

= Pilot (Sports Night) =

Pilot is the pilot episode of the television series Sports Night , written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by Thomas Schlamme , which premiered on ABC in the United States on September 22 , 1998 . The pilot introduces viewers to a varied group of personalities working on a fictional late @-@ night American sports show called Sports Night , on the CSC network .

The episode centres on the team 's attempts to broadcast a feature about an African athlete who is due to take part in his first race following recovery from a potentially career @-@ ending injury . One of the two lead anchors on the show , Casey , is called up for having an unprofessional attitude on and off screen in the light of his recent divorce from his wife , and is even thinking of leaving the show . Producer Natalie is stuck in a dilemma when she becomes attracted to her colleague Jeremy , who is the new sports statistician at the network .

Six characters receive top billing in the episode : Casey McCall (Peter Krause) , Dan Rydell (Josh Charles) , Dana Whitaker (Felicity Huffman) , Isaac Jaffe (Robert Guillaume) , Natalie Hurley (Sabrina Lloyd) and Jeremy Goodwin (Joshua Malina) . Several recurring characters also appear in the first episode , including Kim (Kayla Blake) , Elliot (Greg Baker) , Chris (Timothy Davis @-@ Reed) and Will (Ron Ostrow) . Robert Mailhouse guest @-@ stars as J.J. , while Bernard Hocke and Nina Jane Barry appear as Dave and Claire respectively .

The episode received largely positive reviews . The episode has received multiple nominations and has won Outstanding Directorial Achievement for a Comedy Series at the 52nd Directors Guild of America Awards and also a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series .

= = Plot = =

The pilot episode introduces the six main characters of the series , as well as the cast of supporting characters . Casey McCall , one of the co @-@ anchors of Sports Night , a sports television roundup show running at 11pm on CSC , the " number 3 sports network " ? a channel modeled on ESPN and similar ? is displaying a negative attitude , both on and off screen , as a result of his recent divorce . Dan Rydell , his co @-@ anchor , tries to get back his positive attitude , while J.J. and the network executives begin to get vocal about his need to improve or leave the company . Dana Whitaker , his producer , vociferously defends him to the executive producer , Isaac Jaffe , even while she tries to get him to shape up before they override her shielding of him . At the same time , Casey himself is thinking about quitting sports broadcasting , citing the moral decay he 's seen on the job , in spite of Dan 's observation that he 'd only be doing it for the wrong reasons . Dana also hires a new associate producer , the highly strung but brilliant Jeremy Goodwin , who co @-@ producer Natalie Hurley takes a liking to . At the end of the episode , a unique sporting event involving the return of a 41 @-@ year @-@ old injured athlete to the running track makes Casey change his mind .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception = = =

Sorkin gathered inspiration for the show from a number of places . According to the Huffington Post , " Sorkin got the idea [for the show] from watching TV ... while writing The American President . He was watching ESPN , and found the humor and banter from the anchors (Dan Patrick and ... either Keith Olbermann or Craig Kilborn) intoxicating , and decided to create a comedy set in that world " . The show utilises a laugh track , which the Post @-@ Gazette described as following " an unwritten primetime rule : all half @-@ hour shows , except animated comedies ... must have a laugh track " and Hollywood.com 's Peter Hall calls a " goof " that " crippled " the first few episodes " of the show . It is used sparingly in the pilot as " Sports Night has so many dramatic moments " .

The show was pitched as not being aimed exclusively at sports fans , with the tagline " It 's about sports . The same way Charlie 's Angels was about law enforcement . " Based on the pre @-@ air pilot , ABC ordered Sports Night for the fall 1998 television season .

= = = Casting = = =

The pilot episode , as with the rest of the series , uses an ensemble cast , with six of the cast members identified as main characters . Peter Krause and Josh Charles played the two lead anchors on the CSC network , Casey McCall and Dan Rydell respectively . Felicity Huffman played Sports Night producer Dana Whitaker , while Robert Guillaume appeared as her boss , Isaac Jaffe , the executive producer . The main cast is rounded off by Sabrina Lloyd , who plays co @-@ producer Natalie Hurley , and Joshua Malina , who plays Jeremy Goodwin , a new addition to the crew in the pilot . Other characters given billing include Kayla Blake as Kim , Greg Baker as Elliot , Timothy Davis @-@ Reed as Chris and Ron Ostrow as Will .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

It was announced on May 18 , 1998 that the show would debut on Tuesdays at 9 : 30 as part of ABC 's comedy block , following Home Improvement , The Hughleys and Spin City . The series debuted on ABC in the opening week of the 1998 ? 99 television season , on September 22 , 1998 . ABC finished behind CBS in viewing figures for the opening week of programming , while ratings across the networks fell by 4 million compared to the previous year .

= = = Critical reception = = =

Entertainment Weekly critic Ken Tucker was positive , despite his initial skepticism . He worried that Aaron Sorkin would not be able to translate big @-@ screen success on films such as A Few Good Men and The American President to television , and believed before watching the show that it was " a golden opportunity to stink up prime time with the sort of smug , smirky , life @-@ drainingly ironic talking heads who 've outlasted their naughty @-@ boy novelty status on ESPN " . However , after watching the show , he wrote " But against all odds , Sports Night is a home run , a hole in one , a touchdown ? at once the most consistently funny , intelligent , and emotional of any new @-@ season series . "

The Huffington Post 's Bob Sassone , while reviewing the show retrospectively in 2006 , praised the " intelligent writing , fast @-@ paced dialogue , and a strong ensemble cast of smart , moral characters all working toward a common goal . " He also pointed out links between Sports Night and Aaron Sorkin 's next production , the critically acclaimed The West Wing . The Washington Post called Sports Night " the best new ABC sitcom of the season " and also commented " Aaron Sorkin ... [has] certainly got a knack for snappy , and occasionally moving , dialogue . " They were among a number of publications to point out how the show would appeal to sports fans and non @-@ sports enthusiasts alike . The Associated Press marked Sports Night out as one of the few potential successes amongst the freshman shows for the 1998 ? 99 season . Entertainment Weekly believed that the season as a whole deserved to be nominated for best comedy at the Emmys .

= = = Awards and nominations = = =

The episode received multiple award nominations . The episode 's director Thomas Schlamme won Directors Guild of America award for Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing ? Comedy Series in 1999 . The episode also won for Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series at the Emmy Awards in 1999 . Bonnie Zane and Paula Rosenberg

were nominated for an Artios Award for Best Casting for TV , Comedy Pilot from the Casting Society of America .