

showed a decline in ratings, were *Knots Landing*, which according to the CBS analysis fell from fifth to 17th place; and *Falcon Crest*, which fell from seventh to 18th place. ABC's *Dynasty* also declined in the ratings to finish seventh, according to CBS, with a 21.2/33.

In his analysis of the sweep period, CBS's Poltrack said the main reason for CBS's third-place finish was ABC's and NBC's successful scheduling of movies on Sunday and Monday nights. In particular, he said, the other two networks took advantage of an opportunity to hurt CBS at the times where it is now strongest. During last year's May sweeps, CBS was still strong on Thursdays and Fridays. This year, however, with the dominance of the NBC Thursday comedy block, and a weakening in Friday night ratings, attributable to a drop in the *Dallas* numbers, and the ratings growth of *Miami Vice*, CBS no longer can call those two nights its own.

That, he said, leaves Sunday and Monday nights as CBS strengths. Those two nights are, he said, tailor made for the other networks to schedule a strong slate of movies, especially two-part movies, as counter-programming. Along with the strong numbers for the NBC series in repeats, Poltrack cited those movies as a leading reason for the NBC win.

Indeed, *NBC Monday Night Movies* rated fourth among all programs during the sweeps period with a 21.5/33. Of those, NBC's *Perry Mason: Notorious Nun* (23.3/42) finished first among movies. Two two-part movies on NBC, *Deliberate Stranger* (20.2/30) and *On the Wings of Eagles* (18.7/30), came in at third and fourth in the ratings for movies. CBS's highest-rated film was *Stagecoach* (22.5/36), at second place on the list of movies during the sweeps. ABC's highest rated film was *Convicted* (17.4/27), which placed sixth. Poltrack suggested that NBC had been saving up strong movies since the beginning of the year, when it knew that it was going to win the season.

ABC was the only network to broadcast a mini-series during the sweeps. CBS had scheduled two mini-series, *If Tomorrow Comes* and *Dream West*, toward the end of the broadcast season. ABC ran the 12-hour *North and South, Book II* May 4-11, and got a 21.3/33. Marvin Mord, vice president of marketing and research services, ABC, said: "There's no question that *North and South* was a valuable asset for us in the May sweeps," but added that ABC was also pleased with its performance of regular series during the month. Mord said that ABC has "gotten over the fact that *Dynasty*" does not achieve ratings as high as it used to.

In particular, he said, ABC affiliates, for whom the sweeps mean the most, should be pleased with the network's performance from 10:30-11 p.m., where they provided a strong lead-in for local newscasts. Mord noted that ABC had a 14.7/25 during that time, compared to a 14.4/25 for CBS, and a 15.4/26 for NBC.

Mord also said that a proposal for a 52-week rating season will be presented at the upcoming ABC affiliates meeting. □

Times Mirror buys Abell

Baltimore-based media firm sold for \$600 million; WMAR-TV to be spun off

Times Mirror Co., announced last week it was acquiring the A.S. Abell Co., the privately held company that publishes Baltimore's *Sun* newspapers and operates two television stations, for \$600 million in cash. The stations, WMAR-TV Baltimore and WRLH-TV Richmond, Va., are said to represent \$150 million of the purchase. Times Mirror has broadcasting and cable divisions, owns eight newspapers and operates a magazine and book publishing business.

A Times Mirror spokeswoman said the transaction has been unanimously approved by the boards of both companies although Abell's shareholders must still clear the deal. (More than 80% of Abell's stock is committed to the sale, she reported.) Times Mirror officials were predicting the transaction would be completed in three to four months.

According to Times Mirror, WMAR-TV, an NBC affiliate on channel 2 that was put on the air in 1947 by the Abell company, will be sold to satisfy the FCC crossownership rules that prohibit the acquisition of a TV station and newspaper in the same market. John J. McCrory, president of Times Mirror Broadcasting, said the company had not yet decided how to proceed with the WMAR-TV disposition or what to do with the Richmond station, an independent on channel 35.

Times Mirror is also in the process of selling three of its seven TV stations: WSTM-TV Syracuse, N.Y.; WHIM-TV Harrisburg, Pa., and WETM-TV Elmira, N.Y. McCrory said the sale of the three stations to Smith Associates is slated to close on June 19. Its other broadcast properties are: WVTV-TV Birmingham, Ala.; KTVI(TV) St. Louis; KTBC-TV Austin, Tex., and KDFW-TV Dallas.

In addition to publishing the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Denver Post* and the *Dallas Times Herald*, among others, Times Mirror operates the 10th largest cable MSO, Times Mirror Cable Television. Some of the magazines it publishes include *Popular Science*, *Outdoor Life* and *The Sporting News*. Also last week Times Mirror announced it was buying the *National Journal*, a Washington-based weekly focusing on government and politics.

In 1985, Times Mirror reported earnings of \$237.1 million on revenues of \$2.96 billion. For the first quarter of 1986, its net income was \$34.5 million with total revenues of \$693 million, the spokeswoman said.

An Abell official said the company's revenues in 1985 were \$204.8 million, of which about \$33 million came from its broadcasting division. Abell bought WRLH-TV last year for \$13.7 million. In addition to *The Sun*, a morning paper, and the *Evening Sun*, Abell publishes *Mid-Atlantic Country* and *Ski Racing* magazines. The *Sun* was founded in 1837 and grew prominent in the early decades of this century through national and international reporting and the works of H.L. Mencken. The papers have a combined

circulation of 356,927 and a Sunday circulation of 427,785. Ownership of the Abell Co. is into the sixth generation and is still relatively concentrated. *Ski Racing's* publisher, Gary Black Jr., is believed to be the only descendent of the founding families to be active in company operations. More than \$100 million of the purchase price will go to the A.S. Abell Foundation, a charitable organization.

The Times Mirror spokeswoman said the company approached Abell Co. with a specific proposal on May 13 and was told at that time the company was not for sale. But another offer was made, and a deal was struck. The offer was, said one source, "too good to turn down." □

More waiting on Blair

No decision yet from FCC on revised takeover plan from Macfadden; Blair board considering sale options

The FCC, despite trying to stay off the takeover playing field, played a key role last week in the approaching climax of Macfadden Holdings' takeover attempt of John Blair & Co. It was not what the commission did, but rather that the commission, as of Friday, had yet to decide whether to approve Macfadden's revised proposal for putting tendered Blair shares into a trusteeship. Lacking that FCC approval, Macfadden was forced, once again, to extend its \$25-per-share tender offer begun six weeks ago.

Meanwhile Blair was still searching for a way to keep the company from Macfadden and what it said was an "inadequate" price for the company. Last Tuesday, Blair issued a statement saying it had scheduled a board meeting for later in the week to consider and "act upon" other proposals for the "sale and disposition" of the broadcasting and station representation divisions of the company. It had previously signed a letter of intent to spin off—to shareholders and Warburg Pincus—Advo System Inc., the company's direct mail subsidiary (BROADCASTING, May 19).

Blair's management claimed that the contemplated splitting up of the company would provide higher proceeds than Macfadden's offer. Skeptics to that claim noted that outsiders interested in the company have had months to make an offer for Blair and that last week's statement may have once again been a last-minute maneuver to support the stock price above \$25. But if the market at large agreed, it did not reflect that skepticism in Blair's stock price, which as of late Friday was 26½, well above the Macfadden offer and the highest point in two weeks.

Blair's board did convene for a specially called meeting on Friday, but there was still no word on what, if any, offers had been