

Taker-on of challenges: Ted Turner of Atlanta

Much has been written about Ted Turner. His sailing ventures have put him in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*, *Yachting* and the *New York Times*. His skippering of the *Mariner* and then the *Valiant* in the 1974 America's Cup competition prompted a book, *The Grand Gesture*, by Roger Vaughan.

He's been characterized as a man who seeks adversity and will go out of his way to find an odds-against-him fight. The trophies from his victories at sea stand as evidence of his spirit.

On land, Ted Turner competes in communications—as board chairman of Turner Communications Corp., Atlanta, a broadcasting and outdoor advertising firm. And earlier this year he tossed his hat onto the baseball diamond when he bought the Atlanta Braves.

Ted Turner had corporate responsibilities thrust upon him at 24 when his father's death left him in control of several outdoor advertising companies in the South. Instead of grabbing what he could and pursuing a full-time sailing career, young Turner decided to bring his father's company back into the black. "The challenge was the big thing," he recalls, and besides, he had a company, "even though it was way overextended."

Ted Turner not only brought the outdoor advertising companies back on their feet but also entered the broadcast business. Irwin Mazo, a personal friend and former Turner business consultant, recalls that the "preponderance of advice" was that the merger with Rice Communications for WTCG(TV) Atlanta and the purchase of WRET-TV Charlotte, N.C., were bad investments. WGOW(AM) and WYNQ(FM) Chattanooga, Tenn., were also acquired along the way. Mr. Mazo claims that Ted Turner purchased the UHF television stations to prove his advisers wrong. He did just that and, says Mr. Mazo, "I wouldn't want to compete with him."

Mike Kievman, vice president for programming for Cox Broadcasting's WSB-TV Atlanta, is one who has to compete. He credits Mr. Turner with generating audience excitement for independent television stations. And, as an example of how Mr. Turner throws himself into his causes, Mr. Kievman recalled four years ago when Mr. Turner went on WRET-TV to ask the public to come to the aid of the financially strapped station by contributing the price of two theater tickets. A total of \$22,682 was collected with the promise that if the station was successful, the loans would be repaid with interest. Earlier this year he did just that, at 6%.

Building his independent stations into profit-making operations took much re-



Robert Edward (Ted) Turner III—board chairman, Turner Communications Corp., Atlanta, and president, Atlanta Braves; b. Nov. 19, 1938, Cincinnati; attended Brown University, 1956-60; general manager, Turner Advertising, Macon, Ga., 1960; various capacities for Turner companies, Atlanta, 1962; president and chief executive officer, Turner companies, 1963; m. Jane Shirley Smith of Birmingham, Ala., 1965; five children—Laura Lee, 14, and Teddy, 13 (by previous marriage); Rhett, 9; Beauregard, 8, and Sarah Jean, 7.

search, Mr. Turner said, including study of what made the Metromedia group successful. He went for youngsters in the afternoon and added a heavy schedule of sports. This year WTCG originates the Atlanta Braves games for a six-state regional network of 29 stations. And in an unusual programming move, many of the games are replayed at 1 a.m. Broadcast rights this year became academic when Mr. Turner purchased the team from the Atlanta/LaSalle Corp.

On the news end, Mr. Turner likes to look at his stations as "cheery." He claims he doesn't really go in for reporting the violence and scandal and equates a good deal of television news with the *National Enquirer*. "There's a lot of yellow journalism," he asserts, believing that news operations often are "accentuating the negative." Mr. Turner claims that the "one percent" of the public that gets in trouble is afforded "80%" of news coverage because the media "constantly harp on it." As an example, he cites the scandal

surrounding Congressman Wayne Hays. "We're becoming regional stations," Mr. Turner says of his television operations. Currently his channel 17 in Atlanta is carried by terrestrial microwave to 95 cable systems in six states where it reaches 440,000 homes.

Bigger plans, however, are in the works. According to Terry McGuirk, channel 17 director of cable relations, an application is pending at the FCC to operate a send-and-receive earth station at WTCG. Southern Satellite Systems (which Turner Communications incorporated and then divested because it didn't want to enter the common-carrier business) would deliver WTCG's signal to cable systems at a charge of 10 cents per subscriber. While interest has come from as far away as Idaho, the main effort will be in the Southeast. Mr. McGuirk says it wouldn't be unreasonable to have a one-million-homes goal in that region. Sports events such as Atlanta Braves away games could also be brought in via the satellite, which Mr. McGuirk hopes will be operating by middle to late August.

Mr. Turner, a member of the National Cable Television Association, views the National Association of Broadcasters as an "anticable lobbying association." He doesn't believe that cable should be able to supplant broadcasting but is glad some restrictions over the medium have been taken away. Although his radio stations belong to the NAB, Mr. Turner claims that it is dominated by those who "want to perpetuate control."

On the surface it appears that Mr. Turner's business career has been marked only by success. Yet he is quick to point out that everything hasn't been profit-making, although "the failures go unnoticed." Two such failures were in the screen printing and boat-building businesses.

He looks at these ventures philosophically. "Winning doesn't mean anything unless you lose too," he says, believing that there's "no real exhilaration unless you've been in the valley to begin with."

Ted Turner is sailing now, as a member of the U.S. Orion Patch team. He manages about six weeks off a year to sail because "we've got a heck of a good operation" and good management. And rather than just waiting for him to return to their Marietta, Ga., home his wife, Jane, and five children frequently meet him on foreign docks.

Mr. Turner has had some of his favorite expressions printed on miniature billboards. One which sat on his desk for a while reads: "Either lead, follow or get out of the way." He has succeeded in sailing and communications. Now he hopes to eventually lead the World Series to Atlanta.