

If We Had an Emmy Ballot: The Best TV of 2008 to 2009

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 23, 2009 - 4:57pm

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CHICAGO – Ballots for the 61st Annual Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Emmy nominations are due on Friday, June 26th, 2009, 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.

And, like the large majority of us, if you’re not a card-carrying Emmy voter, let this serve as your populist guide to who really SHOULD be winning Emmys this year. There’s sometime a disconnect between who actually wins the awards and who viewers KNOW should win the awards - i.e., the almost total lack of Emmy love for “Buffy,” “Battlestar Galactica,” etc. - so, in a fantasy world, our fantasy ballot hopes to heap some recognition on the shows and creative types who really, truly knocked our socks off in the 2008-2009 season. But, if you ARE an Emmy voter, be a pal and give some of these guys the nods they deserve.

(Note: While there are five nominees per category, voters nominate six per ballot, so that’s how many we suggest.)

Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy



Jack McBrayer on 30 Rock
Photo credit: NBC

Neil Patrick Harris, “How I Met Your Mother”
Ed Helms, “The Office”
Justin Kirk, “Weeds”
Jack McBrayer, “30 Rock”
Jeremy Piven, “Entourage”
Ray Wise, “Reaper”

There are a number of very strong, mostly male ensembles in comedy television nowadays and it can be tough to pick a favorite. Would you nominate Tracy Morgan or Jack McBrayer from “[30 Rock](#) [2]”? Kevin Dillon or Jeremy Piven for “[Entourage](#) [21]”? Justin Kirk or Kevin Nealon from “[Weeds](#) [22]”? And which of the guys from the criminally underrated “[It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia](#) [23]” would you pick if you wanted to really take a chance on something new?

We picked our favorites, but they’re also representatives for the show’s supporting casts in general and, if Dillon makes it in over Piven or you want to choose Nealon over Kirk, it’s an understandable alternate. And any of the three guys on “Philadelphia” are deserving even if they don’t quite make our top six cut.

All we know for sure is that Emmy voters really need to take the last chance they’ll get to nominate the show-stealing Ray Wise from “[Reaper](#) [24]” and Neil Patrick Harris had his best year to date as “[How I Met You Mother](#) [25]” really started to click this season.

As for what “will” happen, Jon Cryer is likely to get in over several of our choices for the always-nominated “[Two and a Half Men](#) [26]” and you can expect a nod for someone from “[The Office](#) [18]”. If they do go with a Dunder Mifflin employee, here’s an idea - jump on the “[Hangover](#) [27]” band wagon and nominate Ed Helms. We love Rainn Wilson as much as the next guy, but Helms was more inspired this year as he watched his doomed engagement to Angela fall apart.

Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy



Jenna Fischer on The Office
Photo credit: NBC

Kristin Chenoweth, “Pushing Daisies”
Rosemarie DeWitt, “United States of Tara”
Jenna Fischer, “The Office”
Elizabeth Perkins, “Weeds”
Cobie Smulders, “How I Met Your Mother”
Kristin Wiig, “Saturday Night Live”

Last year was the first that the cast of “[Saturday Night Live](#) [28]” was eligible in this category and, rightly so, they nominated the deserving Amy Poehler. Amy only worked half of this season, one of the best in many years for the show, so why not spread the wealth to one of the most talented comediennees in the history of the show - the sublime Kristin Wiig?

Like Ray Wise, there’s also a great opportunity here to nominate another amazing supporting star on a canceled show, the awesome Kristin Chenoweth for “[Pushing Daisies](#) [12]”. She made the cut last year. Emmy voters - nominate her whenever you get the chance.

Meanwhile, Showtime continues to excel and should earn more nods this year than any before. While “Weeds” has gone downhill a bit, Elizabeth Perkins’ perfect and often episode-stealing arc last season in which she had to go to rehab earns her a spot. Showtime should earn a few nods for “[United States of Tara](#) [29]” and the first should come for Rosemarie DeWitt (who deserved and was snubbed already this year for an Academy Award nod for “Rachel Getting Married”).

