

The Best Show on TV

by Joe Mulder

"The Office" (NBC) – 2/9/2006 - 4/2/2006
"Huff" (Showtime) – 4/2/2006 - 8/26/2006
"Big Brother" (CBS) – 8/26/2006 - 10/4/2006
"South Park" (Comedy Central) – 10/4/2006 - 11/30/2006
"The Office" (NBC) – 11/30/2006 - 1/14/2007
"24" (Fox) – 1/14/2007 - 4/5/2007
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 4/5/2007 - 4/10/2008
"House" (Fox) – 4/10/2008 - 10/5/2008
"Dexter" (Showtime) – 10/5/2008 - 11/18/2008
"The Shield" (FX) – 11/18/2008 - 11/24/2008
"How I Met Your Mother" (CBS) – 11/24/2008 - 1/8/2009
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 1/8/2009 - 9/9/2009
"Glee" (Fox) – 9/9/2009 - 10/28/2009
"Friday Night Lights" (NBC) – 10/28/2009 - 2/10/2011
"Community" (NBC) – 2/10/11 - present

It's not easy replacing a legend.

It must be done, however. Time marches on. Things change. People get old. John Elway, for instance, may indeed retire ... but the Denver Broncos still need a starting quarterback the next year. And if Brian Griese is the best they've got, well, then Brian Griese is the guy who's going to replace the legend.

I use the football analogies not by accident but because "Friday Night Lights," the greatest television show of all time, has aired its final episode (on DirecTV, at least; the fifth and final season begins airing on NBC in a matter of weeks).

No show on TV is as good. Since it's unfair even to expect such a thing, I don't. But just as the Denver Broncos need *somebody* to take their snaps, TV needs *some* show to be the best on it.

That show, at least for now, is NBC's "Community." And it's a show I love, so here's hoping that it turns out to be more Aaron Rodgers than Quincy Carter, legend-replacing-wise.

First of all, I know that tastes differ, that it takes all kinds, and that there are many, many other fantastic TV shows on right now. "Community," though, is the best. Your smart friends will tell you it's actually "Modern Family," your TV snob friends will probably tell you it's "Parks and Recreation" (and it just baaaaarely isn't), your parents might tell you it's "NCIS" and your frat guy cousin would undoubtedly tell you that it's "Tosh.0."

But it's "Community."

"Community" centers around a study group at Greendale Community College. The group is comprised of seven

diverse characters of all ages and from all walks of life: disgraced lawyer/con man Jeff, aggressively PC feminist Britta, perky recovering addict Annie, former jock Troy, awkward geek Abed, recently divorced mother-of-two Shirley and rich old weirdo Pierce. The show's premise originally centered on Jeff being forced to go back to school after his law degree was found to be fraudulent, and falling right into old patterns by claiming to run a Spanish study group just to get close to Britta.

During the course of Season 1, however, it seemed to become apparent to the creative forces behind the show – as it became apparent to the audience – that Jeff and Britta weren't particularly interesting together, and that the supporting characters were so good that we needed to see more of them. Much like we humans only use 10 percent of our brains, "Community" was only using 10% of its awesomeness.

So what did they do? They delivered an unqualified masterpiece of an episode, "Modern Warfare," that compared favorably to anything that "Arrested Development" or "30 Rock" ever did. In the episode's opening scene Abed, the high-functioning autistic Greek chorus of the group, proclaims that the sexual tension between Jeff and Britta is putting the whole group on edge. "Hear this on every level," he tells them after referencing classic '90s TV couple Ross and Rachel, "you're keeping us from being friends."

That gauntlet having been summarily thrown down, the episode turns very quickly into both a parody and a wonderfully executed example of a post-apocalyptic survival thriller once the dean of students announces a campus-wide paintball game with a priceless reward for the winner. During the game, Jeff and Britta simply have sex and move on (though some feelings between them do crop up a little later in the season, organically and with hilarious results).

Since the watershed "Modern Warfare" episode (for which writer Emily Cutler was egregiously not rewarded with an Emmy nomination) "Community" experienced a slight growing pain or two as it found its footing creatively, striving for a balance between more conventional episodes, parodies of certain genres and, occasionally, downright avant-garde experimentation the likes of which has rarely been seen on prime time network TV.

Lately, however, the show seems to have mastered its tone and become fully aware of exactly what it is. Unconstrained as they now are by the show's lack of adherence to its original "humbled cool guy goes back to junior college" premise, the characters are free to – for example – spend time jumping on a hidden trampoline that contains the secret to Zen-like bliss, or save a fellow student's life through a particularly intense game of "Dungeons & Dragons," or become Claymation characters.

It's weird, it's fun, it's daring, it's unpredictable.

POOP READING

And at least for now (I say "for now" because there are a lot of other contenders and the gap between #1 and #2 isn't particularly wide), "Community" is the Best Show on TV.
