If We Had an Emmy Ballot: The Best TV of 2009 to 2010

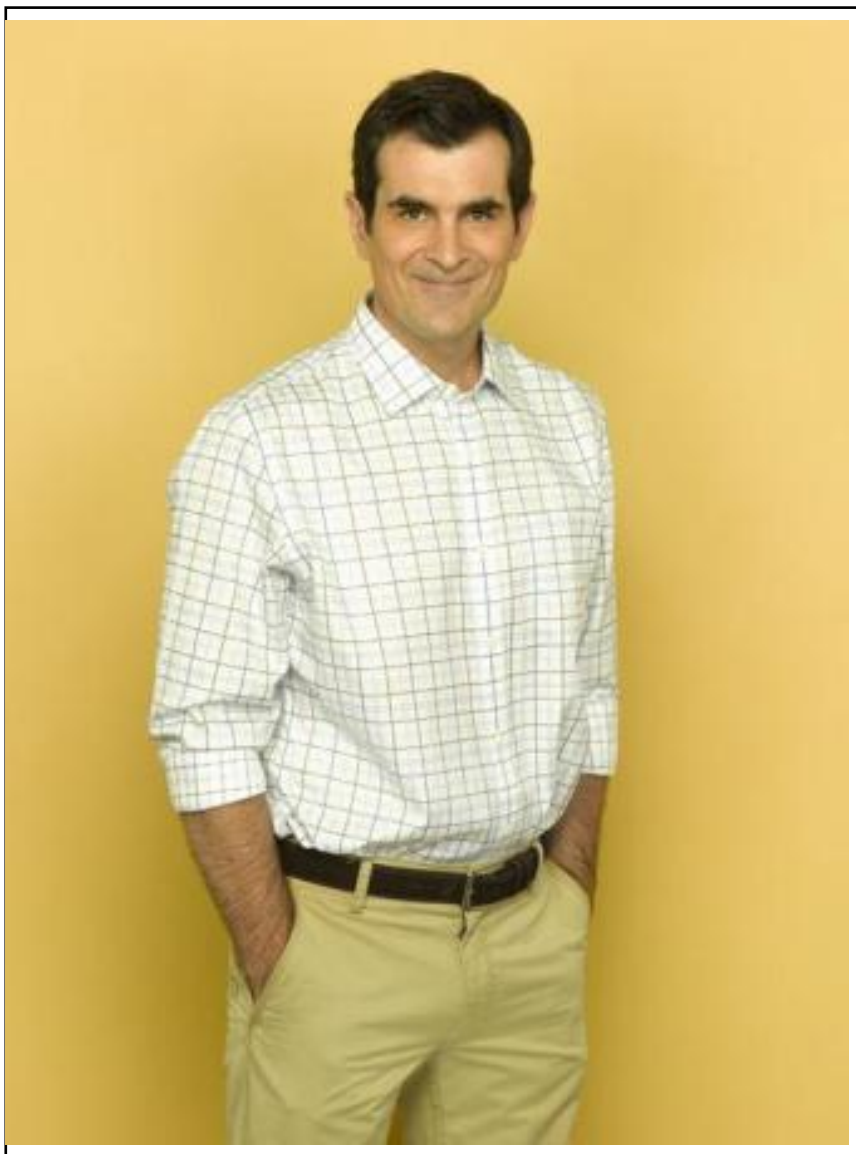
Submitted by BrianTT [1] on June 17, 2010 - 10:00pm

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CHICAGO – Ballots for the 62nd Annual Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Emmy nominations are due on Monday, June 21st, 2010, and we're here to offer some advice for all of you Emmy voters still holding a ballot in your hands and trying to make those tough TV decisions over the upcoming weekend.

