

Staff Photo By WES BOBBITT

Tom Sorensen (lower right) lives out a basketball lover's dream: One studio, eight TVs

A Day In Basketball Central

Where The High Fives, Airballs, Dunks And Cliches Never Stop

"Big basket. Oh yeah!"
 "That basket by Pee Wee Barber could be very, very large."
 "Boy, he makes it look easy."
 "This one could seal it if he could make this one."

I was in downtown Charlotte in the monitoring room of Raycom Inc. In front of me were eight television sets; and on each of the sets was a college basketball game. This is where college basketball junkies who have led good lives hope to go when they die.

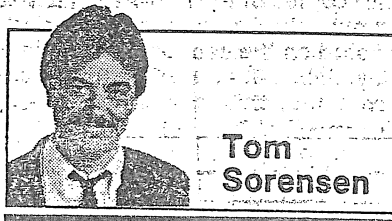
A man here could, with a slow twist of his neck, see high fives exchanged in Waco, Tex., an airball shot in Greensboro, a ball slammed through a basket in Blacksburg, Va., an official's call questioned in Ann Arbor, Mich., and a dirty look delivered by Oklahoma coach Billy Tubbs in Raleigh.

It's about 5:15 p.m. I've been here since 12:30 p.m., and already I've watched 13 games.

Raycom is a Charlotte-based regional sports network that broadcasts Metro, Big Eight, Southwest, PCAA and Pac 10 basketball games. With Jefferson Pilot Teleproductions, it also broadcasts ACC games. On top of the building in which the Raycom offices are housed are four satellite dishes, so games from other networks also can be plucked from the sky.

To spend an afternoon in the monitoring room — "Mission Control" is what executive producer Don McGuire calls it — is to enter a world of bouncing balls, elbows, dunks, officials, beer commercials, big games, big baskets and sweat.

The room is about 12-by-14 feet, with gray carpet on the floor and walls. The sets are stacked in two rows of four in a black cabinet at the front of the room. There are



two long black tables, three chairs to a table. In front of each chair is a set of headphones. A viewer can listen to only one game at a time.

"Charlie Moir is having a down year but today Virginia Tech came out ready to play."

"Oh, the Wake Forest fans are really upset about this one."

"For whatever reason, the N.C. State defense has lost its intensity."

"Overtime! Holy cow."

"Exceptionally smooth. The night belongs to..."

Each Raycom game was monitored by a Raycom employee. Were the commercials broadcast in the proper order? Was the picture clear? Was the sound audible? Their job was to find out.

Is there such a thing as a basketball overdose? My job was to find out.

Saturday's fare included: Florida State-Virginia Tech; Oklahoma-N.C. State; Duke-Wake Forest; Arizona State-Arizona; Iowa-Michigan; SMU-Baylor; New Mexico-Texas-El Paso; South Carolina-Southern Mississippi; Kansas-Louisville; Syracuse-Georgetown; Pacific-California at Santa Barbara; Purdue-Indiana; and Virginia-Clemson.

Between games, or before games, a little

nonbasketball relief was served. The day's most ambitious play, in fact, belonged to Dr. Gene Scott, who announced he was trying to raise \$9 million in 26 days to save his California church. And a case could be made that the afternoon's best moves were put on not by Pee Wee Barber but by the blonde woman on the Caribbean Super Station.

Frankly, even the mace advertisement from Fern Park, Fla., was welcome. Eyes wander from screen to screen, from fast break to three-point shot to the shoving match beneath the basket. There is strength in numbers, and the television sets assault you like a gang.

"Bobby Knight did not like that call."
 "But don't let that fool you. An eight-point lead in this series isn't a lot."

"Jerry Pryor got the matador flag out and just waved it."

"Ask for a Lite."

Three games went into overtime. Syracuse and Georgetown were tied at 77-77 with two seconds left. Kansas lead Louisville 60-58 with 44 seconds left. And Syracuse and Georgetown and Kansas and Louisville — or was it California-Santa Barbara and Southern Mississippi and Baylor and Iowa — were playing at the same time.

"This has been a very physical game."

"Oh, what a prayer!"

"It's been as intense as we thought it might and we'll be right back."

"They said this town was dead."

Is there such a thing as a basketball overdose? Yes, yes there is.

