

= Go Big or Go Home =

" Go Big or Go Home " is the third season premiere of the American comedy television series Parks and Recreation , and the 31st overall episode of the series . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on January 20 , 2011 . In the episode , Leslie gets Ann to go on a date with state auditor Chris to persuade him to increase the parks department budget . Meanwhile , Andy continues harboring feelings for April , while a youth basketball game is ruined by Tom 's jealousy over Ron dating his ex @-@ wife Wendy .

The episode was written by Alan Yang and directed by Dean Holland . It was the first to feature Adam Scott , Rob Lowe , Jim O 'Heir and Retta as regular cast members rather than guest performers . Frequent guest stars Jama Williamson and Natalie Morales also reprised their roles . " Go Big or Go Home " marked the first original Parks and Recreation episode in eight months . It was filmed immediately after the second season concluded due to Amy Poehler 's pregnancy , but NBC ended up placing the show on hold to accommodate their new series , Outsourced .

The season premiere was the first Parks and Recreation episode to air in its new 9 : 30 p.m. Thursday time @-@ slot between the two popular shows The Office and 30 Rock . According to Nielsen Media Research , it was seen by 6 @.@ 19 million households . It was the series ' highest rating in the ages 18 to 49 demographic , and marked the highest overall viewership since the series premiere . The episode received highly positive reviews , with several commentators particularly praising the scene featuring " Swanson Pyramid of Greatness " , Ron Swanson 's guide to successful living .

= = Plot = =

After three months of closure due to the Pawnee budget crisis and government shutdown , Leslie (Amy Poehler) excitedly informs her fellow employees that the parks department has been reopened , although on a shoestring budget . State auditors Chris (Rob Lowe) and Ben (Adam Scott) announce they may only conduct existing park maintenance , but Leslie wants to offer better programs and services . Meanwhile , the always @-@ optimistic Chris continues trying to convince Ann (Rashida Jones) to go on a date with him . Ann finds him too intense , but Leslie convinces her to accept a date and try to persuade Chris to increase the parks budget .

Due to popular demand from citizens , Ben restarts the youth basketball league , although with only two teams . They are coached by Ron (Nick Offerman) , who is extremely strict and disciplined with his players , and Andy (Chris Pratt) , who is very laid back and lets his kids go out of control . Tom (Aziz Ansari) , who referees the game , becomes jealous when his ex @-@ wife Wendy (Jama Williamson) arrives to support Ron . Tom insists he is happy with his new girlfriend Lucy (Natalie Morales) and does not mind that Wendy is dating Ron . However , Tom repeatedly calls false fouls against Ron 's players until all of them are benched . When Ron and Wendy get angry , Tom ejects them from the games and declares it a forfeit , which concerns Lucy .

Ann finds she enjoys her date with Chris . When she asks why he is always so positive , he explains he was expected to die as a baby due to a blood disorder , so he now feels fortunate to be alive every day . Leslie crashes the date to help Ann persuade Chris to increase the parks budget , but to her surprise , Ben also arrives , having predicted Leslie 's plan . The four end up taking their date to a gay bar called The Bulge , where Chris tells Leslie he will consider increasing the parks budget . Leslie excitedly declares " mission accomplished " , accidentally giving away her scheme and prompting Chris to leave , hurt that Ann had an ulterior motive for the date . Later , however , Ann apologizes to Chris and asks for another date , to which he happily agrees .

Meanwhile , April (Aubrey Plaza) shows up to work after having disappeared three months earlier . Andy still has a crush on April , who previously liked Andy until she learned Ann had kissed him . Andy had been leaving messages to April ever since , but she did not return them because she was in Venezuela , where she met her new boyfriend , the handsome Eduardo (Carlo Mendez) . A discouraged Andy seeks advice from Leslie , who encourages him not to give up and to " go big or go home " . Inspired by her own advice , Leslie proposes restoring the parks department with a

Harvest Festival , which was once a Pawnee tradition until eliminated by budget cuts . Leslie and the other parks employees agree that if it is not a success , the parks department will shut down . Impressed by their enthusiasm , Chris and Ben agree to the idea .