First, a battle plan: It was an undeniably strong year for new programming and let's try and start some of these excellent new programs off on the right foot with the recognition they deserve. For years, critics have derided the Emmy voters for ignoring great shows from "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" to "The Wire." 2010 presents an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and gets things right from the very beginning of great new shows including "Modern Family," "Glee," "The Good Wife," "Nurse Jackie," "Justified," "Treme," and "Community," all deserving of at least one major nomination. It was one of the best freshmen classes in the history of television and the biggest mistake the Academy could make would be to fail to recognize that. With that in mind…

Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy



Ty Burrell in Modern Family
Photo credit: ABC

Ty Burrell, “Modern Family”
Peter Facinelli, “Nurse Jackie”
Neil Patrick Harris, “How I Met Your Mother”
Jack McBrayer, “30 Rock”
Danny Pudi, “Community”
Eric Stonestreet, “Modern Family”

Where better to start the slate-cleaning than with the first category? The fact is that “Entourage,” a regular supplier for this category, has been in steep decline for a few years now and no one stood out enough on “The Office” this season to merit a slot, although we won’t complain too much when Rainn Wilson takes his inevitable nod. Justin Kirk and Kevin Nealon of “Weeds” have been contenders in the past and any of the three guys on “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” might make good choices but there are better ones.

As for previous nominees, Neil Patrick Harris and Jack McBrayer had easily as strong seasons as 2008-2009 and they were nominated last year, so why not bring them back to the party? Last year’s winner, Jon Cryer of “Two and a Half Men,” is the best thing about that overrated show but you’ll never see us suggest an overall mediocre program get a nomination in any category, so he doesn’t make the cut.

So, with NPH and McBrayer, that leaves four slots for the incredible ensembles of “Glee,” “Community,” “Nurse Jackie,” and “Modern Family”. Peter Facinelli may make headlines for “Twilight”-related speeches but he’s doing easily the most interesting work of his career on “Nurse Jackie”. He’s taken what could have been a stereotype and made him a fascinating character. There are two men on “Modern Family” that are so good that it would be nice to see them tie and accept the award together — Ty Burrell and Eric Stonestreet. That leaves one spot that feels like it should go to Danny Pudi, Donald Glover, or Chevy Chase for their contribution to what developed into one of the strongest comedy ensembles on television. Glover ended strong but Pudi was the most consistent throughout the year.

Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy



Jane Lynch in Glee
Photo credit: FOX

Julie Bowen, “Modern Family”
Portia de Rossi, “Better Off Ted”
Jenna Fischer, “The Office”
Jane Lynch, “Glee”
Elizabeth Perkins, “Weeds”
Sofia Vergara, “Modern Family”

Last year, the Academy actually did a pretty damn good job in this category, giving the trophy to the spectacular Kristin Chenoweth of “Pushing Daisies” (oh how we miss you Olive Snook) and nominating a deserving Amy Poehler and Kristin Wiig of “Saturday Night Live” along with the great Elizabeth Perkins of “Weeds” and Jane Krakowski of “30 Rock.” (We’ll ignore the Vanessa Williams nomination and consider this category a win.)

Well, Chenoweth is gone and likely to be replaced in the winner’s circle by a rookie with the already-beloved work by Jane Lynch on “Glee”. She’s not just a suggestion, she’s a lock for at least a nomination and a safe bet for the win. Perkins should return from last year. As for the “SNL” nods, Poehler is gone and no one really stood out on that program this year enough to warrant replacing her. If Wiig gets in again,

that will surely be a more deserving choice than some other options, but there are four better ones.

Going back to the best ensemble on television right now, both Julie Bowen and Sofia Vergara developed their comic timing over the first season of “Modern Family” to the point of perfection. They’re great.

As for the last two slots, how about something old and something canceled? Jenna Fischer has quietly gotten better every single season of “The Office” and with wedding AND pregnancy plotlines in one season, isn’t it time to recognize her? Finally, ABC never pushed the often-brilliant “Better Off Ted” in the way they should have and the entire cast deserves consideration, especially the great work by ice-cold Portia de Rossi. You gave the Emmy in this category to a show that ABC screwed last year. How about we make a nomination like this one an annual event? We could call it the “Olive Snook Slot.”

(A cheating seventh choice: If you’re going to ignore de Rossi like everyone else in America did her program, take a look at how strong Alison Brie ended on “Community.” We’d love to hear her name on nomination morning if one of the suggested six don’t make the cut.)

