

CALENDAR

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ON THE MEDIA

ESPN's local expansion is no slam dunk

JAMES RAINEY

Joe Davidson has been slinging copy for the Sacramento Bee for more than 20 years and, though he loves pro and college games, the sportswriter's real passion is high school sports.



Davidson has become enough of a fixture that coaches and fans in Folsom must have been surprised Friday when a television producer shouted at the veteran writer that he didn't belong in the press box for the big Grant-Folsom high school football game.

When Davidson insisted that he indeed did have a seat reserved in the press box, the TV woman snapped: "I'm ESPN!" Perhaps ESPN will one day dominate metro and community sports news the way it does the national sports universe. But it won't get there simply by showing up and announcing its arrival.

The recent dispute involved a high school football telecast. But the all-sports network may face similar challenges as it plunges into local sports coverage online. It can't just show up — as it has in Los Angeles and four other cities in the last year — and expect to earn a permanent and meaningful foothold in these local markets.

The ESPN brand carries a lot of weight and has been a powerful revenue engine for its parent, Walt Disney Co. But it remains far from certain whether the expansion into metropolitan markets around America, announced about a year ago, will snatch huge chunks of the audience from established local outlets.

According to one insider and competitors who follow ESPN.com closely, the sports giant has slowed plans to expand into other cities and become more cautious about the prospect of significant growth from local operations. When I asked an ESPN executive about those contentions

[See Media, D7]



GOING GREEN: New York Jets Coach Rex Ryan may be the breakout star of the documentary series.

THE MONITOR

'Hard Knocks' jump-starts Jets

It's understandable that HBO linked its series to a high-profile team, but it almost feels like piling on.

JON CARAMANICA

On the 2010 New York Jets, you don't want to be called "kid." "Old man" is fine, as would be any number of expletive-heavy strings of words. But "kid" — that's a death knell. That means you can be easily infantilized, a polite way of saying you have a long way to go.

That's especially true on a team facing the level of expectation of this one, widely considered to be a Super Bowl contender, after a loss the conference championship last season. The choice of the Jets as the focus of

"Hard Knocks," the annual docuseries created in partnership between HBO and NFL Films that follows an NFL team in the period leading to the regular season, only highlights the pressure the team faces. Whether the Jets shine or flounder, there will be more than the usual number of cameras there to capture it.

But for a team with a voluble head coach, Rex Ryan (who has promised a Super Bowl victory); a superstar holdout, cornerback Darrelle Revis; and a quarterback with model looks, Mark Sanchez, dominating the sports pages every day, there's little room left for suspense. Why would you need five additional narrative structure to a team so compelling in real time?

As a result, "Hard Knocks" Training Camp With the New York Jets [See Monitor, D10]

MOVIE REVIEW

He's way too cool a customer

George Clooney plays a laid-back assassin in the minimalist thriller 'The American.'

KENNETH TURAN
FILM CRITIC

"The American" is an exercise in style and withheld sentiment, a bleak and atmospheric art-house thriller

that's more of an aesthetic experience than an emotional one. If Robert Bresson, the austere French minimalist, had directed a James Bond film, it might have turned out like this.

Though Bresson favored nonprofessional actors, director Anton Corbijn has secured George Clooney to play the title role of a top-of-the-line professional assassin. But it's a very different, more removed Clooney than audiences are

used to seeing. Playing Jack, a hit man on high alert who is facing a crisis in his life, Clooney is all but unreachable behind his dark glasses. It's a much more interior performance than usual, a dark, withdrawn role that completely avoids the actor's usual high-wattage smile and suave good humor.

Echoing U.K.-based Corbijn's first feature, "Control," the director's new film is impressive. [See 'American,' D4]

ARCHITECTURE REVIEW



'INFORMATION TOWER': The structure's translucent acrylic screens will display video and artwork.

Ideas in transit

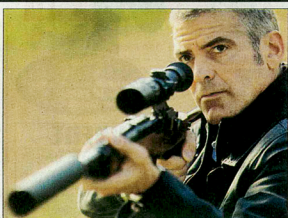
Eric Owen Moss' Samitaur Tower by the coming light-rail Expo Line is a challenge to think bolder about public spaces.

CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORNE ARCHITECTURE CRITIC >>> For the most part, the buildings designed for spots near new mass transit lines in Southern California have been pretty underwhelming architecturally. And it's easy to be cynical about many of them. After all, putting a new apartment building or mixed-use complex close to an existing transit line — or a transit line that may potentially, possibly be built in the future — often absolves developers of a range of architectural and urban-planning sins, including packing in far more density than a site can comfortably absorb.

But a few genuinely thought-provoking responses to the region's hard-won progress on the mass-transit front are beginning to emerge. Among them is the recently completed Samitaur Tower, a 72-foot-high weathered-steel structure designed by Eric Owen Moss for a site at the corner of National Boulevard and Hayden Avenue in Culver City.

