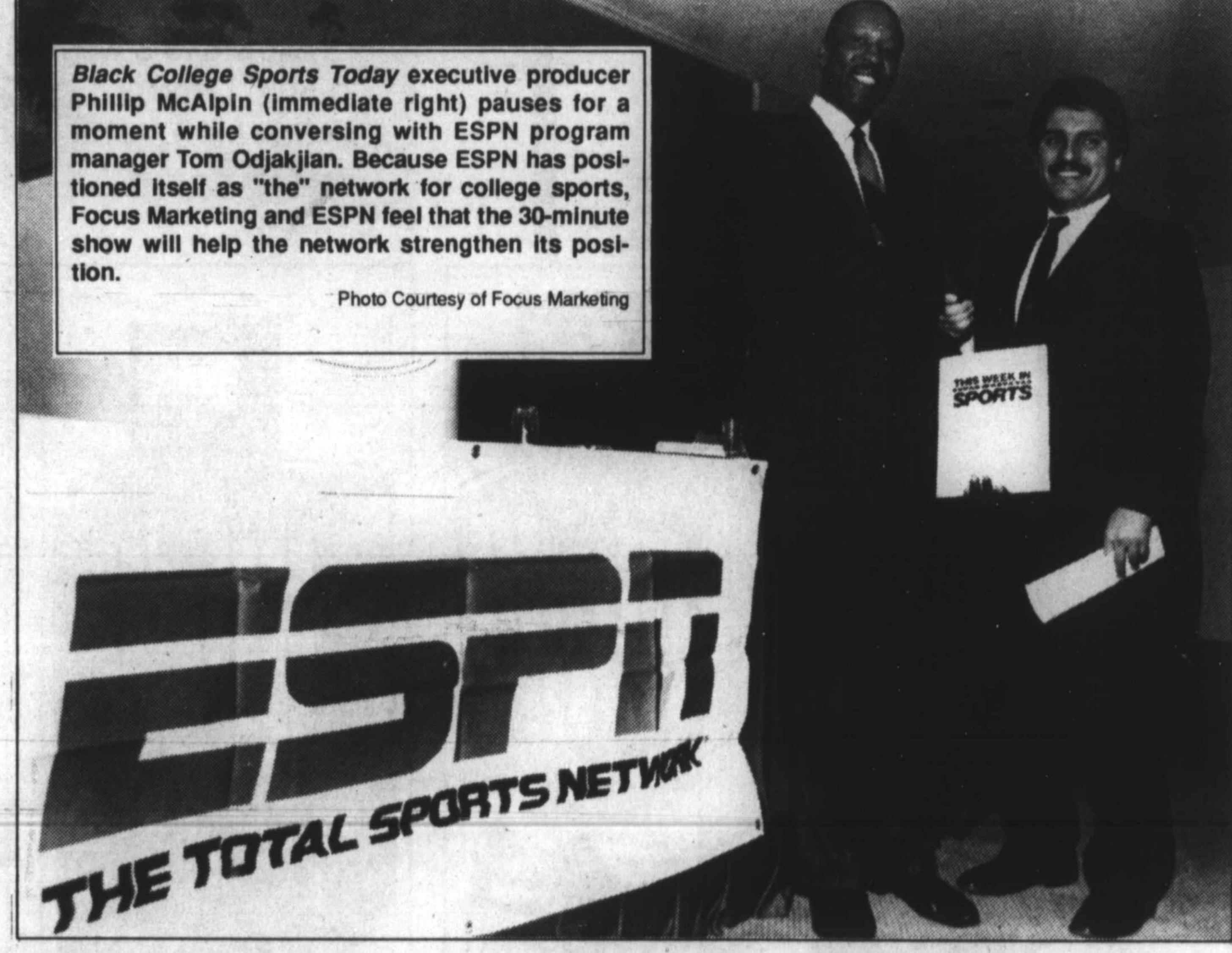
Phillip McAlpin's long term objective as regular basis on Division II schools whether at that time of day, there's always someone a broadcasting entrepreneur was to initiate a those schools are black or white," he said. watching at all times. We could have been put national television network show about black "They're already doing some live program- on at a worse time, like midnight Sunday."

> The initial 26 week run will be crucial to produced in Greensboro, NC. And some of

itself. The 2:30 p.m. time slot puts the program in the anchor position for the network's the success of McAlpin's show, which will be programming for that time of day. The show Conference. Focus provided regular season follows Coach's Corner, which features coning the show for 26 weeks. It will air on the skeptics are wondering aloud if the show versations and interviews with the top colle- '88 season along with the finals of the confer-

be able to get a better time slot."

Focus Marketing has been involved in black college sports coverage before this ven-From all indications, it appears that ture with ESPN. The firm had aired MEAC ESPN will give the show a chance to prove Today, a weekly program that aired on Saturdays which covered highlights, issues and personalities in the Mid-Eastern Athletic coverage of MEAC basketball during the '87-



has a chance because it's not slotted in a prime-time position when more people are more likely to be tuned in.

"It's a new show, so you really can't expect to be on at prime time because the net-

giate athletic coaches around the country.

McAlpin feels that the show will survive its 26 week acid test if the production quality is like it should be for national TV and if viewers let ESPN know that they want to work executives want to see how the show show to stay on the air. The same principle will fare," he said. "After all, you don't see applies to getting the program's time changed networks replacing shows that work in prime to prime time, he adds. "If there are enough time with shows that haven't been tested. So people contacting their local cable system sure, I would have loved to get a prime time operators and telling them that they want to they're exposed to the same stimuli." slot. But while fewer people are watching TV see the show on the air at a better time, we'll

ence basketball tournament.

Even though McAlpin's program has yet to be seen, he is optimistic that the show can cut it. "Black college athletics needs that kind of exposure. It needs to be advertised, it has to be marketed, it has to be promoted. That's what fills up stadiums. I feel that if you do those things, the black community will respond as other communities have when

- Lonnie Sheldon