

Top of the Week

ABC's gains are turning television upside down

February-March rating books are sending shudder through NBC and CBS ranks, electrifying ABC affiliates, whose gains are both across-the-board and spectacular; next question: will momentum hold through upcoming May sweeps

The local TV audience measurement books currently reaching agencies and broadcasters reflect what may prove to be the biggest upheaval in viewing patterns in television ratings history.

The program strength that has kept ABC-TV in first place in the national prime-time ratings for the last 10 weeks is sweeping ABC affiliates to positions of contention or dominance in market after market where they have been more used to running behind—often far behind—their CBS and NBC competitors.

First returns from Arbitron Television's February-March measurements—returns covering 72 of the top-100 markets—show that the ABC affiliates in those markets boosted their prime-time households totals by an average of 29.5% in sweeping, as a group, from third place last year to first place this year (see table).

Their shares of the three-network audience also moved from third place to first, on a gain of 24.1%.

The ABC group's advances were made at the expense of both CBS and NBC affiliates, but less the former than the latter, which declined 8.6% in prime-time households and 12.4% in network audience share to drop from second place to third in both categories.

Although the ABC group's gains and the CBS and NBC groups' declines date to the February-March sweeps of 1975, they show up most dramatically when compared with the sweeps of last November—before the "second-season" changes in December and January launched ABC on its current winning streak.

It is also apparent that the total network audience represented by the affiliates in these markets has increased in the past

year, by 4.3% over-all. That's a net gain of 1,334,000 households, after offsetting NBC affiliates' losses of 869,000 and CBS losses of 543,000.

A measure of the changes that are taking place is suggested in these calculations in the 72 top-100 markets for which information was available:

- In the 71 markets in which ABC has a primary affiliate (it has none in Lansing, Mich., the 96th), the ABC affiliate was number one in 43 markets, number two in 16 and in third place in 12. A year ago ABC had six firsts, 20 seconds and 45 thirds. (Last November, in the first half of the current season, it had 17 firsts, 21 seconds, 33 thirds.)

- ABC had a 40% or higher share of the three-network homes audience in 22 markets—including eight of the top-10 markets. Its affiliates were in first place in all of the top-10 markets except New York and had 40 or better shares in Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco, Washington, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, falling below the 40 mark only in New York (35.5%) and Detroit (37.8%).

- A UHF station, KCST(TV) San Diego, an ABC affiliate, took first place over two network-affiliated VHF rivals for the first known time. The channel 39 outlet had a 35.7 share as compared with a 33.2 for KFMB-TV (CBS) on channel 8 and a 31.1

for KGTV(TV) (NBC) on channel 10.

- In the 71 top-100 markets in which ABC has outlets, all 71 ABC affiliates showed audience gains. These ranged from 0.8% to 74%, but 14 were in the 40%-50% range, six were between 50% and 60% and two were above 60% (see list, following page).

- In the 70 top-100 markets in which CBS has affiliates, 16 CBS stations showed audience gains, 53 showed losses and one maintained its year-ago level.

- NBC has affiliates in all 72 of the top-100 markets for which figures were available: Four of these showed increases, 63 showed losses and five held even with their 1975 results.

- In smaller markets—those below the top 100—for which reports were available at midweek, ABC had affiliates in 21 and all 21 showed audience gains, mostly in double-number percentages, since February-March 1975; CBS had affiliates in 22 and seven of these has gains, 11 lost, four held even; NBC had affiliates in 23, of which seven had gains, 12 losses, four no change.

Although ABC's San Diego affiliate was the first U to outdo rival network V's, the ABC UHF outlet in Springfield-Decatur, Ill., claimed second place in that market with a 33.2 share of the network audience, and the ABC U in Harrisburg-York-Lancaster-Lebanon, Pa., was tied with the

From clear third to easy first in one year. That's ABC-TV's prime-time story based on the first reports available—covering 72 of the top-100 TV markets—in Arbitron Television's February-March sweep. The prime-time averages for those 72 markets are summarized in the tables below along with comparable results from the same markets in last November's sweep and the one in February-March 1975, as compiled by ABC researchers. In some individual markets day-part averages were used based on data that Arbitron made available in advance of its full reports for those markets (these markets are indicated in the tables on the next page). Returns still to come from the 28 other top-100 markets could change the picture shown in this table, but radical change is not expected. A similar pro-ABC tide is evident in reports thus far available for markets below the top-100.

HOUSEHOLDS (000)

	Feb.-Mar. 1975	Nov. 1975	Feb.-Mar. 1976	% Change*
ABC	9,302	9,829	12,048	+29.5%
CBS	11,220	10,677	10,677	-4.8%
NBC	10,154	10,257	9,285	-8.6%

THREE-NETWORK SHARES (%)

	Feb.-Mar. 1975	Nov. 1975	Feb.-Mar. 1976	% Change*
ABC	30.3	31.8	37.6	+24.1%
CBS	36.6	35.1	33.4	- 8.7%
NBC	33.1	33.1	29.0	-12.4%

*% change is from Feb.-Mar. 1975 to Feb.-Mar. 1976.