Comment

ON ENTERTAINMENT

A Look at Hot Sports Shots Off the Court

BY HOWARD ROSENBERG

Tou'd assume that a sports program titled "Power Plays" would be about Tonya Harding. After all, what other power monger would the United States care about?

Instead, it's the behind-the-scenes choreography of the sports business that is examined in this fascinating, three-part documentary on PBS. "Power Plays" airs from 9 to 11 tonight, Tuesday and Wednesday on KCET-TV Channel 28 and KPBS-TV Channel 15, and from 8 to 10 p.m. on KVCR-TV Channel 24.

Offering a sideways scan of American culture, producer Nicholas Kent ("Naked Hollywood: Money, Power and the Movies") and directors Nick Read and Anand Tucker repeatedly emphasize that the United States is not only obsessed with sports but also (as Harding and Nancy Kerrigan can now testify) with sports celebrities. And that laser-like obsession nourishes the sprawling sports industries for which even millionaire athletes ultimately toil.

"Power Plays" ranges from tonight's Michael Jordan entree to Wednesday's look at the abutting Tom Landry and Jimmy Johnson eras of the Super Bowl champion Dallas Cowboys, along with the slick marketing schemes of pro basketball and hockey.

Each segment contrasts power wielders and power seekers. More arresting tonight than the Jordan piece is a comparison of the glamourdomed universe of heavyweight champ Evander Holyfield, seen fighting Larry Holmes for \$18.5 million in Las Vegas, with the low-budget combat of dreadlocked Shannon Briggs, a

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green but promising heavyweight who gets \$500 for dropping a stiff a few seconds into the first round. Backing Holyfield is the Duva family, a premiere management team. Managing Briggs is the lesser-regarded Michael Marley.

In a system that bloodies everyone, the strategy for young fighters is to build wins even if it means recruiting barely breathing setups as opponents. "We do plunder a few graveyards here or there," Marley admits.

On Tuesday, "Power Plays" juxtaposes controversial Marge Schott and her Cincinnati Reds with minor leaguers in Salt Lake City and makes Chicago's old Comiskey Park a nostalgic metaphor for baseball's simpler

There's also an even livelier section on sports agents, focusing largely on David Levine, a charming, 30ish gogetter whose prospects for getting his collegiate football client a multimillion-dollar deal with the pros light him up like a kid at a video arcade.

It gets grimier, though—witness an incident with notorious agent Norby Walters involving alleged mob ties and police misconduct.

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After all, it's Harding and everyone who has known her in her lifetime (Ralph Edwards, eat your heart out) who now leads U.S. newscasts. After spinning anecdotes and tall tales, they await the inevitable question, the one being asked infinitum.

Should Tonya Harding be able to

compete in the Winter Games? Everyone must have an opinion. It's positively un-American not to have an opinion. Everything else in the world is on hold until we get this thing settled.

Does this story have steroid legs or what? Like a ticker tape that won't stop, the daily, hourly updates just keep coming: She'll be indicted this morning. This afternoon. Tomorrow. Sometime this week. This month. This millennium. Reportedly. Maybe. Sources say. Sources hint. Alleged sources allegedly hint. The people Please see ROSENBERG, B11

specials work?

A: I don't think you ever really know.



CON KEYES / Los Angeles Times

Kyra Sedgwick and Lionel Mark Smith in David Mamet's "Oleanna" at the Tiffany: A shrill political tract.

THEATER REVIEW

Casting's Just One Bug in 'Oleanna'

Mamet Insufficiently Draws the Characters in His Political Tract

By DON SHIRLEY TIMES STAFF WRITER

he controversial casting of David Mamet's "Oleanna" for its Los Angeles premiere has made a bad play worse.

Mamet insisted on casting a longtime colleague, Lionel Mark Smith, as the professor who's accused of sexual harassment by one of his students. Producers at the Mark Taper Forum, where the play had been scheduled to open last month, objected and canceled their production. Smith, who is black, charged the Taper with racism—a charge the Taper emphatically denied.

Now the play is at the 99-seat Tiffany Theatre, a better home for this smallscaled clash between two characters than the more expansive Taper would have been. It's much easier for the audience to feel trapped, along with the man in the play, at the Tiffany than it would have been at the Taper.

Yet "Oleanna" still doesn't work. And while the casting of Smith and Kyra Sedgwick is part of the problem, the larger problem is the play itself. It has only one thing going for it: timeliness. Otherwise, it's a shrill political tract.

"Oleanna" is as rigged as a play can get. Its hero-victim is a professor, preoccupied with his own searches for tenure and a new house, who nonetheless takes a few moments in his office to bring a personal touch to his instruction of Carol—a young, troubled student of questionable intelligence.

In Act One, we observe the two of them misunderstanding each other.

Then, after intermission we learn that Carol has accused her Mr. Chips of improprieties. By play's end, she has metamorphosed into what Rush Limbaugh would call a femi-Nazi.

She outlandishly charges the professor, John, with attempted rape, and submits a list of books that he must ban in his classes if he wants any relief. Finally, her criticism of one of his casual comments drives him over the edge.