“The Office” is something of a boy’s club, but Jenna Fischer did her best work to date as she joined the ill-fated “Michael Scott Paper Company” on “The Office,” so just like Pam, it’s time that Jenna gets a little more recognition this year.

Finally, Alyson Hannigan turned her real-life pregnancy into something hysterical (and difficult to cover up) on “How I Met Your Mother,” but her lack of screen time in the second half of the season should allow room for her increasingly funny co-star Cobie Smulders to get a nod. Like most of the cast, she did her best work of the series to date this season.

Best Lead Actor in a Comedy Series



Danny McBride on Eastbound and Down

Photo credit: HBO

Alec Baldwin, “30 Rock”
Steve Carell, “The Office”
Zachary Levi, “Chuck”
Danny McBride, “Eastbound and Down”
Jim Parsons, “The Big Bang Theory”
Tony Shalhoub, “Monk”

There are a few nominees here that are virtually guaranteed and for good reason. Alec Baldwin, Steve Carell, and Tony Shalhoub continue to drive the success of their very well-liked shows and, while it may be predictable to suggest them, they deserve the nominations that they can almost count on.

So why not make the other nominees a little more out of left field instead of a safe (but more likely) choice like Charlie Sheen in “Two and a Half Men”? (Does anyone really gather around the watercooler to talk about how awesome the Ma-sheen was following a very special episode of “Men”?)

Zachary Levi has really developed a strong comic timing on the underrated “[Chuck](#) [4]” and he’s the main reason the show has earned such a strong cult following (and won itself a last second cancellation reprieve). An unexpected Emmy nomination could do that show a world of good in its struggle for ratings and survival.

“[The Big Bang Theory](#) [15]” is one of the funnier shows on television and the perfect performance by Jim Parsons as Sheldon is one of the main reasons. He might have had a better shot in supporting but he’s eligible in lead, so vote for him there. His comic timing is amazing.

And then there’s the performance for which it will be most difficult to find a clip that they can air on network TV - the hysterical work by Danny McBride on HBO’s “[Eastbound and Down](#) [30]”. If you haven’t seen it yet, you should. If you have seen it, you know he deserves to be nominated.

Best Lead Actress in a Comedy



Toni Collette on United States of Tara
Photo credit: Showtime

- Christina Applegate, “Samantha Who?”
- Toni Collette, “United States of Tara”
- Kaley Cuoco, “The Big Bang Theory”
- Tina Fey, “30 Rock”
- Anna Friel, “Pushing Daisies”
- Mary-Louise Parker, “Weeds”

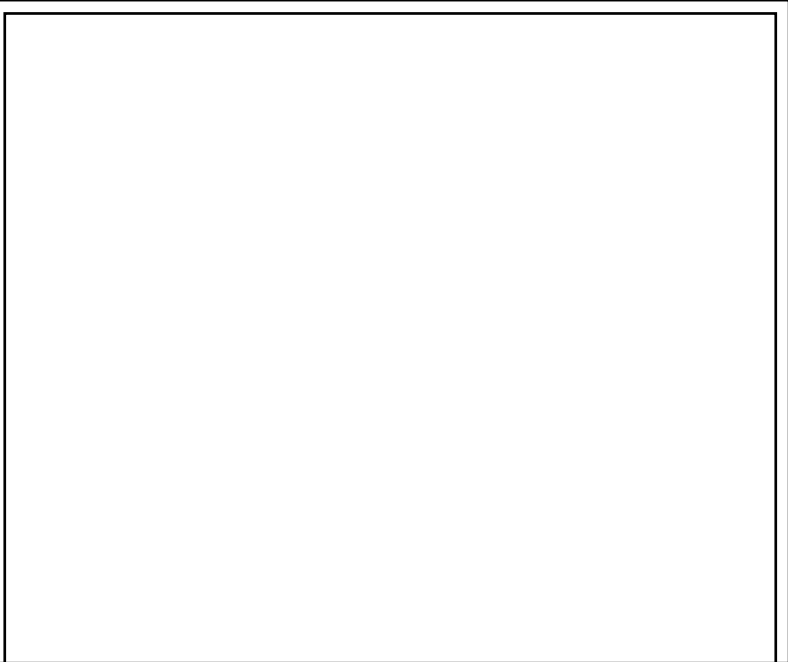
We know this can be a tough category to fill but, please, let’s not resort to America Ferrera and Julia Louis-Dreyfus again. There are simply more deserving actresses out there.