Best Lead Actor in a Comedy Series



Joel McHale in Community
Photo credit: NBC

Alec Baldwin, “30 Rock”
Steve Carell, “The Office”
Larry David, “Curb Your Enthusiasm”
Joel McHale, “Community”
Jim Parsons, “The Big Bang Theory”
Tony Shalhoub, “Monk”

The Academy has historically been pretty accurate in this category. Who’s going to argue with Alec Baldwin and Steve Carell, the anchors of what is still the best night for comedy on network television? They’re two actors who will never have a “down year.”

And it’s unlikely that Emmy voters are going to turn their back on Tony Shalhoub for his last season of “Monk.” With Jim Parsons receiving a great nomination last year for “The Big Bang Theory” and doing even better work on the increasingly popular show this season, he seems like a deserving lock as well. That’s four repeats that are deserving.

So that leaves two spots open for discussion. Jemaine Clement was nominated last year for “Flight of the Conchords” but won’t be eligible this year and can we please, please stop nominating Charlie Sheen for “Two and a Half Men?” Maybe his personal demons will finally keep him out of a category that he never gave a performance strong enough to be in in the first place.

To us, the final two slots are obvious. “Curb Your Enthusiasm” had arguably its strongest season to date, highlighted by brilliant work by the man behind the curtain, the great Larry David. Finally, the last spot should go to a newbie, a man who started off a little shaky but was simply spectacular by the end of the first season of “Community” — Joel McHale.

Best Lead Actress in a Comedy



Edie Falco in Nurse Jackie
Photo credit: Showtime

Toni Collette, “United States of Tara”
Kaley Cuoco, “The Big Bang Theory”
Edie Falco, “Nurse Jackie”
Tina Fey, “30 Rock”
Mary-Louise Parker, “Weeds”
Amy Poehler, “Parks and Recreation”

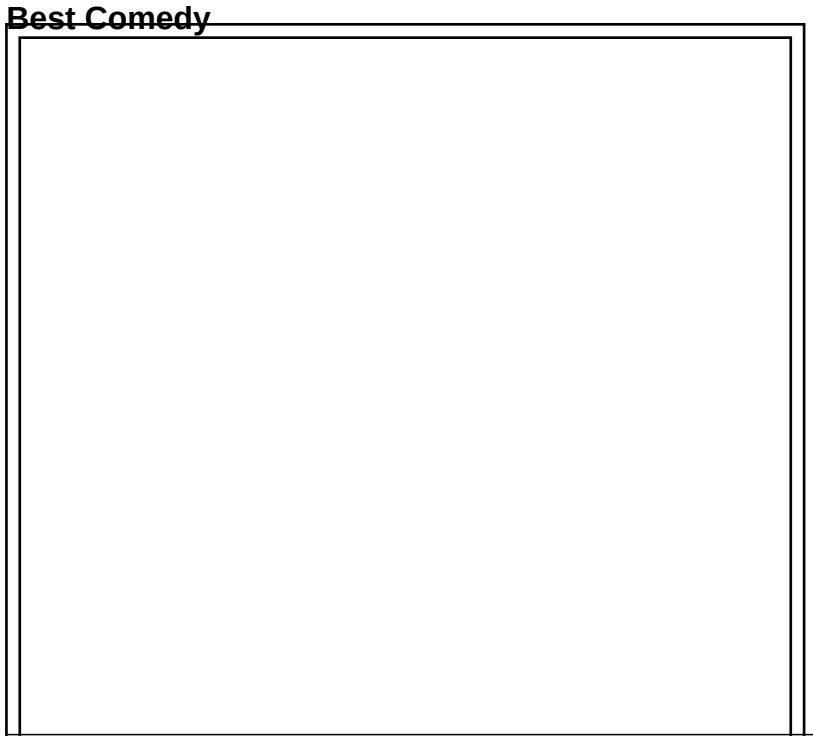
The surprising nomination for Sarah Silverman last year and the deserving win for Toni Collette indicated a willingness to think outside the box in a category that has been historically tough to fill. It seems very unlikely that Collette, Mary-Louise Parker of “Weeds,” and Tina Fey of “30 Rock” won’t return to the dance this year. The last two have had better years but are still more than good enough to make the top six.