The tower is a campanile — an unorthodox and modestly sized one, to be sure — for a new stage of urbanism in Southern California, which thanks to the slowly growing transit network, among other cultural shifts, is beginning to emerge as a less atomized and more public place than the old clichés would have you believe.

The tower will overlook the new light-rail Expo Line, which is under construction from downtown through Culver City and will open next year. (A [See Samitaur, D6])



TAKING AIM: George Clooney is a hit man of very few words in Anton Corbijn's film.

Photo archive disputes claim

The University of Arizona institute that houses Ansel Adams' archives addresses negatives issue. D2

Lacing up her old gunshoes

Sara Paretsky's latest tale of detective V.I. "Vic" Warshawski, "Body Work," is one of her best yet. D5

Ask Amy D5

Comics D12-13

TV grid D14

Projecting art and billboards

[Samitaur, from D1] planned second phase would extend the line to Santa Monica. A section of the rail line runs alongside National Boulevard, practically at the tower's feet, with a pair of stops within easy walking distance. The project's developers, Frederick and Laurie Samitaur-Smith, see the tower as a prototype and hope to build seven more along the Expo Line.



FIRST: The developers plan more such towers.



Source: CSR, TeleAtlas
LORRAINE WANG L.A. Times

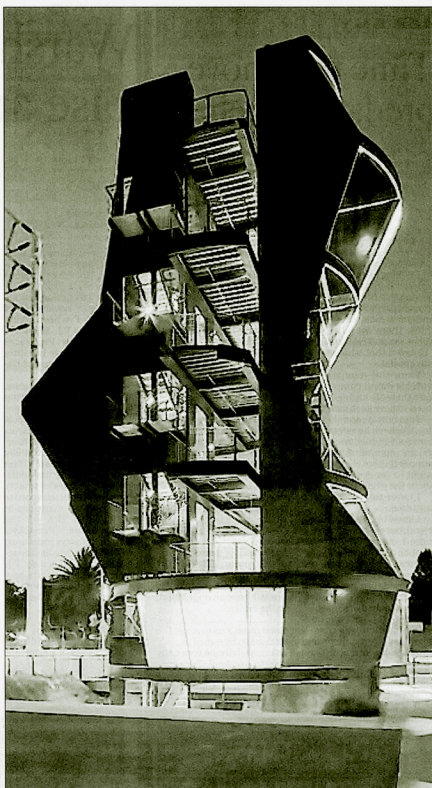
running an architectural practice in Culver City is director of the Southern California Institute of Architecture, has designed several office buildings in the Hayden Tract, turning the area into a hub for media and advertising companies. Major pieces of architecture in their own right, his buildings have also helped spur the much-analyzed recent renaissance of Culver City.

Those designs—the most impressive of which is a low-slung structure Moss calls the Steinh building—are brooding, disjointed and rather internally focused, more interested in trying out certain formal and structural experiments than in paying sustained attention to the rest of the neighborhood or the larger city. They have their roots in the 1970s and '80s, a period when L.A. architects including Moss, Thom Mayne, Michael Rotondi, Frank Gehry and others were ready to go to war with conventional design practice wherever it appeared.

The tower marks a refreshing and important departure by Moss from that work. Its goal is not to evoke a mood or draw a line in the sand but to enable an outlook—and to mark a point in the city visible from trains on the Expo Line and cars on National Boulevard, the nearby 70 Freeway and elsewhere.

In helping Moss break free of the somewhat suffocating self-consciousness that has marked his work, that difference is crucial. The arrival of a new train line in his old neighborhood has captivated the architect just enough to help him, at least in this one compelling project, from chasing his tail.

christopher.hawthorne@latimes.com



VISION: The tower is in a former industrial tract being developed by Frederick and Laurie Samitaur-Smith that has several other buildings by Eric Owen Moss.

The open-air tower, which according to the Samitaur-Smiths won't open to the public until early next year, consists of five platforms wrapped in screens made of translucent acrylic. The screens are designed to display a range of video and artwork, making the structure, which Moss has called an "information tower," an island of alternative signage in L.A.'s sea of commercial billboards.

Once it's fully in operation, it will likely play host to a mixture of parties, art exhibits and openings, as well as serving as a symbolic gateway to the Hayden Tract, a former industrial area that the Samitaur-Smiths, with help from Moss, have been patiently and inventively redeveloping for more than two decades.

Part monument and part building, the tower on its second and third levels bulges out toward National Boulevard, only to be cinched back in one level above that. The rear elevation, facing the Hayden Tract, features an open-air staircase with large, cantilevered out from the main tower on five levels. Seen from that perspective, the tower looks like a set of emergency-exit stairs no longer attached to the larger building from which it was designed to provide escape.

Formally, the project takes its cues from some of the most famous unbuilt towers in architectural history, including Vladimir Tatlin's 1920 Monument to the Third International and Louis Kahn's City Tower Project of the 1960s. Frederick Samitaur-Smith has called it "a poor man's Eiffel Tower." But ultimately, its precise visual symbolism is slippery. It looks like a work in progress, a gathering spot and something of a ruin at the same time.

Moss, who in addition to

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