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LAIKA/house Delivers Animated Hope for ESPN

New ESPN national spot celebrates fans' unwavering belief in teams

Portland, Ore., January 2006 -- **LAIKA/house** and award-winning director **Mark Gustafson** recently wrapped up creation of **ESPN's** latest animated spot "Believe," which celebrates sports fans' eternal optimism for their teams. The 30-second spot airs nationally through Feb. 26, 2006 on ESPN TV.

Working closely with **Wieden + Kennedy NY**, the LAIKA/house team used stop-motion and CG techniques to create an endearing story centered on a family of dedicated Buffalo Bills fans named "The Mitchells."

"I think it's safe to say that we and the client and even my relatives were universally thrilled with how this spot turned out. The process of stop motion animation is one that requires a leap of faith on everyone's part, and LAIKA's work was stellar," said Wieden + Kennedy's Producer, Jesse Wann.

"We took a fantasy world and applied it to an established working-class neighborhood in Buffalo," Gustafson said about the backdrop of the ESPN commercial.

The spot starts in a drab family living room. Everyone from the Bills-sweat-suit-clad grandma to the cowering, jersey-sporting son seem to be facing another bleak and disappointing game day loss ... until a fumble recovery leads to a touchdown with mere minutes to spare. Suddenly, the world inside the Mitchells' household and outside on Buffalo's streets turns optimistically sunny, blooming with brilliant color. Could the Bills really win?

Sadly, no. The touchdown is disallowed and the Bills lose again. The Mitchells, their neighbors, and even the garden gnome retreat to their disappointing world as the title supers: "Without Sports, We'd Stop Believing."

"It's about hope and getting close," Gustafson explained, "but not quite getting there."

The visual embodiment of contrasting emotions was produced by the LAIKA/house crew who created two different set designs: one devoid of hope and the other full of "almost over-the-top"

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cheerfulness, said **Paul Diener**, LAIKA/house Senior Producer. “We had to transform the exterior set from dreary and disappointing to enthusiastic and optimistic through lighting, set design and computer enhancements.”

In addition to Gustafson, the LAIKA/house team was stacked with artists who expertly designed the two diametrically different sets and characters.

“We pulled in some major talent for ESPN’s spot,” said Gustafson, who directed Nissan’s “Toys,” Coke’s “Futbol,” Wrigley’s “Triathlon” and has multiple Clio and Emmy awards.

Art Director Nelson Lowry (who recently wrapped Art Director duties on *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*) and Director of Photography Eric Adkins (cinematographer for *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*) created the moody environment. Character Designer Gesine Krätzner, known for her Esure UK mouse character, developed The Mitchells.

“The ESPN job is right up my alley,” said Lowry. “The story allowed me to create dramatic changes in mood and the set pieces were large and fairly complex. I was able to design and art direct from initial concepting through shooting, which was a luxury on such a visually rich project like ‘Believe,’” Lowry said.

Both Lowry and Adkins will return to LAIKA/house for future projects; Krätzner is a full time LAIKA/house director.

ESPN’s “Believe” airs nationally through Feb. 26, 2006 on ESPN TV.

About LAIKA

LAIKA is owned by Phil Knight, co-founder and Chairman of Nike. The company was rebranded as LAIKA in the Summer of 2005, when it absorbed Vinton Studios, an animation leader and innovator for more than 30 years.

LAIKA/house produces animated commercials and shorts for global clients including Coca-Cola, Wrigleys, ESPN and Esure UK. LAIKA/entertainment has two greenlit animated feature films in various stages of production and was a production entity on *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*. *Coraline*, based on the international bestselling children’s novel by Neil Gaiman, is being adapted for the screen and directed by Henry Selick and will star Dakota Fanning. *Jack & Ben's Animated Adventure*, a heartwarming original story of brotherly love set in the animal kingdom, is being directed by Jorgen Klubien.

Throughout its history, the company has won 11 Clio Awards, three London International Advertising & Design Awards, five Mobius Advertising Awards, two Cannes Lion International Advertising Festival awards, two Academy Awards® out of five nominations, 11 Prime time Emmy Awards, and honors from the New York International Film & TV Festival, Ancey Awards, Annie Awards, and the World Animation Celebration Festival.

For more information about the company or to view recent work, please visit <http://www.laika.com>.

CREDITS

Client — ESPN

Product — Brand TV

Agency — Wieden + Kennedy, NY

Art Director — Eric Stevens

Writer — Scott Hayes

Producer — Jesse Wann

Title – “Believe” :30

Broadcast Location: National

Broadcast Dates: Dec. 23, 2005 – Feb. 26, 2006

LAIKA/house:

Director – Mark Gustafson

Executive Producer – Lourri Hammack

Senior Producer – Paul Diener

Art Director - Nelson Lowry

Character Designer - Gesine Krätzner

Director of Photography – Eric Adkins