

TIME OUT

ESPN has yachting's wind at its back

By Steve Paschal

Last month when the Stars & Stripes defeated rival Kanza in a sudden-death sail-off, executives at ESPN must have breathed a collective sigh of relief.

A Kanza victory would have meant that both boats in the finals would have been owned by a single syndicate, turning what should be an exciting, drama-filled, sea battle into an academic drill. The sports network could have found its ratings stalled like a sailboat on a windless day, but Stars & Stripes' victory ensured a ratings swell, with colorful veteran skipper Dennis Conner facing Bill Koch and the America's Cup Foundation for the right to meet the successful challenger yacht in the America's Cup finals.

Riding the wave of interest created by Conner's successful 1987 bid, ESPN made an unprecedented commitment to this year's coverage. Host Jim Kelley and crew Gary Johnson, Peter Isler and Sharlene Hawkey will call the best-of-seven America's Cup finals races, except for the first, which airs Saturday, May 9, on big-sister broadcaster ABC.

Fans can warm up for the finals on Friday, May 8, when AXF presents *America's Cup 1987: The Walter Cronkite Report*. The special gives neophyte fans an overview of the Cup's history, from its origins in 1851 through 1987, when Conner took back the trophy lost to the Australians in 1983.



Jackee Joins *Designing Women* as Anthony's (Meshach Taylor) fiancée, Monday on CBS.

FRIDAY



Sylvester Stallone plays a 1930s gangster trying to go straight in *Oscar*, premiering on The Movie Channel Friday. Tim Curry, Don Ameche and Linda Gray also star.

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