= = Production = =

" Go Big or Go Home " , the third season premiere , was written by Alan Yang and directed by Dean Holland . It was the first to feature Adam Scott , Rob Lowe , Jim O 'Heir and Retta as regular cast members rather than guest stars . Frequent guest performers Jama Williamson and Natalie Morales also reprised their roles . The episode was originally expected to debut in September 2010 and , due to Amy Poehler 's pregnancy , the Parks and Recreation producers decided to write and film the first six episodes of the season early so it could meet that air date . However , to accommodate their new comedy series Outsourced , NBC opted not to put Parks and Recreation on the fall schedule , and instead delayed the third season premiere to a mid @-@ season date of January 20 , 2011 . Due to the delay , " Go Big or Go Home " is set in the fall , when it was supposed to air , rather than the winter when it was actually broadcast . NBC chief executive officer Jeff Gaspin said this move was not a reflection on Parks and Recreation , and suggested the extended hiatus would not only have no negative effect on the show , but could actually build anticipation for its return .

" Go Big or Go Home " was the first original episode since " Freddy Spaghetti " in May 2010 , and executive producer Michael Schur said while he believed it was a strong episode , there were fears the hiatus would hurt the momentum of the series : " Of course , any time you 're not on the air , you run the risk of people forgetting about you ; that 's the sad thing about the mid @-@ season show . " The week of the third season premiere , Amy Poehler said of the hiatus , " It was an NBC decision and certainly we were confused . But I think , weirdly , there 's a momentum that comes from people waiting for us , which is nice . " Poehler also said the long hiatus made an ironic sort of sense for the script , since at the beginning the characters have " taken too much time off and we 've all gone a little crazy " . While Parks and Recreation previously aired on 8 : 30 p.m. EST on Thursdays , " Go Big or Go Home " marked the first episode in a new 9 : 30 p.m. Thursday time @-@ slot between the two popular shows The Office and 30 Rock . Poehler said of the time @-@ slot , " ' The Office ' is such an amazing show and to be behind it is an honor . " In anticipation of new viewers due to the Office lead @-@ in , " Go Big and Go Home " included an introductory sequence describing the previous events of the series .

" Go Big or Go Home " introduced the subplot of restoring the parks department budget through a harvest festival , which continued to be a major story arc throughout the first seven episodes of the season . It also marked a major development in the romantic subplot between Ann and Chris . Rashida Jones said of her character : " I think women over @-@ correct from their last boyfriends , and Chris is very much the opposite from Mark , " a reference to Mark Brendanawicz , a character eliminated the previous season . During one scene at Ann 's house , Leslie suggests outlandish and inappropriate ways for Ann to try to seduce Chris into increasing the parks department budget , including wearing a sleeveless tuxedo dress that suddenly bursts open . Amy Poehler said she and Jones improvised much of the scene . Poehler said of the scene , " I think it 's really funny how little game (Leslie) has with guys . She 's not a fool , it 's just not her expertise , so when she talks about how to be sexy or hot to get someone 's attention , it 's always really crazy . "

= = Cultural references = =

While coaching basketball , Ron Swanson shows his players what he calls the " Swanson Pyramid of Greatness " , a guide to living similar to the " Pyramid of Success " used by John Wooden . The pyramid includes several different categories , with honor at the top , and others below it such as America , buffets , wood working , welfare avoidance and deer protein . A poster of this pyramid was included in promotional materials given to media in advance of the episode 's broadcast , and images of it were later placed on the official Parks and Recreation website . During the basketball game , Ron wears a red sweater and , at one point , angrily throws a chair into the court . These are

references to the basketball coach Bobby Knight , for whom Ron had professed great admiration in the pilot episode .

During scenes at the gay bar , a stylized stencil poster of Leslie hangs on the wall . It is designed in a similar way to the Barack Obama " Hope " poster designed by artist Shepard Fairey , with the word " Knope " instead of " Hope " . This poster was previously featured in the second season premiere " Pawnee Zoo " , where Leslie is praised as a gay rights hero for marrying two male penguins at a ceremonial wedding at the zoo . During the parks department shutdown , Tom gets a part @-@ time job at Lady Foot Locker , a retail sportswear and footwear store . He wears the store uniform , which resembles a referee shirt , when he actually referees the youth basketball game later in the episode . Tom 's part @-@ time job is a reference to the second season episode " Woman of the Year " , where it is revealed Tom 's friend Jean @-@ Ralphio Saperstein also worked at a Lady Foot Locker .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

In its original American broadcast , " Go Big or Go Home " was seen by an estimated 6 @.@ 19 million household viewers , according to Nielsen Media Research , with a 3 @.@ 2 rating / 8 share among viewers between ages 18 and 49 . It marked the series ' highest rating in that demographic , and the highest overall viewership since the series premiere episode from April 2009 , which was seen by 6 @.@ 77 million household viewers . " Go Big or Go Home " lost about a quarter of the viewership of the episode of The Office (" Ultimatum ") , which was seen by 8 @.@ 3 million households , but New York magazine described this as a " respectable drop @-@ off " given the popularity of that series . Parks and Recreation received a higher rating in its time @-@ slot than the CBS crime drama series CSI : Crime Scene Investigation , which had more viewers at 14 @.@ 34 million households , but a lower 3 @.@ 1 rating / 8 share . Both shows were defeated by the Fox comedy @-@ drama series Bones , which received a 6 @.@ 5 rating / 10 share and was seen by 10 @.@ 55 million households .

