

Turner takes the stand during press tour; announces interest in televising CBS-Westmoreland trial

In a wide-ranging news conference at the NCF, Turner Broadcasting System President Ted Turner renewed his attack on the three commercial broadcast networks—labeling their programs “stupid, violent and ridiculous”—and insisted he is “very serious” about gaining control of one of the three some day. Even if he does not realize that ambition, Turner said, his services will be in 70% of all U.S. television homes by 1990, which he said would allow him “to spend as much money per hour on programming as the major broadcast networks.”

He argued that his Cable News Network and CNN Headline News are much more cost-efficient in their newsgathering than any of the three broadcast networks, estimating his per-hour costs are 1/36 those of ABC, CBS and NBC, which he claimed spend about \$250 million each in a year of news production. CNN’s annual budget, Turner said, is about \$100 million. He estimated his news services are losing about \$10 million a year, but predicted CNN will approach the break-even point in the second half of 1984.

Turner defended his decision to spend \$20.5 million on exclusive cable rights to a two-year package of National Basketball Association games (“Closed Circuit,” May 21), insisting, “We think that we will break even on the NBA package and maybe even make some money.”

“There’s nothing wrong with loss leaders,” he said in defending his sports rights bidding. “You have to take a long-term look at things.” Short-term losses for some packages may be offset by other deals, he explained.

Queried about rumors that his company may be involved in an effort by HBO to market and distribute a direct broadcast satellite package that would include most major pay and basic cable services, Turner replied: “I would hope not to be a part of an HBO-run anything.” He insisted there are no plans to scramble any of Turner’s three satellite-delivered services or to recover revenues lost to “backyard dish” owners.

“Ted does not want to scramble,” Turner Broadcasting Vice President and WTBS(TV) President Robert Wussler told reporters later. “He has always felt he was in the DBS business.” Turner has “cooled” on the idea of marketing his services directly to dish owners, according to Wussler.

On the subject of CNN’s live coverage of controversial trial and pretrial courtroom proceedings, Turner said he has no regrets over the network’s handling of either the recent barroom rape case in New Bedford, Mass., or the McMartin PreSchool child abuse case in Los Angeles.

“We think there’s a lot of good to be gained [from such coverage],” said Turner. “We’re not going to ship out.”

Turner also said his network plans to cover the libel trial involving General William Westmoreland’s suit against CBS News if the trial takes place, assuming the judge approves it. (CBS has asked for dismissal of the suit, and a decision is expected on that request in August.)

‘Newscope’ service scheduled to be discontinued

Telepictures production fails to attract crucial barter advertising, but executives hint there may be way to save show with changes

Due to insufficient clearances in “satisfactory” time periods in the top 15 markets, Telepictures announced it would not proceed with a second season of its first-run syndicated strip, *Newscope*.

However, at a press conference in New York last week, held jointly by Telepictures and Gannett, partners in *Newscope*, Telepictures executives said discussions have taken place with various parties about the possibility of continuing the service in modified form.

Without the crucial barter advertising that could only have been achieved if *Newscope* had favorable time periods in the top markets, “a show like this cannot go forward,” explained Richard T. Robertson, senior vice president, sales and marketing, Telepictures.

According to Robertson, 41 of about 92 stations had renewed *Newscope* for next season, “but without the big cities, it doesn’t give us the NTL penetration needed to attract national advertisers.” Robertson said traditionally such barter programs need between 75% and 80% coverage, with about 30% covering the major markets, to draw national sponsors.

Robertson said half of the show’s revenues were dependent on the sale of the one 30-second national barter spot in each program; the other half came from license fees. Furthermore, Robertson said barter spots were necessary to help foot the show’s \$10-million annual production bill because stations were also unwilling to forgo the national spots in exchange for higher license fees.

Telepictures executives added that *Newscope* would fulfill its contracts with stations by continuing to supply unduplicated programs until Sept. 15, a year after the show’s debut. Robertson stressed that means full budget, staff and advertising support to “sustain the program at its present level.”

“The bottom line,” Robertson commented, “is that the show was too expensive for syndication.”

Telepictures executives also acknowledged they were unprepared for the “slight decline” in local news programming. It took them by surprise, they said, because it had steadily increased for nine consecutive years. David Salzman, executive vice president, Telepictures, noted that news programming has a “slow growth curve,” but he said he expects the present “arrest” to be temporary: “We’re convinced it will increase over the long haul.”

Telepictures declined to say last week exactly what kind of modified service it has in mind. However, according to Salzman, discussions are taking place with “major station groups” and any action, because of corporate timetables, would have to come within two to three weeks.

Programers for station groups cited various reasons for the failure of *Newscope*, but the most common explanation given was that stations were scheduling it in low-viewing time periods, such as daytime, or as a local news lead-in in early fringe—periods that gave the show little exposure. Another complaint was that stations had not been supporting the show. For example, it was said, many stations had not used their top news talent to anchor the program, which would benefit a newscast containing stories with national appeal, such as *Newscope*. □

More local sweeps

What follows are reports of the May sweeps in more major metered markets. BROADCASTING reported on sweeps results in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco in the June 4 issue. Ratings cited in the following reports are not the final tabulations of Nielsen and Arbitron but are station-compiled averages of the overnight metered ratings provided to the stations by both services. Meter ratings only measure households and do not measure demographics. Final results—“the book”—should begin going to stations early this week, but will not be available for all markets until at least a month, when BROADCASTING will publish a complete market-by-market breakdown.

Detroit

Remaining on top in both rating services during the early- and late-news time slots was ABC-owned WXYZ-TV, which pulled a 12 rating/26 share in Arbitron and 13/30 in Nielsen during its 5-7 p.m. local news period. At 11 p.m. it finished with an 18/32 in Arbitron and 17/33 in Nielsen.

As for the two network affiliated stations’ late-afternoon local newscasts, both of which air from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., NBC-affiliate WDIV-TV was second with a 10/23 Arbitron and 10/22 Nielsen followed by CBS-affiliate WJBK-TV with 7/14 in Arbitron and 5/10 in Nielsen.

The same ranking for WDIV-TV and WJBK-TV in early news held true for the 11-11:30 p.m. period, with the NBC outlet in second place, posting a 13/25 in Arbitron and a 12/25 in Nielsen. CBS was third with a 12/21 in Arbitron and a 9/19 in Nielsen. Following in fourth position in both services was independent WKBD-TV’s broadcasts of *Sanford & Son*, registering a 4/7 in Arbitron and 4/9 in Nielsen.

Taking first-place honors in prime-time access—7:30-8 p.m.—is WXYZ-TV, with its showing of the increasingly popular *Wheel of Fortune* game show. The station had a 19/37 in Arbitron and an 18/34 in Nielsen—up from a year ago when it posted a 16/31 (Arbitron) and 14/29 (Nielsen) for *Tic Tac Dough*. Second in Arbitron was WXYZ-TV’s *People’s Court* program, which garnered an