Why would John ever consent to a second private interview with this creature, let alone a third? Apparently he's overly confident of his own persuasive powers. Ah yes, a tragic flaw—and who says they don't write classics any more?

If the play were presented as a cartoon, Mamet's caricatured Carol Please see 'OLEANNA,' B11

Whoopito Take Role of Academy AwardsHost

Oscars: With a new master of ceremonies in place, the guessing game now focuses on Wednesday morning's announcement of nominations.

By DAVID J. FOX TIMES STAFF WRITER

Thoopi Goldberg was named Sunday to host this year's Academy Awards show, ending a difficult search to replace its previous popular master of ceremonies, Billy Crystal.

Once Crystal declined to front this year's event for a fifth straight year, one of the biggest guessing games in Hollywood was who producer Gil Cates would call upon. Cates was mum and would not confirm reports that such entertainers as Bette Midler, Johnny Carson, Tom Hanks and Steve Martin had also declined.

One veteran Oscar insider connected with a major studio said that the five nominees for best picture (which will be announced Wednesday morning) has been easier to predict than guessing who Cates would ultimately persuade to do the March 21 show.

Through her publicist, Goldberg said Sunday she is "thrilled about my date with Oscar. To go from watching to winning to hosting in one lifetime is major." The 44-year-old performer, currently shooting "Boys on the Side" in Pittsburgh, won the best supporting actress Oscar for her role in the 1990 romantic comedy, "Ghost."

The selection of Goldberg is a departure for the Oscar show, where white males have predominated as masters of ceremonies. Not only will Goldberg be the first woman solo host, she also will be the show's first solo African American host.

"I think it's a terrific choice and she'll do a wonderful job," Crystal said Sunday. "And I'm happy for her, the Academy and the fans of the show." Cates, who is in his fifth year producing the Oscar extravaganza, said Goldberg has "all the qualities of a great Oscar host," noting she is a highly recognizable star who has millions of fans. In an earlier interview, Cates told

Please see GOLDBERG, B11

Q&A WITH DICK CLARK

'Popular Music Is the Soundtrack of Our . . . Lives'

By MICHAEL ARKUSH TIMES STAFF WRITER

The hair contains strands of gray. The face reveals the occasional wrinkle. Believe it or not, America's oldest teen-ager is almost a senior citizen.

Dick Clark is 64 years old. How can that be? He was supposed to remain eternally young, frozen in our stubborn illusions of his immortality.

But aging or not, he hasn't reduced his workload. This month alone, Clark is producing five prime-time television specials, including last Friday's "Soap Opera Digest Awards' and tonight's "American Music Awards' on ABC. The others range from a Valentine's Day-related show about marriage proposals (Sunday) to a look at teen idols (which he'll host on Feb. 15, using footage from his old "American Bandstand" series) to a country music program (Feb. 19).

Clark is best known, of course, for his three decades as host of "American Bandstand," which, before MTV, offered the younger generation its first peek at the hottest new music acts. He still hosts two nationally syndicated weekly radio shows-"Rock, Roll & Remember" and "Countdown America"-but spends most of his time running dick clark productions in Burbank, which, in 1987, went public. The company specializes in producing the kind of light entertainment specials that are on view this month.