= = = Reviews = = =

" Go Big or Go Home " received critical acclaim , with several critics particularly complimenting the " Swanson Pyramid of Greatness " joke . HitFix writer Alan Sepinwall said the episode was effective in appealing to both new and old viewers , developing various character subplots and establishing the harvest festival story arc . He also praised the performances of Chris and Ann , which he called a far better and more interesting pairing than Ann with Mark Brendanawicz . Linda Holmes of NPR suggested the season premiere was a good place for newcomers to the series to start watching . She said all the characters were funny and the two new cast members had been seamlessly integrated into the show . Time magazine writer James Poniewozik called the episode an " excellent start " to the season , and said the harvest festival subplot would help better focus the series by giving the characters a single goal . Poniewozki said it also " reminds us that the show is about something : the idea , maybe quaint @-@ seeming in this political climate , that civil servants can actually see themselves as servants and work in their community 's interest " . Damian Holbrook of TV Guide said " Go Big or Go Home " was an improvement on an already strong second season , claiming " the comedy seemed snappier , the relationships better grounded and the ensemble cast at their best . "

CNN writer Henry Hanks praised the season premiere and said he was " overjoyed " that the show had returned . He found particularly funny the scenes at the start of the episode which showed the part @-@ time jobs Tom , Donna and Jerry had during the parks department hiatus . Steve Heisler of The A.V. Club said " Go Big or Go Home " not only included many fun moments , but that the jokes felt " fresher and more rambunctious " than they had in the previous season , and that the

shows seemed to have discovered " a newfound sense of purpose " . Gail Pennington of the St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch said " Go Big and Go Home " , along with the five other first episodes of the season " couldn 't be funnier " . The Hollywood Reporter writer Tim Goodman felt the episode was a strong start to the season , and particularly praised Rob Lowe , whose character he said was " really beginning to jell " . Blogcritics writer Jerome Wetzel wrote , " I can 't express in words how good it is to have Parks and Recreation back on television . " Wetzel said the characters were so well defined that the show rivaled the ensemble cast of The Office , a comedy made by the same producers as Parks and Recreation . Zap2it writer Rick Porter wrote that Parks and Recreation " was one of the two or three funniest comedies on TV when it finished its second season , and it begins its third season having lost none of its mojo " . He particularly praised the performances of Nick Offerman and Rob Lowe .

Matt Fowler of IGN said the episode was a pleasant way to return to the series , and was glad the harvest festival would give the characters something specific to focus on . However , Fowler felt there was a lack of closure over Tom 's resentment in the episode of Ron dating Wendy . Joel Keller of TV Squad felt the new Chris and Ben characters served as a strong springboard into the third season , and that the premiere episode lived up to the anticipation caused by the show 's long hiatus . However , Keller said Tom 's continued pining for Wendy felt " a little protracted at this point " . New York magazine writer Steve Kandell praised the episode and said the parks department employees taking drastic steps to save their department reflected Parks efforts to seek out higher ratings . Kandell , however , felt introducing Chris ' tragic back story in the episode felt rushed . Eric Hochberger of TV Fanatic called the episode consistently funny , and said the new characters Ben and Chris were starting to hit their stride . However , Hochberger said Eduardo subplot felt like a contrived device to continue keeping April and Andy apart . Not all reviews were entirely positive . David Hinckley of New York Daily News called Parks and Recreation " a good show that could be a better show " , claiming it falls short of other NBC comedies like 30 Rock . Hinckley cited the basketball game with Andy , Ron and Tom as a scene that feels too much like a sketch comedy bit rather than a natural progression of the script . Nick Purdy of Paste said the addition of new cast members Chris and Ben may have diluted the rest of the cast 's talents , and that the episode felt as if it had " too many plates spinning " , leaving not enough screentime for strong characters like April Ludgate and Ron Swanson .