

TV Thursday

Is this the year he gets lucky?

Jon Stewart threatens Dave's long run

By MICHAEL GILTZ

THIS is the year of Jon Stewart.

Last month, "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" scored its highest ratings ever — averaging one million viewers nightly. Stewart's been profiled in countless national magazines (like "Rolling Stone") and snagged his third Emmy nomination in a row for Outstanding Variety, Music or Comedy Series.

And Sunday night he might very well be the one to finally end "Late Show with David Letterman's" five year stranglehold on that trophy.



Yesterday, award show website goldderby.com (hosted by and featuring experts from "TV Guide," "Entertainment Weekly" and elsewhere), brought together a panel of experts who predicted Stewart would edge out Letterman in a tight race, with O'Brien, Leno and "SNL" far behind.

"The consensus among media watchers and Emmy watchers is that the show

has hit such a creative peak and has such a huge cool factor," says Thomas O'Neil, author of "The Emmys." "If anybody can dethrone Letterman after five years of hogging this award, it's Stewart."

A 40-year-old New Yorker, Stewart's best role prior to taking over "The Daily Show" from Craig Kilborn was with his own more traditional talk show and a recurring role on "The Larry Sanders Show."

His current hit is a bracing hybrid of political satire, commentary on current events and real guests, whether it's Kate Beckinsale pushing her new movie "Underworld"

or former Secretary of State Madeline Albright leaving Stewart helpless with laughter by revealing that Yasir Arafat is a big fan of Tom & Jerry cartoons.

Want proof of the bizarre line it straddles?

Senator John Edwards officially announced his candidacy on the show, only to have Stewart make clear that "The Daily Show" is "fake" and wonder if maybe Edwards ought to announce again somewhere else.

"Anyway, aren't you already in the race?" asked

Stewart.

"I don't know if you've been following the polls," replied Edwards, "but I think it will actually be news to most people that I'm running for President of the United States."

That timely ability to get big names but still have fun with it, plays well with Emmy voters.

"What Stewart has going for him now is the same thing Letterman has: edge," says O'Neil. "He's a bit of an anarchist. At the same time he has a shrewd, unique way of looking at

current events.

"In these categories, you often see winners like Chris Rock and Letterman. They have to have that bit of rebel in them."

Still, Stewart's win would be an upset over Letterman and O'Neil for one is sticking with Old Faithful.

"I'm just going with the odds for Letterman," says O'Neil. "That's just because I'm so sick of being wrong as an awards expert."



The comedy news-show host has an Emmy in his sights.