

New ESPN reality game show has Michigan roots

Eight strangers in two teams. Ten wacky sports tasks. And a 30-day cross-country race.

If you're thinking TV reality game show, you're right. But don't assume the contestants all are jocks or diehard sports fans, says former Birmingham resident Neil Mandt, creator and co-producer of *Beg, Borrow & Deal*, a new hour-long reality game show that premiered Tuesday on ESPN.

"They all did it for the adventure. Only one is a big sports fan," Mandt described the game's eight players. "We did a variety of auditions in LA and Chicago and Philly, an open casting call. You have to be friendly, out-going and a genuinely warm person."

"You need to rely on strangers... you'll never make it in this game if you rely on friends and family."

Mandt knows a bit about adventure and the kindness of strangers.

The film director (*Hijacking Hollywood*) and television producer has backpacked extensively in Africa and Europe and once while in Spain, was a passenger on a train that "broke down in the middle of nowhere."

"There was a local guy who gave me and a few others a ride where we needed to go—six hours away," Mandt said. "We had no money to give him."

MANDT'S ADVENTURE

Beg, Borrow & Deal is a bit like Mandt's adventure. The players—four on each team—started the game in New York City last April 29.

With nothing more than the clothing on their backs, they had to complete 10 of 40 required sports tasks and make their way to Alcatraz Island off the California coast within 30 days.

Michael Mandt (left) and Neil Mandt (right) pose with Rich Eisen, the host of their ESPN show, *Beg, Borrow & Deal*. The Mandt brothers grew up in Birmingham.



The game rules prohibited players from handling money or credit cards, but allowed them to ask strangers, family and friends for temporary help. They also had to convince major sports teams, venues and media to help them complete their sports tasks.

"The game is hard because it's so deceptive," said Cobi team member Josh Gates, during the first show. "Sure, it's hard to get these tasks accomplished. It's really difficult to find sports celebrities who are willing to do these crazy things with us. But it's just as hard to get a sandwich."

During the first episode, team members convinced strangers to lend cell phones, give them subway tokens, car rides, a hotel room and pay for food. Gate's team also talked their way into Giants Stadium to catch 35-yard passes from player Jesse Palmer and convinced an Olympic medalist to pose for photos—two of the required sports challenges.

A camera crew captured every move. Although the cameras might have influenced a few passersby to help team members—especially if they wanted a few seconds of fame on a television game show—they were "more of a negative than a positive," Mandt noted.

"Consider this, it's post 9-11 (tragedy) and you're a security guard and someone tries to talk their way in. And you're being videotaped. You're not going to let them in."

During the premiere episode, a guard ejected one team from a major sports arena and several hotel managers turned the penniless players away.

STAY TUNED

By the end of the first episode— which covered two game days—one



Camera crews catch one of two teams on the new ESPN reality game show, *Beg, Borrow and Deal*. In deep thought as they figure out their next move.

team had finished two sports tasks and the other was still trying.

Mandt suspects *Beg, Borrow & Deal* will appeal to both sports fans—who will watch for the athletic challenges—and non-fans who are interested in the players, their personalities and ability to work as a team.

"There is no question the show not only appeals to the sports fan, but more important than ever, he can say to his girlfriend or wife, hey let's watch this together," Mandt said.

Both Mandt and his brother enjoy watching sports and have worked for ESPN.

Michael Mandt was a production assistant on ESPN's SportsCenter before becoming a free-lance sports television producer for NBC Sports, ABC Sports, TNT, USA network, NBA Entertainment and Major League

Baseball. He has been a part of three Olympics and has earned two Emmy Awards and a Cable Ace Award for his work.

Neil Mandt moved to Los Angeles after a stint as an entertainment reporter for WDIV in Detroit. He worked as a free-lance producer and reporter for a variety of projects, including CBS News investigative reports, the O.J. Simpson trial and the British show, *The Big Breakfast*. He left television to write and produce *Hollywood Hijacking*, a feature film, in 1995 and produced and directed a 14-episode DVD series, *Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling* in 2000. He pitched the idea for *Beg, Borrow & Deal* to ESPN in the spring of 2001.

"I had this idea for a show. I set up a meeting (with ESPN) and they jumped on board. This was going to be a big

BEG, BORROW & DEAL

When: 8 p.m. Tuesdays on ESPN

The Teams: Two teams. Each team consists of two men and two women in their 20s. Five players live in California.

Others live in South Carolina, Connecticut and Michigan.

Local Player: Kelli Zink grew up in Plymouth and holds a degree in broadcast journalism from Michigan State University. She lives in East Lansing.

The Game: Teams were dropped off in Times Square in New York City without any money, credit cards or other resources just their driver's licenses and the clothes on their backs. They must complete 10 sports challenges and get to Alcatraz Island in 30 days.

The Prize: Two tickets, all expenses paid, to four championship events.

move for them, an expensive move and a creative move that they hadn't done before," Mandt said. He suggested bringing his brother on board and "they loved the idea."

Mandt produces the show from Los Angeles. His brother has accompanied a crew on the road and is in post production.

"We're still editing. There's six months of 350 hours of tape. We're cutting it down to eight episodes."

They're also casting for new players for the next game, tentatively set for summer 2003.

"It's definitely going to be more difficult. We'll have even more restrictions on the assistance they can get. It's going to be hard."

Applications are available on ESPN.com

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