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SGI Helps NBA Access Games Faster

Video-server system allows league to store and deliver footage more easily

By Ken Kerschbaumer -- Broadcasting & Cable, 5/30/2005

The National Basketball Association's technology arm plans to install a massive video-server storage system from SGI that promises to ease the way regional and national sports networks assemble highlight reels and player profiles.

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With thousands of men's and women's games each year, the league aims to make it easier to access video from current and past seasons.

NBA Entertainment—the league's programming and technology unit—is setting up the server system at its Secaucus, N.J., headquarters. The division has a Grass Valley Profile video server that can store up to 40 games a night. Archivists using Pinnacle editing systems will attach metadata notes to each play of every game stored. That will let networks easily retrieve specific plays.

The new SGI storage area network (SAN) can hold 40 terabytes (TB), or about 1,800 hours of standard-definition content, and will ease long-term storage at the facility, making access to game content faster than relying on pulling content off tapes.

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All of this will be available to broadcast and cable partners. "We'll extend access to our partners like ESPN, TNT and ABC so that they can browse clips in low resolution and then put together a clip reel so our footage editors can output the clips to tape or, in the case of Turner, deliver over the Internet," says Steve Hellmuth, NBA Entertainment senior VP, operations and technology.

Cable operators that want to offer NBA games in the future could also benefit. "They wouldn't need to store a digital copy at the cable plant," he says. "They could pass a message from the viewer saying they wanted to watch one of Michael Jordan's games, and then we could stream it out to the cable operator, who sends it to the viewer."

Installation of the 40-TB system is expected to be completed by the time the NBA kicks off its 2005-06 season in November. Because the games cannot be stored long term on servers, the NBA is expected to add a data-tape-based system for long-term storage using a new generation of linear tape open (LTO) tapes. The move will give the facility the ability to reduce storage costs by more than half.

"We'll be converting all of the games from past seasons stored on analog tape," says Keith Horstman, NBA Entertainment director of IT. That project is expected to take seven to eight years.

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