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History live, in graphic detail

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This is the latest in a series about the coolest jobs in the sports media business.

Today: A live game graphics operator/coordinator.

Kenny Lofton rifled the ball inside first base and down the right-field line in the second inning of Tuesday's Dodgers-Rockies game at Dodger Stadium, and was off to the races.

But Lofton hadn't even made it around second base before Mitch Rinehart, off in a FSN Prime Ticket production truck moored in the stadium parking lot, hit a few keystrokes, and immediately had a graphic up on his flat-screen monitor.

It read:
Most triples:
Active players:
Steve Finley 119
Kenny Lofton 102
Johnny Damon 80

By the time Lofton steamed into third, and a replay of what just happened was shown - a key moment, as he drove in two to give the Dodgers a 4-0 lead - those few lines of statistics had jumped from Rinehart's monitor, been OK'd by the game director, and were up on the bottom third of your TV screen.

Updated, of course, to now read 103 triples, set off nicely in an orange-colored font.

We can't be sure who was faster on that one, Lofton or Rinehart.

On a typical three-hour-plus Fox Sports Net telecast of a Major League Baseball game, more than 100 pieces of originally-generated information will pop in and out of TV view. Rinehart, as the veteran graphics operator and master of the imposing Chyron keyboard, grinding paragraphs into sentences with the PC-based Windows format of the Duet computer, might have offered up three times that number to the producer or director. They have the discretion of what gets put on the air without interrupting the flow.

For Rinehart, the process of obtaining and generating information is really a matter of writing history as it happens.

"I feel as if I'm a journalist creating fresh information with different angles that you might see the next day in the newspaper," said Rinehart, 43, who has been with FSN since its first year of existence when it was known as Prime Ticket in

1985, and as a graphics operator the past 18 years. "I may not know the stat, but I know where to look it up and build on it."

Niguel Jones, a stat master himself and working as the graphics coordinator this particular night, often can't feed the information fast enough to Rinehart in most cases. Jones simply calls Rinehart "the graphics guru," a fountain of facts and figures that both follow and lead the storylines that the broadcasters are spinning through a telecast.

Graphic elements have evolved as quickly as the technology will allow. Where simple numbers were hardly a fancy way of reminding viewers of down-and-distance or score by innings, Fox has been at the forefront of delivering the info-nuggets into moving parts with sound effects. Rinehart has already been through three generations of Chyron systems, each a little more sophisticated in how they use the keystrokes, digital pictures and working templates.

While Rinehart may be less inclined in getting caught up in all the attention-deficit-disorder devices, his focus on those pieces of information gold that almost subliminally enter a viewers' brain through the screen are what has kept him on top of his game for years.

"He's a one-man band," says Brad Zager, who spent four years as Rinehart's graphics coordinator on Angels telecasts. "He's on top of his game like no one else. If I'm thinking about a graphic, he's already thought it of and has it ready. He takes these things to a new level and he's the ultimate ally in the truck."

Doug Mann, the booth statistician sitting next to the broadcasters who trades information with the graphics guys in the truck, calls Rinehart "a walking encyclopedia ... he's the most valuable person in our business."

"The job he has is probably one of the most critical once we go on the air. It requires someone to interface with as many as five different people at any time. In our ever-increasing demand for more and more graphics and stats, that position really requires someone who is quick and accurate and can handle an incredible amount of stress that move at a heart-pounding pace in the truck. Mitch is able to succeed at that."

Many of the graphics used in a game are built hours beforehand. Rinehart arrived at the production truck parked just outside the reserved level on the third-base side nearly six hours prior to the first pitch. Some were even done on a

laptop from his home in Yorba Linda that morning. Because of a virus that day that affected the computer hard drive in the truck, he was extra busy reprogramming information, then keeping a handwritten list of the four-number codes he had given each one for quick reference.

Nearby was a simple spiral notebook with pasted-in box scores of games clipped from the newspaper for immediate backup reference - you can't always trust a computer with Internet access not to crash - and at his feet are piles of media guides to find team records, player bios, etc. Jones, sitting just inches away with his own laptop clicked onto the STATS Inc. Web site, has been trading information with Rinehart right up until the pregame show starts at 6:30 - which might be the only restroom stop or food break either get during the night.

It's the same modus operandi for a Dodgers, Angels, Kings, Lakers or Pac-10 football game, all of which Rinehart fills in on during a six-day-a-week job throughout the year. He rarely travels anymore to road games, to keep his family life sane (although he did work for NBC on its 1992 Barcelona Games on volleyball and might do something in Beijing in 2008). He also is loyal to the FSN broadcasts, where it's easier to stay focused than if he was into more national network productions.

Each broadcaster's style might dictate how much of Rinehart's info gets on the air. The Angels' Steve Physioc, for example, has in the booth next to him what is referred to as the "Mitch Monitor," where Rinehart's information is zipped directly to him. With Vin Scully, Rinehart is more inclined to back up a storyline with statistical evidence he quickly digs up.

Every night is a new adventure, such as the Dodgers' team-record setting 25-hit night last Friday, during which Rinehart and company were busy checking and rechecking franchise numbers. Not every stat is positive, either, making them even harder to generate.

"It could be easy to get jaded, but I still find this to be an excellent job," said the Fresno State print journalism graduate. "I'm no rocket scientist. Anyone really can do this, and I'm sure younger people with a grasp of this software could operate it just as quickly. It's a wide field to enter in the L.A. media. But for this purpose, it's really just remembering that the game is the story, the broadcaster tells it, and we support him and fill in around him."