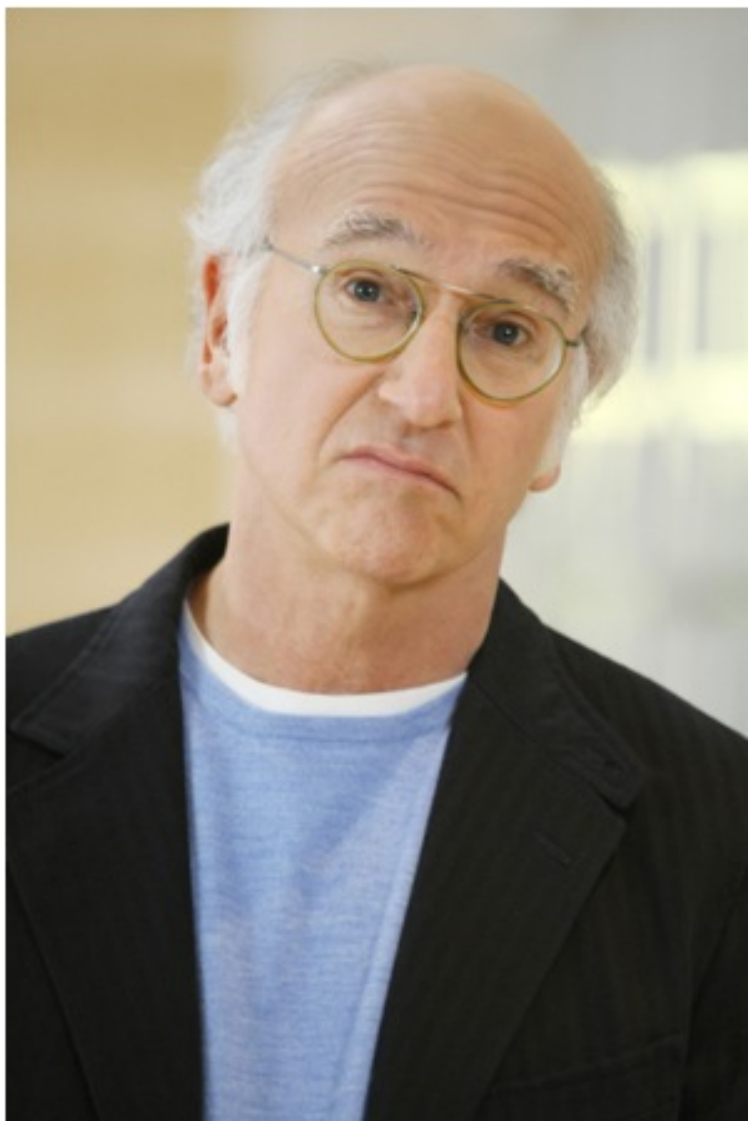
With the other three spots open for debate, the first new nomination that should be required for every ballot out there is for the best performance in this category, Edie Falco’s insanely great work on “Nurse Jackie.” She should be one of the few to win a Lead Actress Emmy in both drama and comedy in a few months.

As for the final two, Amy Poehler developed her own rhythm in the last season of “Parks and Recreation” when she stopped overplaying and trying too hard to be the next “Office.” She’s clearly liked by the Academy and “Parks and Rec” could use some love before its midseason return.

Finally, with its rise to one of the most popular shows on television, why not a nod for the underrated Kaley Cuoco of “The Big Bang Theory?” She has more than proven that she can hold her own with the boys of this male-driven show and Academy members like to jump on-board with the biggest hits.

Best Comedy





Curb Your Enthusiasm
Photo credit: HBO

“30 Rock”
“Curb Your Enthusiasm”
“Glee”
“Modern Family”
“Nurse Jackie”
“The Office”

Last year, the Academy kicked open the door and nominated seven comedies including three from cable — “Entourage,” “Flight of the Conchords,” and “Weeds” — and even threw a nod to “Family Guy” while finally ignoring “Two and a Half Men.” We’re all for diversity, but this category was weird last year.

