



# TUNING IN

BY BOB RAISSMAN

## Geek chorus clamors for Jeff

★ **T**HE CHALLENGES facing Jeff Van Gundy are also accompanied by opportunities. Along the lines of Forrester Gump, Burger King's Herb the Nerd and singer Elvis Costello, the Knicks coach is suddenly in position to be a marketing trendsetter — geek chic.

Think about it. Van Gundy, the self-deprecating nebbish strolling the sidelines like a marionette in a baggy suit. Van Gundy, addressing the media, nervously rubbing his face or using his finger as a Q-Tip to dig into his ear. Van Gundy, eschewing the big fancy meal for the Big Mac.

And then there's Van Gundy's idea of a big night out. A trip to a Broadway show following the early-bird special at Howard Johnson's. Hey, he swears by Ho-Jo's apple crisp. Can't you see Van Gundy ordering his main course: "Pasta-trani on white with butter, please."

Revenge of the nerds? You bet. With any success, Van Gundy will have all those Pat Riley copycats sitting court-side at the Garden burning their Armanis and running to Filene's Basement so they can dress like Jeff. Not to mention become the hero of every slide-rule-carrying megabyte brainiac in the city.

Thoughts of how to market Van Gundy are already percolating.

"I wouldn't use the term 'nerdy' or 'geeky' for Jeff. I prefer to call him low-key or blue-collar," said Steve Rosner, VP at Integrated Sports International. "But for someone to be marketable, he has to want to be marketable. The first question I would ask him is 'Do you want to do this?'"

**Brandon Steiner**, of Steiner Sports Marketing, said he has already talked to one clothing company about Van Gundy, although he doesn't represent him.

"Jeff is going to need some work, but he can do some things because he's in a high-profile position," Steiner said. "He's already a sound-bite master, but nothing funny or really personable comes out of his mouth."

"I would pitch him to companies known for caring about their employees because he's

the kind of guy who looks out and cares about the guys who play for him."

The feeling is Van Gundy may be reluctant to do much off-the-court work because he'll need every second to become a successful coach.

"But if he wanted to get into it, I would go to his house and go into his closet and see what he wears," Steiner said. "Then I would go into his kitchen to see what he eats and drinks. Jeff Van Gundy? I bet he drinks a lot of cheap orange juice."

### BOSS STATIC

George Steinbrenner (see End Zone) is at it again, meddling in Yankee TV affairs. The Boss recently said Suzyn Waldman is a candidate for a permanent spot in MSG's Yanks booth next season. Steinbrenner has veto rights over any Yankee voice. "We can just say, no, no, no, until they (MSG) understand," Steinbrenner said. Yet MSG has done a good job of not caving into His BossNess' demands. He long wanted Tony Kubek out, but couldn't pull that off. Steinbrenner's already carped about Jim Kaat, but that hasn't stopped Kitty from speaking his mind. If



### GEEK CHIC

**EXCUSE US**, but if Jeff Van Gundy thinks it would be neat to win a championship with the Knicks, he might also think it would be really cool to become poster boy for "Geek Nation." Here are a few who have cashed in big time by becoming household nebbishes:

Waldman, or any other broadcaster, is in line for a MSG Yankee gig, the network should have the call, not Steinbrenner, who is obviously looking for someone in the booth to spin things his way. ... When Jack Buck was dumped from CBS' baseball coverage, reports of bad blood between the veteran voice and then-partner Tim McCarver

surfaced. On Saturday, Joe Buck — Buck's son — will team with T-Mac to launch Fox's coverage of Major League Baseball. Is young Buck feeling any residue of bad vibes? "No," Buck said. "My dad told me a long time ago that nobody had anything to do with him being let go at CBS other than the people who made the decision — not

Tim McCarver." Young J.B. said he has already discussed the situation with McCarver. "I told Tim I couldn't have hand-picked a better person to work with," Buck said. ... With Rangers out of playoffs and hockey taking a backseat around here, it was good seeing Ch. 9's Russ Salzburg devoting time for nice one-on-one spot with Mario Lemieux on Monday. ... Showtime and its PPV arm — SET — have exclusively worked with promoter Don King. Looks like that will be changing. SET will distribute the Bob Arum-promoted Aug. 23 Vinnie Pazienza Dana Rosenblatt bout. "They're being sensible," Arum said. "It doesn't pay to lock yourself into one promoter." ... It's still early in the season, but Chris (Mad Dog) Russo is already into his narrow-casting trip by beating up on reports on his beloved Giants. The Dog knows when he talks Giants, he's virtually broadcasting to two people — himself and the otherwise astute Dennis from Yonkers.

## Eagle's plucked from network debut

**Ian (The Bird) Eagle** came within a feather of making his network TV debut on NBC last week.

On Sunday, SportsChannel's Nets voice was in the NBA Entertainment studio in Secaucus preparing to work the NBA draft lottery for NBA Radio. With about 8:50 left in the first half of Magic-Bulls, NBA Entertainment exec Craig Winnick

told Eagle that Bob Costas, scheduled to host the lottery for NBC, was stuck in the Lincoln Tunnel. He advised the Bird to get on some makeup.

"It began to sink in that this was going to happen," Eagle said.

But with 1:50 left in the half, Costas arrived.

"I was a little disappointed," Eagle said. "I went back

to the makeup room and saw Bob sitting there. I just said, 'Bob, I came within an eyelash here.'" Costas told Eagle he had food poisoning. In fact, a doctor had to feed Costas fluids intravenously before NBC's pregame show.

"The craziest part about all this is the night before I had a dream that I would do that lottery on TV," Eagle said. "I'm not joking."

### DUDE OF THE WEEK

**Len Berman**

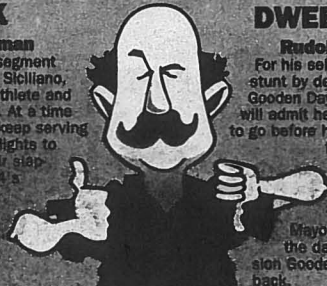
For his moving segment Thursday on John Siciliano, a local disabled athlete and a true inspiration. At a time when Tapeheads keep serving meaningless highlights to go along with their slap-stuck shtick, Ch. 4's sports anchor gave us a real reason to cheer.



### DWEEB OF THE WEEK

**Rudolph Giuliani**

For his self-serving publicity stunt by declaring Dwight Gooden Day. Even Gooden will admit he has a long way to go before his comeback from drug abuse is complete. By gloating the spotlight with Gooden, the Mayor gave everyone the dangerous impression Gooden is all the way back.



### Q&A

**Q:** Will WABC Radio make George Steinbrenner another offer to retain Yankee radio rights?

**A:** Yes, WABC suits are in the process of preparing a new offer after Steinbrenner turned down a previous 10-year deal worth \$30 million.