

ABC unhappy with its other-night editions of pro prime-time football

Three Sunday and one Thursday versions of popular Monday games fall in the ratings; network will only do minimum allowable next year

ABC Sports, suffering mediocre ratings for some of the extra prime-time games in its new National League Football contract, plans next season to air the minimum number of such games possible under the deal, four, and to keep them away from Sunday night.

"It is our feeling and the feeling of the NFL that the number should be four in 1979," said James Spence, senior vice president of ABC Sports, and "I think the games would be of greater interest on other days than Sunday." More Thursday games would at this point be the most likely prospect, Mr. Spence said, although the specifics are still being negotiated.

The NFL deal provides for from four to six of the extra games each season, at a price of about \$3 million each ("Closed Circuit," Nov. 14, 1977). The number of additional games next year was to be determined after evaluating the performances of those this year, when one Thursday night game and three Sunday night games were scheduled.

The first Sunday game, on Sept. 24, aired during the premiere weeks of CBS-TV and NBC-TV and pulled a 16.3 rating and a 28 share, a distant third in its time period. The second on Nov. 12, pulled an 18.3/31, also a third-place showing. The Thursday game, on Oct. 26, pulled a 22.6/37 and won the night for ABC, but not by a greater margin than its series usually provide. (Those ratings are for the full duration of the games, which all overran prime time and in doing so increased their ratings averages slightly due to the local news competition on the other networks.)

The final Sunday game is to air Dec. 3, when Denver will meet Oakland in what Mr. Spence believes should be a high-interest contest. Sunday is the heaviest viewing night of the week and therefore the most competitive for the networks. CBS and NBC both have Sunday games and each week one of them airs a doubleheader.

ABC President Fred Pierce told BROADCASTING that the NFL forced ABC to accept the extra game package during negotiations last fall. According to Kevin O'Malley, a vice president of CBS Sports and a participant in the negotiations, the league at first put the package up for grabs to all three networks. But ABC wanted to keep its prime-time exclusivity while the other networks wanted to hold on to their rights to the play-offs and Super Bowls, he

said, so the NFL changed its mind.

Football ratings are slightly off on all three networks so far this season. Through Nov. 13, ABC's Monday night games averaged a 21.1 rating, Mr. Spence said, about a half point off their average at this point last year. NBC said it has an 11.7 average now compared to a 12.5 last year, while CBS said its average is 14.1, down 6% from a year ago.

Sports executives at all three networks put part of the blame on the earlier start this season (13 days earlier), when lower viewing levels may have dragged averages down. A CBS executive also said the network's average dropped when NBC scheduled a World Series game against CBS's Sunday afternoon football. Last year the Sunday series game aired at night, he said.

ABC's Mr. Spence also said last week that his division is looking to cut back on the number of prime-time baseball games it accepts in the new contract now being negotiated with the professional leagues. Mr. Spence declined to give specifics on the discussions, but he didn't contradict Mr. Pierce's assertions that ABC wants between eight and 10 Monday-night games instead of the 18 telecast last season. William F. Turner, head of the ABC affiliates' sports committee and president of KCAU-TV Sioux City, Iowa, said it is his understanding that some Sunday afternoon games are also being considered.

Mr. Turner also agreed with a number of other ABC affiliates sampled last week who said that there had been no affiliate poll concerning whether ABC should renew its baseball contract at all. Several newspapers have reported that such a poll found an overwhelming margin against renewal, but Mr. Turner and others said dissatisfaction with the games has been greatly lowered by ABC's moving up starting times of the games from 8:30 p.m. NYT to 8 p.m. *Monday Night Baseball* last season averaged a 12.7 rating, up slightly from the 12.5 record set in 1977, ABC said.

MPAA goading FCC to move on request to limit network power over producers

Almost a year and a half ago, the Motion Picture Association of America petitioned the FCC to limit the agreements networks could negotiate with producers. MPAA is still waiting for a response, so now, through its attorneys, it renewed its request, and this time asked for action within the next 30 days.

The original pleading, filed on June 1, 1977, requested changes in the FCC's financial interest ruling that would bar networks (1) from entering agreements that grant options to produce programs at preset prices, (2) from obtaining prolonged exclusivity rights against the showings by others of series episodes after

the network exhibition rights in the older episodes have expired, and (3) from precluding producers from creating new and diverse derivative works based on previously licensed series and licensing the new programs to others.

Arthur Scheiner, counsel for MPAA, notes in his letter to Chairman Charles D. Ferris that MPAA President Jack Valenti wrote the commission late last year expressing concern about the lack of action. In February, Mr. Scheiner adds, Wallace Johnson, chief of the Broadcast Bureau, replied, stating that the petition would be "one of the first matters" taken up by the new network inquiry staff, then being reconstituted.

But, Mr. Scheiner said, when the further notice reopening the inquiry was finally issued, on Oct. 20, it said nothing about the petition. And the co-directors of the inquiry staff, Thomas Krattenmaker and Stanley Besen, said the staff was not working on the matter.

Mr. Scheiner noted that the petition has "languished" at the commission for almost one and a half years and is in "no better posture today than when it was originally filed." Accordingly, he added, "continued failure of the commission to act on a matter of such important and urgent concern is wholly unreasonable."

Warner TV acquires some big players for its producing team

Among those signed to contracts: Komack, Arnold, Blye-Einstein and Nicholl-Ross-West

Warner Bros. Television Distribution has secured exclusive worldwide distribution rights from what it calls a "powerhouse of leading producers." Those who have signed their names to multiyear contracts for current and future projects—many of them situation comedies—include James Komack, Danny Arnold, and the teams of Don Nicholl, Michael Ross and Bernie West, and Alan Blye and Bob Einstein.

The signings, over the past several months, follow Warner Bros. TV's acquisition last year of David L. Wolper's organization, which has been producing *Roots: the Next Generation* for an ABC-TV airing early next year.

James Komack, executive producer of *Welcome Back, Kotter* and *Chico and the Man*, currently syndicated domestically by Warner, has development deals for the three networks for TV movies and pilots. *Faculty Lounge*, a situation comedy pilot, is in production for NBC-TV; *Maxx*, another sitcom, is in preproduction for ABC-TV.

Danny Arnold, producer of *Barney Miller*, is giving Warner rights to the vehicles he is pursuing for ABC-TV, including orders for six episodes of a new sitcom, *Triangle*, and five half-hours of *National Graffiti*, a current-events comedy send-up.

Writing-producing team Don Nicholl,