

Det. Free Press  
12-4-92

# TV eyes big picture on Michigan-Duke

It might not change the face of televised college basketball.

But Raycom's national syndication Saturday of Michigan-Duke — an encore to last season's NCAA final — has etched a smile on the face of Channel 20 station manager Mike Berman.

"I took a gamble and won," said Berman, whose station is one of 130 nationally — covering about 90 percent of the country — that will carry the 9 p.m. telecast.



**STEVE CROWE**

TV/radio

Raycom, an independent producer/syndicator based in Charlotte, N.C., controls the game's rights through its \$14-million-per-season Atlantic Coast Conference deal, which gives Raycom all games hosted by ACC schools.

Bent on attempting "Wheel of For-

tune"-like saturation, Raycom opted to spin rather than walk with the \$200,000 that CBS offered the network for No. 1 Michigan vs. No. 4 Duke.

CBS had hoped to use it as the nightcap to a doubleheader that would have begun with No. 3 Kansas vs. No. 2 Indiana.

That's where Berman displayed keen court sense, balking at an eight-game Raycom package involving U-M and Michigan State until it was cherry-topped with Duke-Michigan.

It's being billed as the biggest syndicated TV game since Lew Alcindor (UCLA) and Elvin Hayes (Houston) were centers of mass attention from the Astrodome in January 1968.

In that game — syndicated by TVS, but unavailable in significant areas — Houston snapped UCLA's 47-game winning streak, 71-69.

Another centerpiece — Ralph Sampson's Virginia 68, Patrick Ewing's Georgetown 63 — eluded the big-time networks in December 1982. Ted Turner carried it on his new superstation, Atlanta's WTBS — which then reached only about 30 percent of American homes — and syndicated it on 112 over-air stations.

The cable-syndication combination covered 92 percent of U.S. homes.

Detroit Channels 2, 4, 7 and 50 would have welcomed Duke-Michigan with open arms and wallets, but 20 landed it with leverage. Channel 20 is the only one without network affiliation, and the one able to clear so many nights for so much basketball.

And it seems a fair trade-off for what Channel 20 is losing from its 10-game Raycom package of last season — both Michigan-Michigan State games. With MSU seemingly poised for a season-long seat in the Top 25 and U-M's Fab Five now super sophs, the Big Ten sold the games to CBS.

Len DeLuca, CBS vice president of program planning, said the edge Raycom gained by keeping Michigan-Duke "is obvious. They get to keep the ad revenue and try to syndicate the game among a lot of stations in prime time.

"But it's still a December game, and it's not going to get the ratings it would later. See me on Feb. 14, when we have Michigan-Indiana."

At a time when bigger networks are taking big baths on sports, some suggest that Raycom's bottom line for Michigan-Duke might prompt a new wave of nationally syndicated sports.

"There will be a lot of eyes on this — not just from the viewers, but also from the broadcast networks," said

→ Ken Haines, Raycom executive vice president. "There's a risk involved any time you attempt something of this magnitude. . . . But this, in all likelihood, will be the highest-rated basketball game of the regular season. So we'll take our chances."