

Top of the Week

ABC-TV bags largest game yet in affiliation hunt: KSTP-TV

Pioneer station in Minneapolis drops NBC after 30 years despite pleas from Silverman and Adams; it's 19th affiliate to switch to ABC since ratings ascendancy

ABC-TV pulled the biggest coup in its long campaign to upgrade its affiliate list last week by signing KSTP-TV Minneapolis-St. Paul away from NBC-TV.

The signing, despite the personal intervention of NBC President Fred Silverman, brought to 19 the number of affiliates ABC has taken from rival networks since it took over top perch in the prime-time ratings two and a half years ago. Most, although not all, of those changes came on ABC's initiative.

Despite the earlier victories in ABC's affiliation campaign, in the view of most observers none could compare with the acquisition of KSTP-TV, billed as the third television station to go on the air in the U.S., the country's first all-color station, the first with a regularly scheduled daily news program, the first with news in color, an NBC affiliate for 30 years and owned by a pioneer operator, Hubbard Broadcasting Inc., whose AM affiliation with NBC goes back 50 years.

In addition, KSTP-TV has the dominant news operation in the market, ranked the 14th ADI, and one of the strongest in the country—which ABC clearly hopes will provide rub-off benefits for its own third-place newscasts.

"Unless they sign an NBC or CBS O&O," one observer said, "they'll have a hard time topping this one."

The importance both sides attached to the new alliance was reflected in the fact that the announcement, usually made by presidents or vice presidents, was made in this case by Leonard H. Goldenson, chairman of ABC Inc., and Stanley E. Hubbard, 81-year-old founder and still chairman and chief executive officer of Hubbard Broadcasting.

KSTP-TV's decision to go with ABC was made last Monday, despite a visit the previous week by NBC President Silverman, Vice Chairman David C. Adams and Ray

Timothy, executive vice president for affiliate relations. They flew out in a plane owned by RCA, NBC's parent company, for a special presentation to dissuade Mr. Hubbard and his son, Stanley S. Hubbard, president and general manager of the Hubbard stations, from changing.

"They're all fine people," Stanley S. Hubbard said last week, "and they made an excellent presentation."

But, obviously, so did ABC's people, and Mr. Hubbard said he felt a special compatibility with that network.

"We at KSTP-TV have prided ourselves on our reputation as young, aggressive broadcasters, as programmers with imagination, with a feeling of responsibility to our community. ABC is not afraid to try the new and different, and we feel its management is most compatible with our philosophy," the younger Mr. Hubbard said.

Stanley E. Hubbard said that "ABC's leadership over the past seasons was a consideration" but that "ABC's long-range potential for continuing that leadership" was the deciding factor.

"We feel ABC is the network of the future. It has the strongest management team in broadcasting today and therefore has been able to give much more thought to future planning for its audience needs and interests."

NBC officials said part of their trouble in holding onto the channel 5 station was that KSTP-TV wants to extend its range with a network of translators that would get into two areas where NBC-TV has affiliates but ABC-TV does not: Alexandria, Minn., and Eau Claire, Wis. They said KSTP-TV hoped to put in perhaps as many as 30 translators, which it could do as an ABC affiliate but would have to cut back to

six or seven as an NBC outlet, in view of NBC's affiliations in Alexandria (KCMT-TV) and Eau Claire (WEAU-TV).

A big part of NBC's pitch was that its ratings are going to rise and ABC's will decline, and that this, coupled with the translators that would be possible as an NBC affiliate, would largely if not wholly offset the audience gains from moving to ABC and installing the larger number of translators. NBC officials urged the Hubbards to wait at least a year or so before making a final decision.

But late Monday afternoon the elder Mr. Hubbard called them and told them the move to ABC was on.

In on the contract sessions with the Hubbards were James E. Duffy, ABC-TV president, and Robert F. Fountain, ABC vice president in charge of affiliate relations, who had been ABC's principal negotiator in the deal.

The younger Mr. Hubbard confirmed last week that he plans to build a network of translators, and intended to do so regardless of the KSTP-TV affiliation—and, in fact, applied for one in Alexandria some time ago. He would not confirm that the total number might reach 30, saying final plans have not been decided on.

Just when the affiliation change will take place depends in part upon when NBC-TV settles on a new affiliate in the market. Its contract with KSTP-TV runs to next March 5—which is also said to be termination date of ABC's contract with its current affiliate, KMSP-TV (channel 9). There are two other commercial V's there: WCCO-TV (channel 4), which is affiliated with CBS-TV, and Metromedia's WTCN-TV (channel 11), an independent.

NBC officials said they intended to

From one to another. ABC's tally of station changes, not including satellites, since Jan. 1, 1976, follows ("acquired" means ABC obtained a primary affiliate in a market where it had no primary before; "switch" means a change of primary affiliations within a market):

1976—acquired KRGV-TV Weslaco, Tex., ch. 5, from NBC on March 15; acquired KEVN-TV Rapid City, S.D., ch. 7, from CBS on July 11; switched to KXLY-TV Spokane, ch. 4 and formerly with CBS, on Aug. 8; acquired KXLF-TV Butte, Mont., ch. 4, from CBS Aug. 30; took on two new stations—KDUB-TV Dubuque, Iowa, ch. 40, and WCA-TV Tallahassee, Fla., ch. 27—on Sept. 12 and Sept. 16, respectively.

1977—acquired WBOY-TV Clarksburg, W. Va., ch. 12, from NBC on Jan. 3; switched to WISN-TV Milwaukee, ch. 12 and formerly on CBS, March 27; switched to WPRI-TV Providence, R.I., ch. 12 and formerly with CBS, and to KGTV-TV San Diego, ch. 10 and formerly NBC, both on June 27; acquired WCB-TV Columbus, Miss., ch. 4, from CBS Aug. 28; acquired KWTX-TV Waco, Tex., ch. 10, from CBS Sept. 4; switched to WBRZ-TV Baton Rouge, ch. 2 and formerly on NBC, Sept. 5; switched to WREN-TV Albany, N.Y., ch. 10 and formerly on CBS, Oct. 23; switched to WAAY-TV Huntsville, Ala., ch. 31 and formerly on NBC, Dec. 11.

1978—acquired KOB-TV Medford, Ore., ch. 5, and KOTV-TV Klamath Falls, Ore., both from CBS on May 1; switched to WSOC-TV Charlotte, N.C., ch. 9 and formerly on NBC, July 1; acquired KFPW-TV Fort Smith, Ark., ch. 40, from CBS, also July 1; acquired Ktwo-TV Casper, Wyo., ch. 2, from NBC Sept. 1; acquired KSTP-TV Minneapolis-St. Paul, ch. 5, from NBC, effective date to be determined.