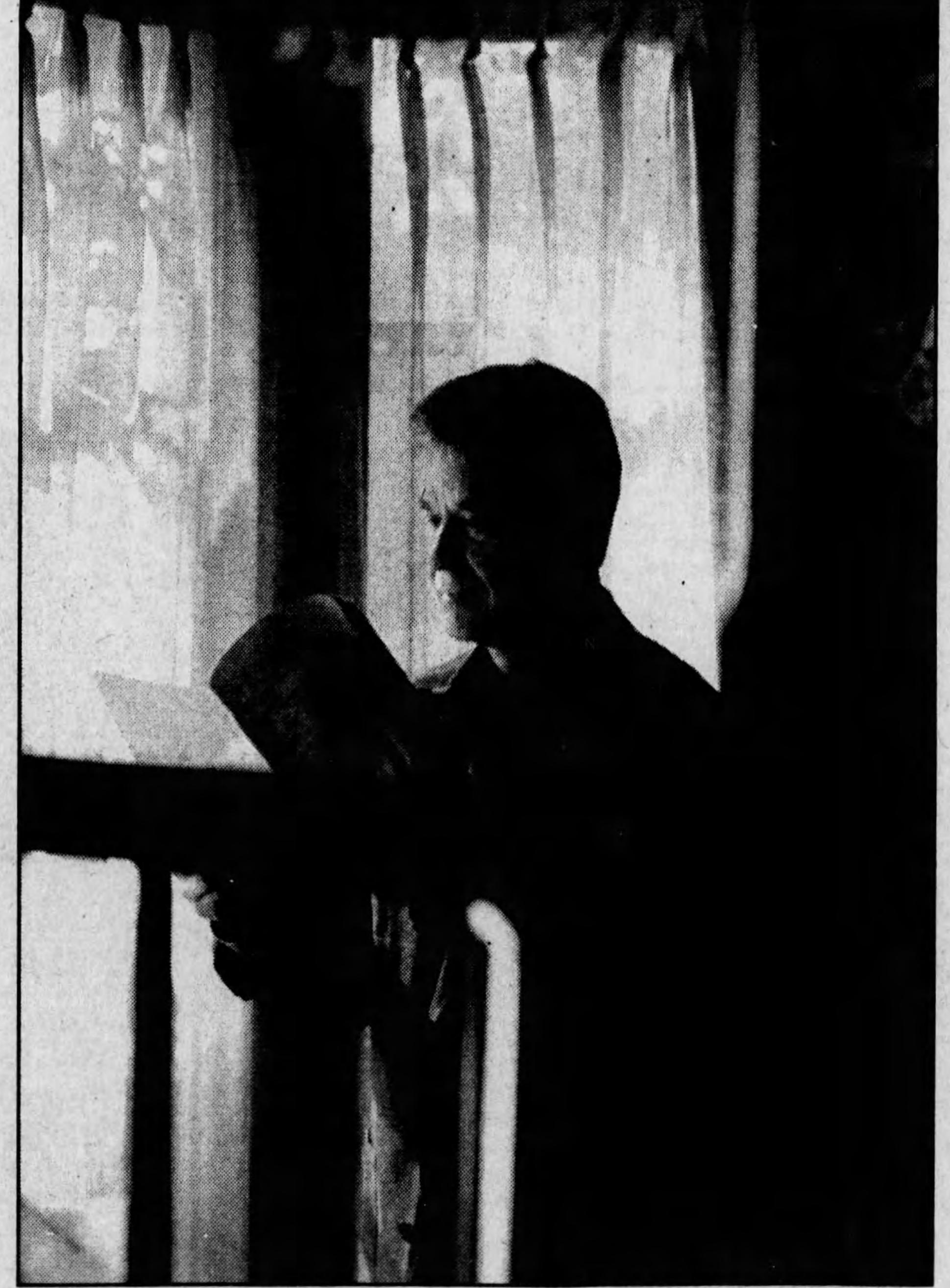
uestion: Why do people love awards Shows so much?

nswer: There is so little live television. People look to see if there will be an accident, a surprise, something unexpected. Anything that's live these days draws a big audience because we're satiated on prepared material. Women tune in to see the clothing, the hair styles. Obviously, we tune in to see the punch line-who won? An awful lot of people who watch say, "I would like to be there in that audience."

Q: After 20 years, is it tough to keep "The American Music Awards" fresh?

A: No, the material changes. I look, year to year, and say, "Oh, God, last year, we were desperate to have this person or these people involved and, this year, we don't care. They're not even nominated."

Q: What's the key to making your sort of



GARY FRIEDMAN / Los Angeles Times

Dick Clark is producing five prime-time TV specials this month from his Burbank office.

You try to find something that's easy to a lot of hot sports on [the Winter Olympics] promote so that the network can draw that night. some kind of audience.

"Will You Marry Me" is an awfully easy show to talk about; it's a big hit in Europe. Surprising one another with proposals should draw women, especially if there are

Q: Any plans to use more "American Bandstand" footage, as you do in the "Teen Idol" show?

A: Eventually, all of that stuff will go into a museum. But it's very expensive to

That's why it's not out there all the time. That's why it's not in videos. You've got guilds and unions. You've got copyright owners. It's endless.

Q: What do you think of music these days?

A: Nothing about the talent has changed. The business has changed. It's now owned by five or six multinational corporations, run by people who deal very much with the bottom line.

Breaks for new people are negligible. There's so much money invested in the well-known names, perpetuating their careers and recouping the investment, that you and I, if we just started now, would have a steep uphill battle.

In the old days, you'd find a guy who managed the business out of his garage, and you'd be the star, the mainstay.

Q: How do you feel about MTV?

A: It's a great promotion tool. It has been since the day it started. The unfortunate part that bothers me as an adult is that it strips you of your imagination to listen to a record and conjure up your own pictures in your mind. That's sad.

You and I grew up that way. You listened to the radio, and then you wrote a screenplay [with your imagination]. Now you see the darn thing as the director of that video saw it: "That's where the car crashes. That's where the guy jumps through the

window." I guess it has changed the appreciation of music for young people because their minds don't play the song.

Think of all the songs you have listened to all your life. Popular music is the soundtrack of our individual lives. Anything that ever happened to you, good or bad, was scored with the music you listened to. I'm not sure that's happening to today's generation.

Q: Do you get tired of being called America's oldest teen-ager?

A: It's tough because I have to look in the mirror every day. To have people continually remind you or crawl up within five inches of your face and say I look pretty good for a guy my age is meant to be a compliment, but it adds that heavy-duty imposition on you-"There's another wrinkle. There's another gray hair." But I use it. The first man to ever call me that was almost 30 years ago. What it does, it breaks

Please see CLARK, B11