

# Production Notes

Journals and notes from the production staff of E:60.



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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2010

## Roundtable: Not A Con



Production assistant Max Brodsky senses something amiss. The E:60 roundtable segment on disgraced former basketball star Rumeal Robinson is into its 12th minute, and has yet to yield what Brodsky needs.

As the cameras roll, Brodsky signals Executive Producer Andy Tennant, at the table with six others, and mouths a question: "If he's not a con man what is he - without giving away the details."

Tennant nods, turns back to the table, and breaks in. He references a comment by reporter Lisa Salters, who earlier had called Robinson a

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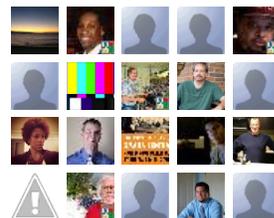
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“con man”.  
 “Go back to what Lisa said,” Tennant says. “If he’s not a con man, what is he?”  
 Reporter Jeffri Chadiha re-focuses. He ponders Robinson, convicted in September of eleven federal counts from a sham business deal, and of Robinson’s adoptive mother, who lost her Cambridge, Ma., home in her effort to help him.

“What he is...he is a guy who had a lot of success as a basketball player, and got in way over his head, and once he was over his head, didn’t know how to reach out for help. He wasn’t humble enough to go to the people he loved and ask them to help him out.”

Chadiha says more, in a tidy and poignant summary. Brodsky has enough.

“Cut”.

The 10-person production crew and the roundtable participants relax. Brodsky shakes his head. He is 25, with a thick shock of brown hair, three-day stubble, and wry sense of his work.

“Sometimes they forget that it’s about the big themes - not about the details,” he says.

The shoot is into its second hour, at a meeting room called the “garage”, at ESPN the Magazine, East 34th Street, Manhattan. Roundtables for three of the six fall shows - 15 stories total - are being shot on a weekday evening early in October.

The roundtable is a simulation of a news meeting in which producers and reporters discuss the news value, characters and themes of stories. When E:60 was conceived by ESPN Content Development early in 2007, the roundtable was not unanimously embraced - some feared it would appear “phony”. But advocates believed if it was unscripted, and captured the spirit of a real news meeting, it could work.

Fast forward to October 2010. E:60 is the first show to migrate from Content Development to Production. Now in its fourth season, E:60 features the roundtable before and after most segments - as a preview and postscript.



It reaches for big themes, as Brodsky insists. It also evokes casual banter, and a thoughtful and irreverent take on sports.

At the table, which is not round, are Tennant, along with coordinating producers Robert Abbott and Michael Baltierra, and, by turns, reporters Chadiha, Salters, Jeremy Schaap, Rachel Nichols and Seth Wickersham, magazine editor Gary Belsky, and columnist/commentator Bill Simmons. All are made up and miked.

Only Tennant, Abbott and Baltierra are familiar with all of the stories. The others know about their own, but hear about the rest with fresh ears and opinions.

Brodsky directs the crew, which includes an overhead camera, two handheld cameras, and a dolly camera that moves on a semicircle of tracks. Production manager Sue Friedman hovers at the periphery. Tennant acts as a moderator - initiating and guiding discussion. Typically, a reporter explains his or her segment, and others chime in with comments, questions and wisecracks. The conversation, at its spontaneous best, mirrors an actual newsroom.

Typical is the discussion about Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez. Nichols pitches it as a story about a second-year quarterback facing high expectations because Jets coach Rex Ryan “loves to talk and draw attention” and because Sanchez is the “first Hispanic-American playing quarterback in a market like this” and because of Sanchez’ popularity with celebrity/gossip media which taps into the cultural legacy of Broadway Joe Namath. Whew.

Schaap disagrees - he thinks Sanchez is not burdened with particularly high expectations because the Jets aren’t built around him the way other teams are built around their quarterbacks.

“He’s in a position where he doesn’t have to be a great player,” Schaap



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E:60  
 Bristol, CT, United States

“E:60” is ESPN’s first prime-time newsmagazine featuring profiles, investigations and cutting-edge stories on emerging and established sports.

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says.

Nichols demurs - she points out that after the Jets lost their opener he was pilloried. She goes on to say that he draws more attention because of his USC pedigree, which draped him in the glamour of "Hollywood". Simmons points out, as a Los Angeles resident, that Sanchez was not as big a deal as two USC stars that preceded him - Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush.

"That's like following the Beatles - nobody is going to win in that situation," Simmons says.

"I think he did quite well," Nichols says.

The discussion veers - with ribald humor - towards Sanchez' sex appeal. Abbott mentions that the Jets' off-field problems - the DWI charge against Braylon Edwards, and the harassment of reporter Ines Sainz, are making Sanchez' job more difficult.

Sanchez is up against a phenomenon, Nichols explains, in which opposing defenses get ahead of second-year quarterbacks.

"We got behind the scenes to see how he will hold himself together for this season," Nichols says.

At this point, 12 minutes into the Sanchez discussion, Brodsky has what he needs - and probably too much.

"Cut."

The participants wander off to snack on pizza and Friedman's brownies, save for Simmons, who taps furiously on his Blackberry, absorbed in a white-knuckles [Twitter drama](#).

Soon the roundtable will enter its fourth and final hour. Shoulders will sag, eyes will glaze, and voices will drone. The dolly camera will derail. Brodsky will shrug and help put it back on track. The dolly - and the show - must go on.

On the seventh floor of a deserted mid-town building, a custodian leans in the doorway to watch the making of journalism and entertainment. "Roll 'em."

(Posted by Steve Marantz, October 12, 2010)

Posted by [E:60](#) at [2:14 PM](#)

Reactions: [funny \(0\)](#) [interesting \(0\)](#) [cool \(0\)](#)



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[teamwill42](#) [October 12, 2010 at 9:53 PM](#)

We watched this segment this evening and I'm saddened that Rumeal Robinson feels no remorse for his con job. I don't know if the big picture is him getting in over his head and not having the humility to ask for help or, it's the love of a mother that raised him in the home that he so callously called "just a house"...what a loser!

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