

## All but done

It's not over till it's over, as someone said, but odds against ABC's overtaking CBS in this season's prime time TV ratings race are beginning to look mathematically prohibitive. Four weeks from "official" end of season on April 15, CBS is eight-tenths of rating point ahead. CBS researchers calculate that ABC would have to win each remaining week by average of five rating points just to pull even. CBS has won 16 weeks and ABC seven (and they tied one), and ABC's biggest win to date was by 3.4 rating points, for week ended Feb. 5.

## Back to basics

FCC is moving on Commissioner Mimi Dawson's proposal of omnibus inquiry to determine how much broadcast content regulation is actually required by Communications Act. Source last week said FCC Office of General Counsel has already completed initial draft that is now under review by Mass Media Bureau. Source said item should be up by summer.

## Consolidations

Katz Communications Inc., parent of Katz radio, is reportedly close to acquisition of The Christal Co., radio rep firm owned by Bob Duffy with clients in approximately 90 markets, and RKO Radio Sales, owned by RKO and representing 36 stations—including RKO's 12 radio properties—in 22 markets. Christal deal would reportedly cost Katz between \$16 million and \$18 million, RKO between \$3 million and \$5 million. If deals go through, look for Christal and RKO Radio Sales, latter probably with new name, to operate as separate entities.

## First blood

A.C. Nielsen is expected to release next week major survey measuring videocassette recorder usage in U.S. television homes. Survey is based on national sample of over 1,000 households over three-month period, with each home documenting one month's VCR usage in specially prepared diary. Survey will cover viewership for prerecorded cassettes as well as programs being taped in home and corresponding playback activity (in hopes of learning, among other things, more about frequency of commercial "zapping"). Respondents also were

questioned about preferences in machines and machine-features. VCR penetration was measured by Nielsen last November to be 9%.

## Lost cause

Latest six-month filing at Federal Election Commission shows National Cable Television Association's political action committee raised total of \$104,462 in 1983 of which \$44,225 was spent on contributions to federal candidates. NCTA's PAC raised \$27,825, from July 1 to Dec. 31, 1983. Largest contribution was \$5,000 to "Royer for U.S. Senate" campaign. Charles Royer is Seattle mayor and former president of National League of Cities. He played instrumental role in negotiating compromise last spring with NCTA that led to development of cable deregulation bill (H.R. 4103) in House. Subsequently cities abandoned compromise and opposed bill. And Royer lost his bid in Democratic primary during special election to fill Senate seat left vacant by death of Henry (Scoop) Jackson (D-Wash.).

## HBO realities

HBO is adding one more genre to its program mix—documentaries, which will be periodically scheduled under umbrella title, *America Undercover*. Imre Horvath has produced first documentary, scheduled for April 24 and titled "Murder: No Apparent Motive," which explores serial murder phenomenon. Horvath is Emmy winning journalist and former producer for *60 Minutes*.

## Action in MDS

Microband Corp. of America, in partnership with Marquee Television Network, local single-channel MDS operator, intends to launch wireless cable service in Washington later this year (see "Fifth Estater," page 95). But by time it does, substantial portion of market may have been lost to wireless cable competitor. Capitol Connection, ITFS service of George Mason University in Washington suburb of Fairfax county, Va., plans to launch four-channel wireless cable service in April. Capitol Connection has been providing two-channel service—CNN and C-SPAN—to office buildings in downtown Washington for over year. According to George Mason's Mike Kelley, it intends to add Home Team Sports, Group W's regional

sports network, and yet-unknown pay movie service in April and offer package to homes throughout city for as little as \$21.95 a month.

## Fall-back

United States Satellite Broadcasting, DBS subsidiary of Hubbard Broadcasting, may ask FCC for clarification of its DBS rules to determine whether it can use its high-power DBS satellites to provide fixed satellite services. USSB wants to know in case it launches costly DBS satellites and DBS business—broadcasting television directly to homes equipped with small earth stations—fails or is slow to develop.

## No stereo must-carry

Major issue still outstanding in FCC's proposal to authorize TV stereo, subject of meeting Thursday, March 29, is whether to require cable systems to retransmit stereo on must-carry signals. Word is that vote could be close, but that majority will leave carriage of stereo signals to cable system's discretion.

## Split in spades

Apparently breaking new ground in attorney-client relations, Robert Marmet and Harold McCombs, partners in Washington law firm that used to represent Radio Stamford Inc., licensee of WSTC(AM) and WYRS(FM) Stamford, Conn., have filed competing applications on top of renewals for those stations. According to attorney for Radio Stamford—owned by Alphonsus Donahue, CBS's Andy Rooney, and others—it's unclear what grounds challenges will be based on. Attorney said Marmet and Stamford Radio are currently involved in litigation over disputed fees. Marmet and McCombs declined to comment.

## Second thoughts

Plan to launch West Coast-originated cable superstation has been put on hold by Robert Wold Co., Los Angeles-based satellite services firm, according to senior executive there. Wold has been eager to make distant signal available through one of its leased transponders, but situation has been complicated by decision of WPIX(TV) New York to begin nationwide distribution of its signal and growing reluctance of cable operators to pay distant-signal copyright fees.