

lushi; "A Breed Apart," with Kathleen Turner, and "Hoosiers," with Gene Hackman. The acquisition of 15 films for VCR distribution "is one of the largest HBO has made" since the company became involved in the home video business in 1984, said Henry McGee, HBO vice president, home video.

Showtime/The Movie Channel, meanwhile, has also made another exclusive agreement. The cable network has a five-year deal with Imagine Films Entertainment, whose co-chief executive officers, Ron Howard and Brian Grazer ("Splash" and "Nightshift"), are also to develop original projects for Showtime.

The agreement begins with 1989 pay television availabilities and includes exclusive pay-per-view exhibition rights to all Image-produced films, Showtime said. About 30 motion pictures and "an unspecified number of original products" are also covered by the agreement. "Long-form dramas" or series may be part of the original program material to be developed and aired exclusively on Showtime, the cable service said, adding that it may also acquire the syndication rights to these films and original products.

Scrambling report

The Christian Broadcasting Network denied reports that it is scrambling its signal because of pressure from cable operators. In a letter sent to Senator Al Gore (D-Tenn.), Timothy B. Robertson, CBN's executive vice president, wrote that "a very serious misconception has arisen regarding the position of CBN on the matter." Robertson was

responding to reports that a letter written by CBN last January indicates that the cable network was "coerced" into scrambling. During a Senate Commerce Committee hearing on scrambling, Gore cited the letter as an example of cable operators forcing cable programmers to encrypt their signals.

Robertson said that the previous letter from CBN's chief executive officer, M.G. (Pat) Robertson, "can hardly be used as an example of coercion." Instead, he argued, it is a "clear statement that we understand the problems of the cable industry and the need to provide exclusive programming in order for that industry to remain healthy." The cable industry, he wrote, "has invested billions of dollars into building delivery systems, and we believe that there is a clear need to protect the integrity of that investment. Quite frankly, I am somewhat perplexed as to why this letter, which was addressed to a private citizen, was erroneously interpreted and used as evidence in both Senate and House committee hearings, without any members of those committees or their respective staffs seeking official confirmation from CBN." He said that CBN believes encrypting its signal "is the only way to protect both our own rights as producers and the syndication rights of our distributors."

Face lift

Home Box Office has changed its on-air graphics, music and logo in its latest effort to give the pay television service "a more contemporary look and underline the distinctions between program categories," HBO said last week. Among the changes

are the network identification graphics, the "Next on HBO" and "Tonight On HBO" lead-ins, new "opens" for some of the original programming umbrellas, such as "On Locations," and a new "HBO Movie" introduction.

According to Orest Woronewych, director of design, HBO felt a need for "a greater variety of on-air components to precede HBO programs and help distinguish them. For example, we are retaining the widely-recognized HBO Movie opening for premieres and prime time plays, but we have designed a new movie open for repeat showings and nonprime time plays." The on-air changes, which have been in development for nine months, use computer-generated images, Woronewych said. He added that "texture, color and movement are all separately programmed, right down to lighting that simulates the complex shadows and tones of real sunlight. The entire process is an exercise in computer virtuosity." Pacific Data Images in California's Silicon Valley, collaborated with HBO on the project.

Daniels joins Lakers

Cable television pioneer Bill Daniels and Jerry Buss, who have been 50-50 partners in the Prime Ticket Network, a Los Angeles-based regional sports and entertainment service, are now partners in the Los Angeles Lakers, Prime Ticket's prime attraction, but on a 5-95 scale.

Daniels, who is chairman of Daniels & Associates, Denver, told reporters in Washington that he has purchased a 5% interest in the National Basketball Association franchise, subject to the NBA's approval, but he would not reveal what he paid. Buss is the principal owner of the Lakers.

If cable is Daniels's first love, professional sports is his second. Over the years, Daniels has owned an American Basketball Association franchise (the Utah Stars), a United States Football League franchise (the Los Angeles Express) and has sponsored auto racer Lloyd Ruby and heavyweight boxer Ron Lyle.

In a prepared statement, Jerry Buss said because the deal allows Daniels to return to sports ownership and "strengthens our partnership in Prime Ticket, [it] is a mutually beneficial co-venture."

In addition to the Lakers, Prime Ticket telecasts the Los Angeles Kings (National Hockey League), the Los Angeles Lazers (indoor soccer), boxing, tennis, concerts and various sports events of the University of California-Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, University of Nevada-Las Vegas and the University of Hawaii.

Prime Ticket now serves 1.5 million subscribers in California, Arizona, Nevada and Hawaii. According to Daniels, the service is thriving and is expected to break even in eight to 12 months.

Because of the increasing costs of professional sports, Daniels said, they will eventually all move to cable. "The salvation of professional sports is cable," he said.

He said Daniels & Associates, which is a mid-sized MSO, fully supports ESPN's efforts to acquire a package of National Football League games in 1987 by charging its cable affiliates an extra 42 cents per subscriber per month to raise the extra millions of dollars needed to gain the package.

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