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Sports Business

Basketball tourney eyeing changes for 1998

Raycom Inc. is huddling with other principals from its annual Charlotte college basketball tournament to revamp the event after seeing attendance fall by 30% since 1994.

Launched in 1988, the Harris Teeter Pepsi Challenge averaged 12,577 fans last month at Charlotte Coliseum -- a steep fall from the nearly 18,000 fans who attended in December 1994. The University of North Carolina and the University of South Carolina are annual participants.

"We felt like we needed to make some changes and generate higher attendance," says Ken Haines, Raycom executive vice president. "We are going to discuss all sorts of possibilities."

Among possible changes: reducing the event to one day.

Steve Luquire, a local sports marketer and ad executive, says the tournament faces two obstacles -- a holiday season date and TV coverage. "The biggest obstacle is getting people to buy tickets three weeks before Christmas," he says. "And people are also realizing they can watch for free on TV."

Haines expects to finalize plans for the 1998 tournament within the next month. Both UNC and USC will return, and College of Charleston is a likely addition. Average ticket price is \$25 to \$35 per day; no price changes are expected.