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ACC Game Shutting Out Reagan Speech On WBTV

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President Reagan's State of the Union message Tuesday will be slam-dunked by Atlantic Coast Conference basketball on WBTV (channel 3), which is preempting live coverage of the address for the UNC-Georgia Tech game.

Channel 3 will run a message at the bottom of the TV screen directing viewers who are interested in the speech to WSOC-TV (channel 9) and WPCQ (channel 36), which will carry

the event live.

"We mean no disrespect to the president, but this puts us on the spot," said Marion Meginnis, channel 3 program manager.

Reagan was to address Congress last Tuesday, but postponed the speech after the space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after lift-off from Cape Canaveral.

Two commercial television networks — CBS and NBC — were thrown into a frenzy when it was announced Reagan would talk at 9 p.m.

Tuesday. CBS planned to air the final chapter of its seven-hour "Sins" at 9 p.m. (on channel 3), and NBC was to air the third part of its eight-hour "Peter the Great" (on channel 36) in that time slot. The networks asked the White House to move the State of the Union address to 8 p.m. Tuesday. Though White House officials deny they bowed to pressure, the starting time was changed.

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But that solution only made things tougher for channel 3.

Meginnis said the station had known several weeks ago the UNC-Georgia Tech game would conflict with "Sins." Channel 3 successfully petitioned the ACC to begin the game at 7 p.m., instead of its scheduled 9 p.m. start. That way, the game would be over in time for "Sins."

Fine and dandy, until the news of the rescheduled State of the Union message arrived.

Meginnis said the importance of the game — matching two highly ranked teams — influenced the station's decision to preempt the speech. She added, "We can't show an hour of the game and

then go to the speech . . . If we let people know where they can find the president's speech, we're not shirking our responsibility."

WBTV will air the taped State of the Union address and the Democratic Party response at 11:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Channel 3 isn't the only N.C. CBS affiliate to preempt Reagan for basketball. WFMY in Greensboro and WRAL in Raleigh also will carry the ACC game live and the president on tape.