

## Cable TV reviews



A blustery Brian Dennehy tries his best to breathe life into ESPN movie.

### 'A Season on the Brink'

By Ray Richmond

Why does ESPN decide to make a movie? Isn't that sort of like CNN producing a sitcom? Here is one clue as to motivation: All of this time, ESPN had to stand by and jealously watch as taboos fell and network after networks began to incorporate raw language into their mix. All work began to incorporate raw language into their mix. All occasional expletive accidentally caught on microphone during the heat of athletic battle. But with "A Season on the Brink," the Disney-owned sporting web gets to join the ranks of profanity's big boys.

And golly, does it get there in a hurry.

During one particularly color-

ful 72-second stretch of this overheated, dated homage to the notorious former Indiana University men's basketball coach (and current Texas Tech head man) Bobby Knight, the blustery Brian Dennehy — in the guise of Knight — can be heard spewing the f-word no less than 11 times. It has to be one very purging experience for a network that has always had to rely on luck and pluck to capture such vibrant verbiage.

Here, finally, ESPN is able to literally write it into the script itself.

It's almost redundant to say that "Season" is a strange choice for ESPN's first original, home-

See "SEASON" on page 38

grown motion picture. Why base it on a book (by John Feinstein) that's more than a decade old, charting a season (1985-86) that happened 16 years ago? Knight is, at best, a fallen icon and at worst an abusive, psychologically unstable maniac. His ultimate undoing was the stuff of Greek tragedy.

But that wouldn't happen for another 13 years or so after writer Feinstein tailed the coach for that full NCAA season in the mid-1980s.

The Bobby Knight depicted in "Season" is driven by plenty of demons, to be sure. But he's basically just an obsessed, tight-lipped bully who likes to toss chairs across the basketball court when he doesn't get a call. There is nothing particularly ingenious or complex about this version of Knight as played by Dennehy, and it makes for a decidedly tedious and uncomfortable two hours.

Dennehy does all he can trying to breathe life into the adaptation of Feinstein's book by David W. Rintels (who also co-

produces). But good as he is, the barrel-chested actor is unable to seize and embody the true Knight character. He's got the ear-splitting vocals down pat but has trouble communicating the man's trouble brilliance of the man. Watching this, you wonder why anyone would view Knight as anything greater than a mental patient. He seems to operate on projecting pure fear rather than teaching the basics of putting the

ball through the hoop. Nobody else in the movie is permitted to exhibit much personality aside from an occasional frown of frustration or expression of intimidation. In "Brink," Knight isn't merely larger than life; he is life itself. But even if you appreciate the man's knowledge of basketball X's and O's, it's mighty tough to work up much passion for him as a human being. The guy is such an unremitting jerk that rooting for him proves impossible.

Director Robert Mandel imbues the film with a bouncy energy, making good use of "wittinesses" — real folks who praise Knight as the astute basketball mind he knows himself to be. But the b-ball footage captured by director of photography Claudio Chea and his team looks disconcertingly small, as if shot in a high school gymnasium. This is particularly odd for a film produced in tandem with a sports network.

Then again, "Season" isn't really about the game at all but a rage-a-holic coach whose boorish behavior did much to taint it.

#### A SEASON ON THE BRINK

ESPN  
 ESPN Original Entertainment and Once Upon a Time Films  
 Executive producers ..... Mark Shapiro, Stanley M. Brooks  
 Supervising producer ..... Scott Anderson, Chet Fenster, Joshua Butler  
 Co-executive producers ..... Lewin Webb, David W. Rintels  
 Producers ..... Damian Ganczewski, Robert Mandel  
 In charge of production ..... David W. Rintels, Robert Mauk, David W. Rintels, John Feinste

#### A SEASON ON THE BRINK

ESPN  
 ESPN Original Entertainment and Once Upon a Time Films  
 Executive producers ..... Mark Shapiro, Stanley M. Brooks  
 Producers ..... Scott Anderson, Chet Fenster, Joshua Butler  
 Executive in charge of production ..... Lewin Webb, David W. Rintels  
 Director ..... Damian Ganczewski  
 Writer ..... Robert Mandel  
 Based on the book by ..... David W. Rintels  
 Director of photography ..... John Feinstein  
 Production designer ..... Claudio Chea  
 Costume designer ..... Gord Wilding  
 Editors ..... Lynda Kemp  
 Music ..... Steve Porcaro, Randy Vickrey  
 Casting ..... Susie Glicksman, Kim Miscia, Beth Bowling, Marjorie Lecher

Cast: Brian Dennehy, Duane Murray, Benz Antoine, Gary Hudson, Dan Becker, James Lafferty, Yorick Parke, Michael James Johnson, Thomas Williams, Mike Weekes, AT Performance, Thomas Hauff

Airdate: Sunday, March 10, 8-10 p.m.



"...and they lived ugly ever after."