

Sunday TV

If you thought football was rough and tumble, then you've never seen an *NSYNC ticket line. Finally, next Sunday, the two will meet.



*NSYNC (far left) will headline the halftime show while the Giants and Baltimore Ravens are recovering from the first two quarters.



The First



Super Bowl

By MICHAEL GILTZ

IN the mid-90s, MTV tweaked the NFL by staging an "alternative" Super Bowl halftime show featuring its two most popular characters "Beavis and Butt-head."

What a difference a decade makes.

This year — thanks to corporate mergers and CBS' desire to make the biggest TV event of the year a little more hip — MTV is producing the official halftime show.

But that's only the beginning.

MTV is also producing a Saturday night concert featuring Ricky Martin; a cheeky, behind-the-scenes peek at Super Bowl history; and a special Sunday edition of "Total Request Live" with Jennifer Lopez, Dan Marino and other celebrities.

Loss in the Backstreet Boys for the national anthem and *NSYNC and Aerosmith during the halftime show and it starts to sound more like the lineup for the MTV Music Video Awards instead of the Super Bowl.

Can MTV's guiding hand bring teenagers (gasp! even girls) flocking to the Super Bowl — without driving off the truckers and bond traders?

Maybe, says Dan Rank of the OMD USA, the media buying arm of the giant Omnicom Group ad agency.

"Every year there's a lot of buzz surrounding the Super Bowl and it's smart for CBS to try and maximize it," says Rank, who runs all national and local TV buying for such clients as M&M/Mars, Pepsi and Universal studios.

"It doesn't cost them much to put the extra programming on."

The Super Bowl traditionally draws an audience of 80 million or more. But the ratings have been steadily declining over the last decade.

Playing the youth card, so to speak, all of

a sudden it seems as if it was inevitable.

Perhaps the rickiest move of all? A special edition of "Total Request Live" — which as the uninitiated Super Bowl viewers will soon learn is always referred to as "TRL" — a new millennium version of "American Bandstand."

"Is anyone besides the hardcore MTV audience going to watch?" wonders Rank. "Or is it going to turn the regular football fan off?"

CBS — more pointedly CBS Sports — is certainly aware of that risk.

If the hardcore football fan does tune in that early, MTV president Van Toffler imagines they'll be saying, "Who's that Jennifer Lopez person?"

Rank doesn't think it's much of a risk.

"Total Request Live" intrigues me the most," he says. "I'm 46 years old, so it's not like I'm in the MTV demo. It's the whole synergy with Viacom coming to life and I think it might actually do well."

"Besides, they're putting it on at noon so it's not like they're getting nuts about it. They're just sticking their toe in the water. It's going to give some exposure to MTV that it wouldn't normally get. The upside potential may be very little, but there's no downside."

MTV's involvement with the biggest day on the gridiron began with the NFL's invitation to do the halftime show.

"Doing half time was kind of an outgrowth of our relationship with the NFL over the years," explains MTV's Toffler,



"from doing 'Rock 'n' Jocks' with them."

The challenge to make the half time concert a little cooler certainly didn't strike Toffler as particularly hard to do.

"How do I respond to that without putting all of our predecessors down?" says Toffler. "There've been some pretty bad half time shows in the past."

One big change: this year they'll start it off with a celebrity-studded short film directed by McG, who helmed the summer smash flick "Charlie's Angels" (which, of course, was heavily promoted by MTV).

But MTV's involvement was just beginning.

"Then we showed them the 'Uncensored' series we have taking a look behind the scenes at the Video Music Awards and Movie Awards and told them we'd love to do that with the Super Bowl. They let us do it."

"And then they told us that they do a party on Saturday night and wanted to turn that into a musical special and we told them we'd love to produce that."

"Then they also mentioned..." Toffler starts to laugh. "They also mentioned they were starting their telecast about six hours before the Super Bowl started and so we're going to do 'TRL' on CBS starting at noon."

So the music video channel that once stole some thunder from the Super Bowl gets rewarded by programming almost as many hours of pre-game hype as CBS Sports itself.

For the first time, CBS has expanded its pre-game hoopla to start Friday night — so there was plenty of TV time to fill. But you still might have expected some turf wars. Not according to Sean McManus, head of CBS Sports.

Even MTV's Saturday night documentary about Super Bowl history — something CBS Sports was obviously capable of producing — doesn't bother McManus.

"CBS Sports certainly could have gone out and done a documentary," he says. "But I'm not sure, quite frankly, that we aren't maybe a little too close to it to give a brand new and refreshing look."

"MTV, coming in as outsiders, have done that. It's a very different look, different from what CBS Sports or any other network would have come up with."

"I've watched every Super Bowl since the first one and think I know a lot about Super Bowl history," says McManus. "But there was stuff in there I had no clue had ever happened."

"The best example is Don Shula in Super Bowl... I don't even remember the number. But he was being carried off the field and had his watch taken off his wrist by somebody."

"They show the film down and if you look at it very, very carefully, he says, 'Where's my [blank] watch?'"

There are other reasons MTV's presence is useful, McManus says.

"The 'Total Request Live' hour sold out very quickly because it was a different group of advertisers that normally wouldn't advertise on Super Bowl Sunday. I don't like the word 'synergy,' but this is a pretty good example."

And how would MTV feel if some other network tried to upstage MTV's halftime show with an alternative of its own?

"Very bad," laughs Toffler. "Very bad."