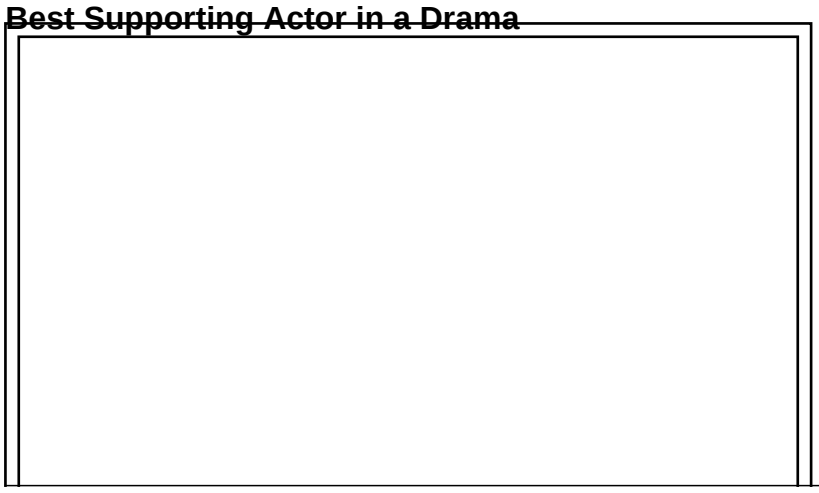
How do we fix it? “Flight” isn’t on any more, and “Entourage,” “Weeds,” and “Family Guy” had down years. (Heck, “The Cleveland Show” had a better season of if they must pick an animated show.) None of them should be nominated. That leaves the two NBC shows — “30 Rock” and “The Office” — and CBS’ “How I Met Your Mother.” “HIMYM” isn’t a bad choice but there are better ones. The two NBC shows deserve to repeat and remain the best comedy hour on television and it wouldn’t even be a tragedy to see “Community” or “Parks and Recreation” get some love. It was a truly a great year for comedy when a program as consistent as “Community” is on the outside looking in to six better choices.

So who claims the other four spots? “Curb Your Enthusiasm” returned with one of the best seasons in the show’s history. With the “Seinfeld” connection, it should be a lock with nostalgic Emmy voters.

“The Big Bang Theory” seems like a very likely “HIMYM” replacement and it’s nice to see that very good program get some love, but there were three new shows that were just a bit better — Showtime’s “Nurse Jackie,” ABC’s “Modern Family,” and the show that most of us expect to win the trophy, FOX’s phenomenal “Glee”. (Personally, we’re sensing a “Modern Family” dark horse upset or possibly even “Curb,” but only time will tell in a category that’s going to be fun to watch.)

Go on to the next page for the five drama categories…

Best Supporting Actor in a Drama





Alexander Skarsgard in True Blood
Photo credit: HBO

Henry Ian Cusick, “Lost”
Tate Donovan, “Damages”
John Lithgow, “Dexter”
Terry O’Quinn, “Lost”
Aaron Paul, “Breaking Bad”
Alexander Skarsgard, “True Blood”

Two great character actors, John Lithgow and Terry O’Quinn, are likely to fight for the trophy in this category and it would be stunning to see either of them not announced on nomination morning. They both practically stole their individual shows and defined evil on television in the last year.

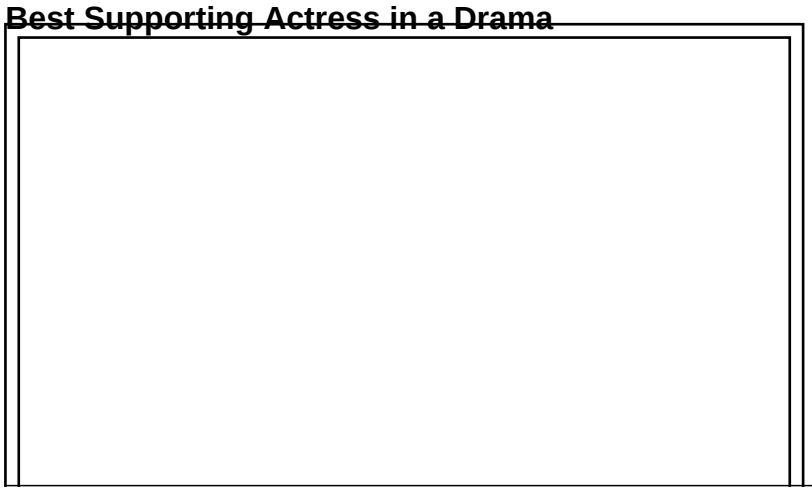
Three of last year’s nominees - Christian Clemenson and William Shatner of “Boston Legal” and William Hurt of “Damages” are ineligible and it seems likely that O’Quinn will take the spot from last year’s winner, Michael Emerson of “Lost.” Aaron Paul of “Breaking Bad” will certainly repeat and it wouldn’t be much of a mistake at all for John Slattery to repeat for “Mad Men.”