Christina Applegate, Tina Fey, and Mary-Louise Parker deserve to return to the dance and duplicate their nominations from last year for “[Samantha Who?](#) [31],” “30 Rock,” and “Weeds,” respectively. They’ve all had better years but they’re still more than good enough to make the big six.

As for the other three, the lovely and charming Anna Friel deserves consideration for her pitch-perfect work on “Pushing Daisies” and Toni Collette is absolutely flawless on “United States of Tara”. We wouldn’t be surprised to hear either of their names on nomination morning.

More surprising but just as deserving would be a nod for the underrated Kaley Cuoco of “The Big Bang Theory”. In the show’s excellent second season, Cuoco really proved she could play with the boys in this very male-driven ensemble and more than held her own in multiple episodes.

Best Comedy





The Office
Photo credit: NBC

- “30 Rock”
- “The Big Bang Theory”
- “Eastbound and Down”
- “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia”
- “The Office”
- “Pushing Daisies”

Last year it was “30 Rock,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” “Entourage,” “The Office,” and “Two and a Half Men”. The two NBC shows deserve to repeat and remain the best comedy hour on television.

As for the rest? “Curb” isn’t eligible (there hasn’t been a new episode since 2007), “Entourage” had a slightly down year (although it wouldn’t be that horrible if it was nominated), and we’ve never understood the massive acclaim for “Men,” a decent show but not an award-worthy one in the slightest.

What’s ironic is that there are two CBS sitcoms that DO deserve nomination although my jaw will drop if they both make the Emmy cut - “The Big Bang Theory” and “How I Met Your Mother” - an hour of television that often out-delivered NBC this past year for the funniest hour on television. “Mother” was a bit too hit-and-miss at times, so let’s go with “Big Bang Theory” if we have to pick only one.

“Pushing Daisies” is the most tragically canceled shows of the last several years and the Academy often jumps at a last chance to nominate a show that they will never be able to again. If you can, voting members of the Academy, please take this opportunity to give The Pie-Hole some well-deserved post-cancellation love.

Nothing was as sublimely ridiculous in 2008-2009 as HBO’s unbelievable “Eastbound and Down” with its spectacular direction by the great David Gordon Green (“Pineapple Express”) and Jody Best (“Observe and Report”). If you haven’t seen “Eastbound,” catch up with it on DVD next week (and watch for a full review soon).

Finally, very few shows make us laugh out loud like FX’s inspired “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia”. It’s one of the top-rated shows on Hulu for a reason and is developing a growing following with every episode. Emmy voters, try and jump on a bandwagon before its come to a stop for a change.

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

Best Supporting Actor in a Drama

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John Mahoney in In Treatment
Photo credit: HBO

- Jeremy Davies, “Lost”
- Michael Emerson, “Lost”
- Walton Goggins, “The Shield”
- William Hurt, “Damages”
- John Mahoney, “In Treatment”
- Aaron Paul, “Breaking Bad”

There’s no way that this category won’t include a shake-up or two. Last year’s winner, Zeljko Ivanek of “[Damages](#) [32]” wasn’t on season two of that show and his co-star and fellow nominee, Ted Danson, had a much smaller role that won’t be nominated. That’s two open spots.