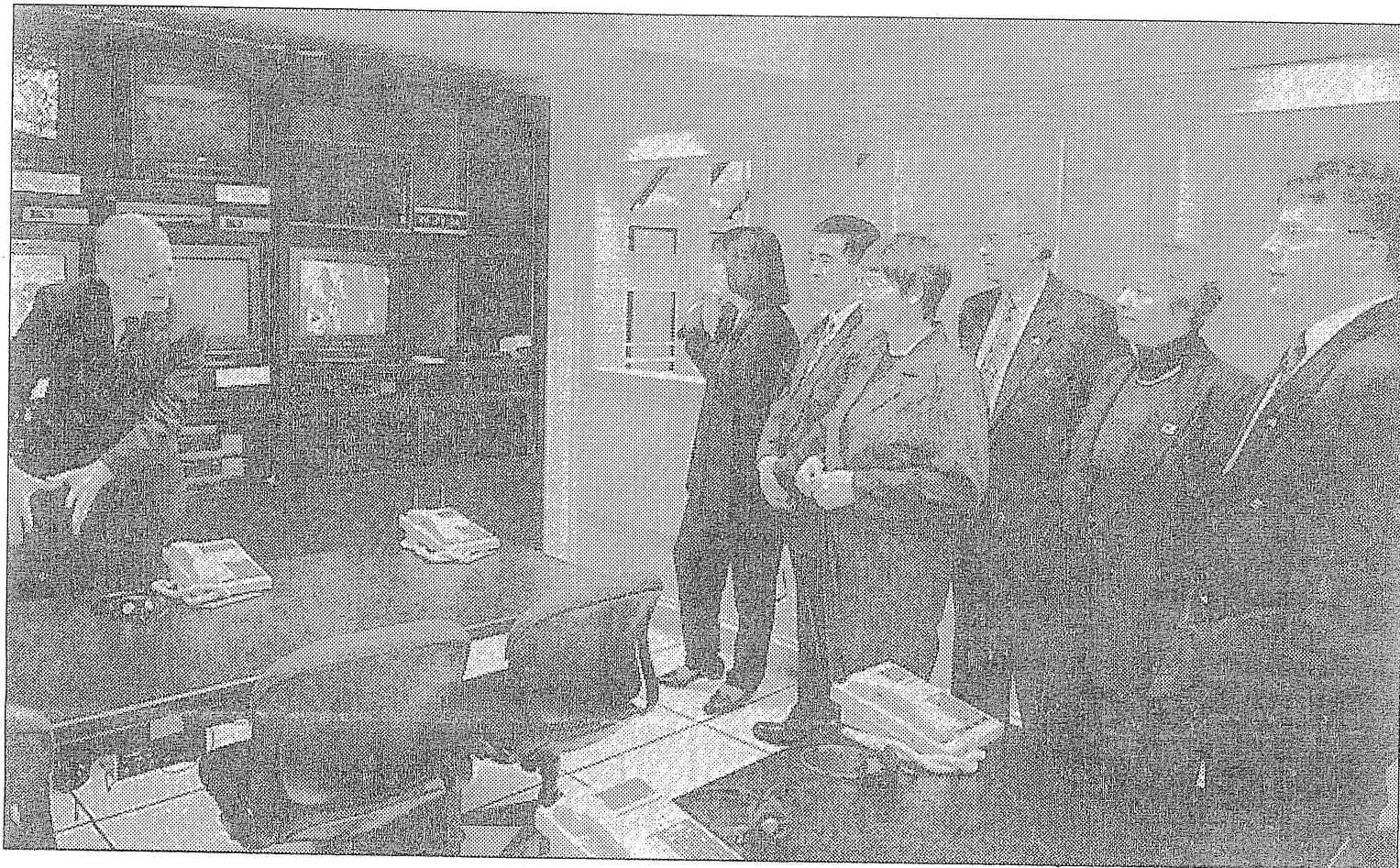
And California and Oregon State are due to start at 5:30.

Let me go — now, before it starts — and I promise to have Dr. Scott's money by midnight.

Business

The Charlotte Observer

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Raycom executive vice president Ken Haines (left) shows a group of visiting Siberian business people around the company's Charlotte facilities. Among the group studying at the McColl School of Business at Queens are (from left) Maria Mejevitch, Kadirbay Ryatov, Nelly Zolkina, Galina Chalicova and Victor Alferov. Robert Kelley (center of group) is director of the Queens program.

DIEDRA LAIRD/Staff