But there are better choices than Slattery. First, a replacement for Hurt is likely to come from “Damages” with guest stars Campbell Scott and/or Martin Short being frontrunners. The actual best supporting performance on that show this year? Tate Donovan, who perfectly sold the arc of a man caught between personal and professional obligations. Whether or not “Damages” returns, this is the Academy’s last chance to nominate Donovan and they should take it.

“True Blood” had a slightly down season overall from the first but Alexander Skarsgard is slowly starting to steal every scene he’s in on that show. The Academy mostly ignored HBO’s water-cooler hit last year but I have a feeling it may pop up in a few major categories this year. Skarsgard is a great choice.

Finally, the cast of “Treme” provides a few great choices, but we’re going back to “Lost,” largely because it’s the last time we can. As Desmond, Henry Ian Cusick anchored the “sideways” portion of the show with a remarkable, zen-like presence. His underrated work carried the audience through to the emotional climax. They nominated him in 2006. Give him one before we say goodbye, brother.

Best Supporting Actress in a Drama





Khandi Alexander in Treme
Photo credit: HBO

Khandi Alexander, “Treme”
Christine Baranski, “The Good Wife”
Jennifer Carpenter, “Dexter”
Ginnifer Goodwine, “Big Love”
Christina Hendricks, “Mad Men”
Regina King, “Southland”

Now this is a tough one. Elizabeth Mitchell wasn’t on the last season of “Lost” (and “V” is not good), “In Treatment” wasn’t on the air, Cherry Jones (last year’s winner) took herself out of the running for “24,” and we’ll never understand the love for “Grey’s Anatomy.”

That leaves a lot of empty slots. Rose Byrne for “Damages” (or the less-deserving Lily Tomlin) sure seems possible as does at least one of the “Grey’s” ladies, but let us make a few other suggestions.

“Dexter” had its best season to date and we’d love to see it represented in as many categories as possible. Jennifer Carpenter did her best work yet and deserves consideration. “Mad Men” obviously has one of the strongest ensembles on the air and Christina Hendricks has delivered a stronger overall supporting performance every season. She deserves a nod.

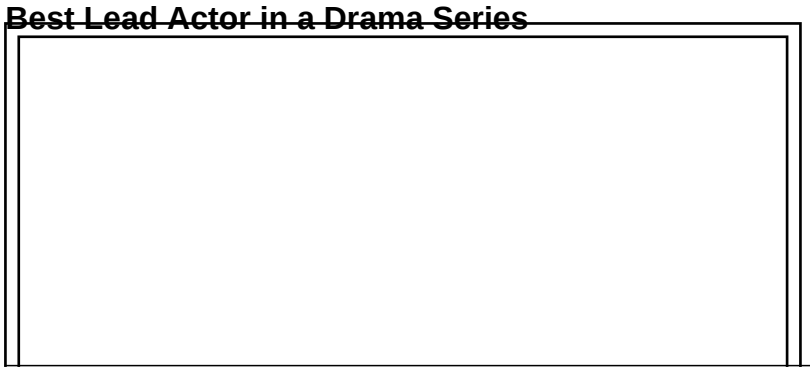
“Big Love” was down this year from its brilliant third season but Ginnifer Goodwine’s arc as she started to become financially independent and even fell for what was technically her stepson was the strongest of the year for that up-and-down HBO program.

Christine Baranski has delivered solid supporting work for years, no matter where she goes, and it seems likely that “The Good Wife” could be a multiple nominee on Emmy morning. She’s deserving.

Even more deserving is the spectacular Regina King, a woman who keeps adding depth to one of the most accomplished ensembles on television in “Southland.” Remind TNT that they’ve done a great thing by renewing this great program and nominate King.