As for repeats, Michael Emerson deserves to be here again for “[Lost](#) [33]” and John Slattery for “[Mad Men](#) [11]” wouldn’t be a horrible decision, although let me suggest a few alternatives.

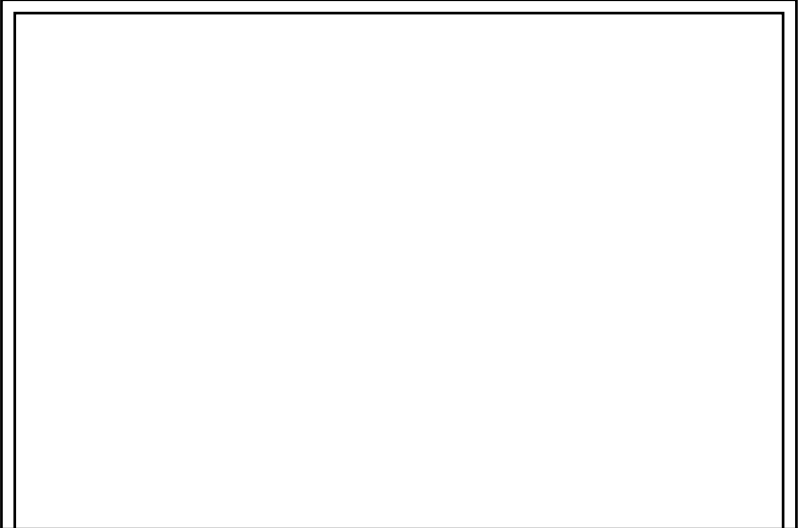
The Television Critics Association finally nominated the great Walton Goggins for his amazing final season of “[The Shield](#) [19]”. The Academy should follow suit and nominate one of the best supporting performances of the last decade.

If they wanted to pick a fellow “Lost” cast member to join Emerson, Jeremy Davies did spectacular work this year, although there are clearly several good choices on that island.

Even though we think the second season of “Damages” doesn’t come close to matching the first, we expect that William Hurt’s presence on the show guarantees him a nod and you can’t fight destiny.

Finally, voters should turn to two drastically different but brilliant cable performances for the last two slots. The always-amazing John Mahoney on the fantastic “[In Treatment](#) [9]” and Aaron Paul for his riveting work on “[Breaking Bad](#) [34]”. They gave Cranston the award last year for “Bad” and his co-star is just as good.

Best Supporting Actress in a Drama





Hope Davis in In Treatment
Photo credit: HBO

- Jennifer Carpenter, “Dexter”
- Hope Davis, “In Treatment”
- Marcia Gay Harden, “Damages”
- Cherry Jones, “24”
- Elizabeth Mitchell, “Lost”
- Alison Pill, “In Treatment”

We’ve never understood the popularity of “[Grey’s Anatomy](#) [35],” so can’t stump for last year’s Sandra Oh or Chandra Wilson. And “[Brothers & Sisters](#) [36]” is a decent soap opera that we don’t mind catching up with on DVD but would never nominate. Finally, Dianne Wiest is great, but there were two better supporting actress performances from the great “In Treatment” this season. So, we’re suggesting a complete house-cleaning and a whole new list of nominees.

In our dream Emmy world, Hope Davis and Alison Pill share an Emmy for their amazing work on “In Treatment”. Nominate them both and maybe that can actually happen.

Jennifer Carpenter and Elizabeth Mitchell should have been nominated last year for “[Dexter](#) [5]” and “Lost,” respectively, so let’s make up for that injustice this year.

Finally, Marcia Gay Harden just won a Tony. Encourage actresses of her caliber to do more television by nominating her for “Damages” and do the same with the great Cherry Jones, the most intriguing character on “[24](#) [37]” this season.

