CBS switches affiliation to WBAL-TV in Baltimore

Network will leave WMAR-TV in September for Hearst's ch. 11

CBS-TV claimed a major coup last week: the signing of the Hearst Corp.'s WBAL-TV Baltimore as an affiliate.

WBAL-TV on channel 11 and currently an NBC affiliate, will replace WMAR-TV, channel 2 outlet owned by A.S. Abell Co. (the Baltimore Sun), in the CBS lineup. Authorities said the switchover will be next September, when current affiliation contracts expire, unless an earlier date can be negotiated.

James H. Rosenfield, CBS-TV president, said that with WMAR-TV as the affiliate, "our presence in that market has not been up to the standards CBS is accustomed to."

In the last sweeps period, Rosenfield said, WMAR-TV's sign-on to sign-off average audience declined 9.6% while CBS-TV's increased 6.7%.

Apparently WMAR-TV had pre-empted more network programs than CBS liked.

"WMAR," said Rosenfield, "is a good station, but it just didn't seem to care about the network relationship."

WBAL-TV's "strength in station time and in news," he added, will make a good combination with CBS's programming.

Franklin C. Snyder, Hearst Corp. vice president, said that "we are pleased to join the CBS-TV network, and with the prospect that the strength of WBAL-TV's local programing combined with the CBS leadership in news, public service and entertainment will attract the largest audiences in Baltimore."

Dale B. Wright, president and general manager of WMAR-TV, took issue with CBS's Rosenfield. Of the network president's assertion that WMAR-TV hadn't provided CBS a sufficient "presence" in Baltimore, Wright asked: "Is that a nice way of saying we're trying to serve our local public instead of carrying network programs?"

Of WMAR's slippage in the last sweep, Wright noted that CBS-owned WCBS-TV New York also slipped, by 3.1%. "Do you think they switched that affiliation to WPIX-TV?" he asked.

He said WMAR-TV does carry Baltimore Orioles baseball, Baltimore Colts preseason football, University of Maryland/Atlantic Coast Conference basketball and "a small amount" of Baltimore Blast soccer. The station also carries a weekly public-affairs hour in prime time, "which the network never felt very good about," plus a daily half-hour children's program in network time and telethons for United Negro College Fund, Muscular Dystrophy and the local epilepsy association.

WMAR-TV presumably will move to NBC. WJZ-TV, the only other V in Baltimore, is affiliated with ABC.