Finally, there’s arguably no better ensemble on television right now than the folks on “Treme.” The whole season isn’t eligible, as it overlaps with two Emmy eligibility periods that run from June to May but the cast is so good that even half a season’s work deserves mention. With a cast of great choices all around, Khandi Alexander stood out from episode one. Give her the nod and, HBO, schedule this next year so the WHOLE season is eligible. You’ve had enough trouble getting David Simon’s programs nominations. Why make it more difficult?

Best Lead Actor in a Drama Series





Timothy Olyphant in Justified
Photo credit: FX

Bryan Cranston, “Breaking Bad”
Nathan Fillion, “Castle”
Matthew Fox, “Lost”
Michael C. Hall, “Dexter”
Jon Hamm, “Mad Men”
Timothy Olyphant, “Justified”

Once again, this category is remarkably crowded. Some voters may feel a need to nominate Kiefer Sutherland for his last horrible day on “24,” Hugh Laurie is an annual choice, Denis Leary might pop up, and it’s not hard to see Simon Baker making a repeat appearance for “The Mentalist,” although there are better choices than all four gentlemen.

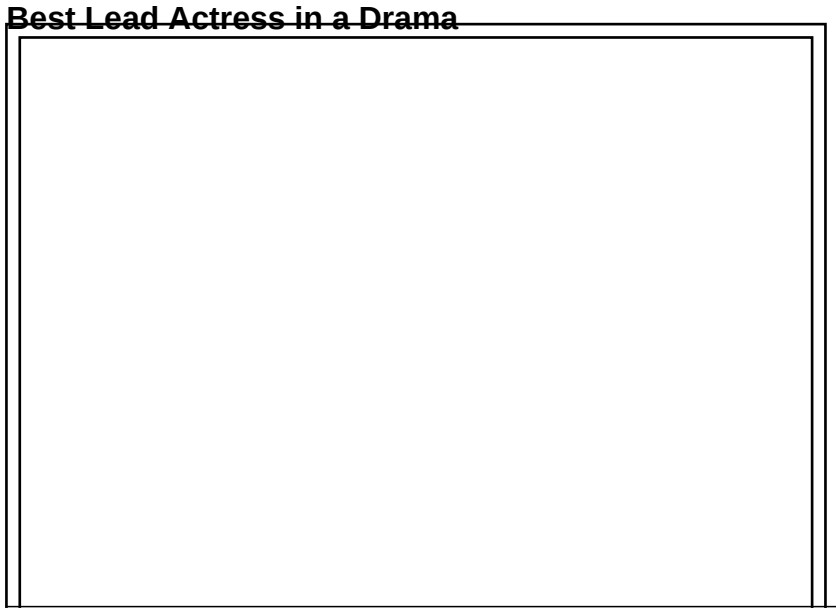
Jon Hamm isn’t getting kicked out of this category until the show is canceled and Bryan Cranston has won two years running for “Breaking Bad” and he has to be the odds-on favorite to win again. Although he’ll face some stiff competition from a former nominee, two new ones, and a last chance choice.

The former is Michael C. Hall, who has been nominated twice before but never won. The most recent season of “Dexter” featured his best work and he’s neck-and-neck with Cranston when it comes to handicapping who will actually win much less be nominated.

As for the new ones, Nathan Fillion improved every week on “Castle,” making a better serial mystery choice than Baker and Timothy Olyphant found the role that he had been working toward his entire career with his spectacular work on “Justified”. In weaker years, he’d be a great choice to win, much less just be nominated.

Finally, after six spectacular seasons, Matthew Fox deserves his first and last nomination for “Lost.” Don’t miss this opportunity to nominate the face of one of the best shows of the current era of television.

Best Lead Actress in a Drama





Juliana Margulies in The Good Wife
Photo credit: CBS

Glenn Close, “Damages”
January Jones, “Mad Men”
Stana Katic, “Castle”
Juliana Margulies, “The Good Wife”
Anna Paquin, “True Blood”
Kyra Sedgwick, “The Closer”

