

Post Super Bowl Edition of 'The Office' Scores Comedy Field Goal

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 30, 2009 - 9:14am

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [Cloris Leachman](#) [3]
- [Ed Helms](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Jack Black](#) [6]
- [Jeff Blitz](#) [7]
- [Jenna Fischer](#) [8]
- [Jessica Alba](#) [9]
- [John Krasinski](#) [10]
- [Paul Lieberstein](#) [11]
- [Rainn Wilson](#) [12]
- [Steve Carell](#) [13]
- [Super Bowl](#) [14]
- [Television](#) [15]
- [The Office](#) [16]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [17]



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – What a network chooses to put in its post-Super Bowl spot says a lot about what they are most commercially and creatively confident about on their schedule. For NBC, the choice was clearly either “[30 Rock](#) [18]” or “[The Office](#) [16],” and the brain trust went with the latter, delivering an expanded version of the [Steve Carell](#) [13] hit that will thrill fans of the show and probably even satisfy the viewers who were just too lazy to change the channel after the big game.

The episode of “The Office” that follows the Super Bowl at roughly 9:30 CST is called “Stress Relief” and has been written by Paul Lieberstein (who plays Toby on the show) and directed by Jeff Blitz (“Spellbound,” “Rocket Science”). Guest stars include [Jack Black](#) [6], [Jessica Alba](#) [9], and [Cloris Leachman](#) [3].



Steve Carell as Michael Scott

Photo credit: Paul Drinkwater

In one of the most hilarious pre-credits openings in the history of “The Office,” Dwight ([Rainn Wilson](#) [12]) decides to test the fire safety awareness of his staff by staging a fake blaze. He puts a lighter under some of the door handles to give the impression that there are flames on the other side and even blocks a few doors. Then he crumples some paper in a garbage can and tosses in a lit cigarette.



Steve Carell as Michael Scott
Photo credit: Paul Drinkwater

Of course, all that results is panic and one of our favorite workers at Dunder-Mifflin Paper ends up having a heart attack. Because of Dwight's actions, Michael (Carell) is forced to deal with the heightened stress level in the office. He soon realizes that *he* is the main cause of most of the stress at work and concludes that the best way to relieve it is to stage a no-holds-barred roast. Anyone who's seen the show can guess how well that goes.

Meanwhile, Andy ([Ed Helms](#) [4]), Pam ([Jenna Fischer](#) [8]) and Jim ([John Krasinski](#) [10]) are watching a pirated version of an unreleased love triangle movie starring Jack Black, Jessica Alba, and Cloris Leachman. (Yes, that says "love triangle" with Jack Black and Cloris Leachman. Prepare yourself.) Pam and Jim are concerned about about the rocky relationship of the former's parents and their discussion of it while watching the awful online movie convinces Andy that they are film gurus.

"Stress Relief" is clearly divided into two plotlines - the funnier material with Michael and Dwight and the more emotional material about the dissolution of the marriage of Pam's parents and the concerns that raises within her regarding her union with Jim.

The 'A plot,' the material with the roast and stress relief techniques, works significantly better. Carell does some of his best work of the year to date and Michael's response to the roast is a must-see for even casual fans of the show.

The 'B plot' isn't as effective. The Black and Leachman cameos are amusing but Alba barely registers and the Jim/Pam stuff feels a bit overdone and it takes the audience away from the material in this episode that they are really going to want to see after a day of drinking and watching football.

Finally, I've never been a fan of 45-minute (running time without commercials) episodes of "The Office". This show works significantly better in regular, not supersized, format. It's an incredibly well-paced show. It's the comic timing of the cast that makes it work. That's much harder to maintain at twice the length.

Having said that, nothing is normal-size on Super Bowl day and most fans of "The Office" won't complain about getting more of their favorite show. It may not be one of the best episodes in the history of one of NBC's most beloved shows, so we can't credit "The Office" with a touchdown, but they're definitely walking away with points.

'The Office,' which airs on NBC, stars Steve Carell, Jenna Fischer, John Krasinski, Ed Helms, Leslie David Baker, Brian Baumgartner, Kate Flannery, Mindy Kaling, Angela Kinsey, Phyllis Smith, Oscar Nunez, Creed Bratton, Craig Robinson, and Paul Lieberstein. "Stress Relief" airs on Sunday, February 1st, 2009 at 9:30PM CST.

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- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/ed-helms>
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- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/rainn-wilson>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/steve-carell>
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- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/television>
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