

The Philadelphia Inquirer

World Series chances for N.J. gubernatorial candidates

*By Jonathan Tamari
Inquirer Trenton Bureau
October 31, 2009*

Just after the national anthem, and a short time before Jimmy Rollins stepped to the plate to lead off Game 1 of the World Series Wednesday night, Chris Daggett popped up on television screens across Philadelphia and South Jersey.

Daggett, an independent candidate for New Jersey governor, had secured prime advertising time just as viewers were settling in for a game that was hotly anticipated up and down the New Jersey Turnpike.

With New Jersey's sports loyalties and media markets divided between North and South, it's rare for one event to have a hometown hold on both ends of the state. But the Phillies-Yankees World Series has done that, creating a challenge and opportunity for the gubernatorial candidates making a final push before Tuesday's voting.

On the one hand, attention in print, on the airwaves, and over cubicles has turned from politics to baseball, sucking up much of the available oxygen. But the huge viewing audiences tuning in to the games present an opportunity, if the candidates can afford it.

"This is a very target-rich environment," said Evan Tracey, president of the Arlington, Va.-based Campaign Media Analysis Group, which monitors TV spending by political candidates.

Mike DuHaime, senior campaign adviser for Republican candidate Christopher J. Christie, said simply: "There are a lot of eyeballs watching every night."

Reaching those eyeballs comes at a steep price.

In Philadelphia, political ad slots in Fox29's pregame show cost \$4,000 for 30 seconds. The cost nearly triples to get on during the break between the local and national broadcasts, and an ad during the game sets a campaign back \$32,000.

That's more than 75 times the cost of a political spot during the 5 o'clock news.

Democratic Gov. Corzine, a multimillionaire who is paying for his campaign almost entirely by himself, had bought three in-game ads in the Philadelphia TV market, leading the pack in spending, as of Friday morning. Daggett has one in-game commercial slated to air Monday.

But for the most part, Daggett and Christie, each taking public financing and facing spending caps, have tried to take advantage of less-expensive spots during the pregame build-up, when viewership grows but is far smaller than during the game.

The difference? During the local pregame show, Philadelphia-area viewership averaged 129,000 households Wednesday and 166,000 Thursday, according to the Nielsen Co. It soared to around 1,300,000 each night during the games. At the peak viewing time so far, late in the first game, half of the households in the Philadelphia market were tuned in.

In the New York City market, even more is at stake. Each game drew an average of 2.2 million homes there. Advertising costs are also far larger, and in that market, the candidates also have to compete for air time with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, another tycoon using his fortune to promote his reelection bid.

The ad buys, while targeting big audiences, also come with a touch of risk during an unpredictable live event. The local affiliates have limited ad slots to sell, and it's impossible to say exactly when a commercial will air.

Daggett and Christie, for example, had ads run just after the national anthem in Games 1 and 2, respectively, when viewership was around 600,000 to 700,000 homes - a significant leap from just 15 minutes earlier.

Corzine, who may have expected the biggest bang for his buy Thursday, saw his in-game ad held until well after the final out. By the time his commercial aired, Philadelphia viewership was in the process of falling from around 1.2 million homes to just under 500,000 as the network broadcast signed off.

Corzine also has ads slated to run in games today and Monday.

While the games may provide a chance to reach hordes of voters, the buzz of the series may make it tough on candidates trying to break through, said Montclair State University political scientist Brigid Harrison.

"Today, throughout the state, the game is 'above the fold,' and if the gubernatorial race is on the front page, it's below the fold," Harrison said Thursday, after Game 1.

She said the challenge would be particularly acute for Christie and Daggett, who, with limited budgets, are relying more on "free media," such as newspapers and radio, that might cover them, Harrison said. But baseball is consuming column inches and airtime, she said.

On Thursday, both Christie and Corzine said they expect to be able to get their messages across despite the attention on the Series.

"People can do more than one thing at a time. They know the election is coming up on Tuesday," Christie said. "We don't have any problem reaching out."

Through yesterday morning, Corzine had spent \$96,000 on World Series ads in Philadelphia. Daggett had put in \$44,000 for ads during or leading up to the game. Christie had paid about \$27,000 for World Series-related spots and the Republican Governor's Association had chipped in \$50,000 to \$60,000 more.

Christie and the GOP have the most slots locked up, but in less desirable times than Corzine and Daggett.

The Daggett campaign, backing an independent candidate who has no natural political base and less name recognition than his better-funded opponents, is swinging big, aiming for fewer ad buys on bigger slots, said Bill Hillsman, the campaign's media consultant.

The campaign has also bought time on *Today* and *The View*, for example. Both have huge audiences.

But with the Phillies and Yankees going toe-to-toe, said Daggett spokesman Tom Johnson, "you don't get much more high viewership" in New Jersey than this World Series.

Added Harrison, "This is the entire state invested in this. Unless, of course, they're Mets fans."