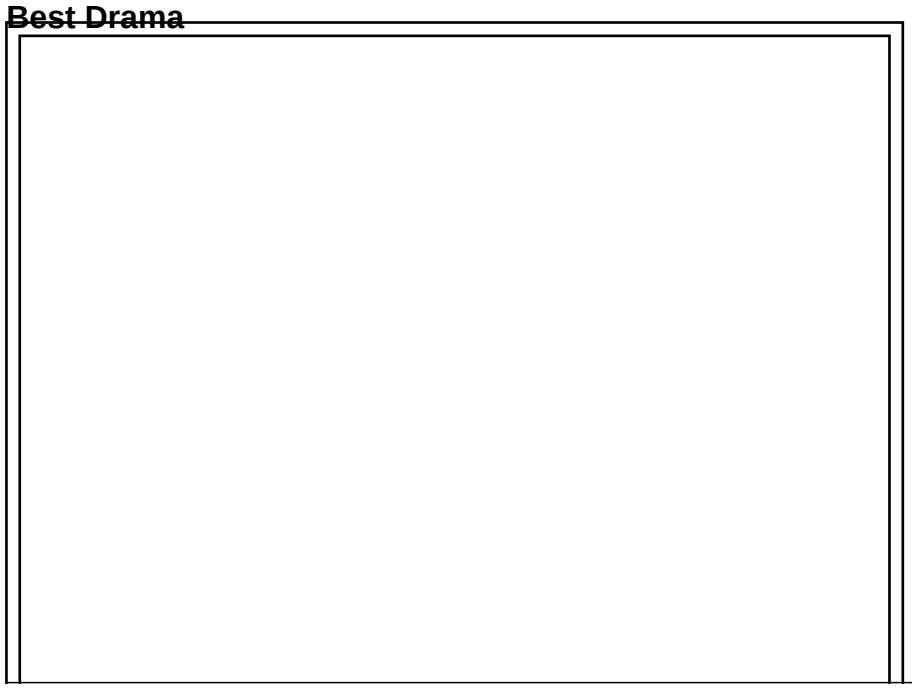
All six of last year’s nominees returned in seasons that could bring them back to the dance in a rare full-category repeat. But that’s not going to happen. Someone needs to make room for who we suspect will win — Juliana Margulies for her career-best work on “The Good Wife”. The first one to go can be Holly Hunter, who is good on “Saving Grace” but the show is not.

As for the other five, bring back last year’s winner in Glenn Close, even if that show was definitely down this season, and Kyra Sedgwick is a perfectly worthwhile annual nominee for “The Closer.” She carries that hit show week in and week out. The Academy loves Sally Field in “Brothers & Sisters” and Mariska Hargitay in “Law & Order: Special Victims Unit”. We think both are good but not as interesting as some deserving alternates.

January Jones should have been nominated for the last two seasons of “Mad Men”. Let’s make up for that mistake this year. Elisabeth Moss is great but show January some love. Someone else who should have been nominated last year and might the second time around is Anna Paquin, who carried “True Blood” from moderate hit to cult phenomenon and deserves recognition.

Finally, Stana Katic makes up half of the most charismatic duo on television right now. If you must nominate a sexy detective, forget Hargitay. We’ll take Katic without question.

Best Drama





Dexter
Photo credit: Showtime

“Dexter”
“The Good Wife”
“Justified”
“Lost”
“Mad Men”
“True Blood”

It’s time to shake things up in a category that has been stale for years as the Academy has overlooked obvious, great choices like “Battlestar Galactica” or “The Wire.” Bringing new blood like “Breaking Bad” and “Big Love” into the category last year was a great start. Sadly, “Big Love” was way down in its truncated season, so it should wait till next year, but “Bad” will almost surely return.

“Dexter” and “Lost” had above average seasons that are almost sure to be nominated and “Mad Men” seems like it will own a nomination slot until the day it’s canceled. If those three shows are NOT nominated, someone miscounted the ballots.

That leaves three slots that last year went to “Big Love,” “House,” and “Damages”. The latter had a weak enough year that it should be replaced and CBS’ spectacular drama “The Good Wife” is a better legal choice. Instead of a weak year for “Big Love,” jump on the vampire bandwagon and recognize “True Blood” for creating riveting genre television that’s a lot harder to pull of than it looks.

Finally, there’s been very little as entertaining as FX’s “Justified” on any channel over the last year. You really want to break out of the Academy comfort zone? Replace “House” with a cable show about white supremacists and a modern cowboy. It really is a new era for television.

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