Best Lead Actor in a Drama Series





Denis Leary in Rescue Me
Photo credit: FX

- Gabriel Byrne, “In Treatment”
Michael Chiklis, “The Shield”
Bryan Cranston, “Breaking Bad”
Michael C. Hall, “Dexter”
Jon Hamm, “Mad Men”
Denis Leary, “Rescue Me”

This category is unbelievably crowded. We could offer a worthy list of five alternate nominees in Jeffrey Donovan for “[Burn Notice](#) [38],” Nathan Fillion for “[Castle](#) [39],” Simon Baker for “[The Mentalist](#) [17],” Damian Lewis for “[Life](#) [40],” and Kiefer Sutherland for “24”. But, as great as all five of them are, there are six that are just a bit better.

We think voters should copy at least four of last year’s nominees - Bryan Cranston, Michael C. Hall, Gabriel Byrne, and John Hamm for “Breaking Bad,” “Dexter,” “In Treatment,” and “Mad Men,” respectively.

Let’s look to the consistently great FX for the other two slots. Michael Chiklis should have been nominated multiple times for “The Shield” - he arguably did his best work of the series in the final season - Denis Leary continues to get better every episode on “[Rescue Me](#) [13]”. He’s doing the best work of his career in season five. Nominate them both.

Best Lead Actress in a Drama

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Anna Paquin in True Blood
Photo credit: HBO

Glenn Close, “Damages”
January Jones, “Mad Men”
Regina King, “Southland”
Mary McCormack, “In Plain Sight”
Anna Paquin, “True Blood”
Kyra Sedgwick, “The Closer”

We love Holly Hunter in general but not her work on “[Saving Grace](#) [41].” However, we’re down with nominating her TNT co-star, the fantastic Kyra Sedgwick on “[The Closer](#) [16]”. She should repeat and get a deserving nod.

It would be a shock if Glenn Close didn’t repeat for “Damages” and 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 first season of “Mad Men”. Let’s make up for that mistake this year. Also Mary McCormack is riveting on “[In Plain Sight](#) [42]” and Regina King is easily the best thing about “[Southland](#) [43]”. Both would be shocking choices that would indicate that the Academy is willing to think outside of the box.

Finally, Anna Paquin is the life of the undead hit “True Blood,” so it’d be a shame to forget her.

Best Drama



The Shield
Photo credit: FX

“Dexter”
“In Treatment”
“Lost”
“Mad Men”
“The Shield”
“True Blood”

There are a surprising number of good choices for the big category of the night. We would be stunned and very happy if the Academy would take a risk on a show like “Burn Notice,” “Breaking Bad,” “Battlestar Galactica,” or “Rescue Me,” but we don’t see that happening and can actually suggest six other nominees.

The Academy definitely moved outside of their comfort zone last year, nominating two basic cable series for the first time - “Damages” and “Mad Men”. The former had too disappointing a second season to repeat but we expect the latter will and deserves the nod. “Dexter” should repeat as well, even if the third season wasn’t quite as good as the perfect second (and we wouldn’t be too disappointed if it were replaced by one of the four shows in the first paragraph).

For the rest of last year’s nominees, even “House” fans think the last season was a step down and they thankfully can’t nominate “Boston Legal” again.

With “Dexter” and “Mad Men” repeating, what else might make the cut for the other three spots?

There have been rumors that HBO might consider canceling “In Treatment”. A nomination for the Best Drama on TV might change their minds. Heck, the show arguably deserves to win.

The network also deserves a nod for their insanely addictive “[True Blood](#) [20],” the most ridiculously watchable hour of television of the week. It may be soapy and ridiculous (which means it probably won’t be nominated) but it’s much harder than people think to make TV this riveting.

What more is there to say about “Lost”? When we look back at the ’00s, it will be one of the two most influential shows of the entire decade (with “24”). Season five wasn’t perfect, but it was definitely top six.

Finally, the last season of “The Shield” was the best program of 2008 and an amazing end to a spectacular show. Don’t let your last chance to nominate this great series pass you by.



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