

Aaron Daniels: ABC Radio Network's competitive edge

One morning in 1968, Aaron Daniels opened *The New York Times* to learn that the United States did not have a "fron tennis" team—a variation of jai alai—to send to the upcoming Olympics. The sport was not exactly a featured attraction at the New York Health & Racquet Club. But Daniels, a former squash team captain at Dartmouth, and currently president of the ABC Radio Network, seized the opportunity to learn the sport and become an Olympic athlete.

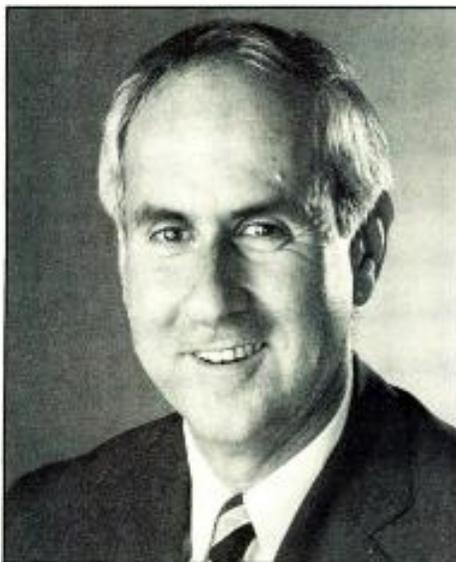
The young salesman, who had been with WPAT-AM-FM Paterson, N.J., for four years, asked for time off to train for the Olympics. With a no doubt patriotic appeal and a touch of salesmanship, Daniels finagled six weeks away from the office. He rounded up a team, booked them on a flight to Mexico City and spent the next few weeks practicing like crazy.

The 1968 U.S. fron tennis team lost every match that year. Revenge, however, was just around the corner. A week after the Olympics, Daniels and his teammates stayed in Mexico City and arranged some unofficial squash matches. "We did to the Mexicans in squash what they did to us in fron tennis," says Daniels.

A self-described competitive person, Daniels enjoys his position atop the traditional leader in ad billings. Among the accomplishments at ABC during his tenure as network president: newscaster Paul Harvey, who recently grabbed the top five slots in the RADAR network ratings, was signed to a seven-year contract; Satellite Music Network turned over ad sales to the network, as did Dow Jones's *Wall Street Journal Report* and Gannett's *USA Today* radio show, and the network added its Tour Marketing and Merchandising Division, the company's first new division in six years.

Quite a bit of activity for a man who, as recently as 1986, was working on the local level as president of Capital Cities' WPRO-AM-FM Providence, R.I. The station, as Daniels points out, is not in one of the top 25 markets. Nevertheless, he regards his experience there and at other local stations as among his most valuable. "I was at the local station level for most of my career," he says, an experience that he feels has made him especially sensitive to the concerns of individual radio stations. "I think that has helped me do my job at the radio network because I have a station background as opposed to a staff or management background."

Daniels's first job in radio was as an account executive at WPAT-AM-FM Paterson, N.J., in 1964, the beginning of a long career with Capital Cities. He applied for a job at the station, he says, because he was looking for a broadcasting job that could possibly lead him to the "glamorous" business of television. He abandoned his aspirations for



AARON MARTIN DANIELS—president, ABC Radio Network, New York; b. May 11, 1935, Holyoke, Mass.; BA, sociology, Dartmouth, Hanover, N.H., 1957; Harvard Advanced Management Program, 1986; account executive, Anchor-Hocking Glass Corp., New York, 1958-59; account executive, McCall Corp., New York, 1960-61; assistant to president/advertising director, Davis Publications, New York, 1962-63; account executive, WPAT-AM-FM Paterson, N.J., 1964-69; director of group sales, Fairchild Publications, New York, 1969-71; general sales manager, WPAT-AM-FM, 1971-79; VP and general manager of WPRO-AM-FM Providence, R.I., 1979-83; president of WPRO-AM-FM, 1984-86; present position since May 1986. m. Judy Friedman, Nov. 22, 1961; children—Greg, 25; Alex, 22.

television, however, when he concluded that radio had a glamour all its own.

Daniels joined WPAT from a sales background primarily in publishing. A salesman who was already successful in print, he thought, could be equally successful making sales in broadcasting. Capital Cities reversed the logic in 1969 and positioned Daniels as head of its newly acquired Fairchild Group, a publishing concern. He spent 18 months at the division, where he organized group sales for the company's publications. "Even though it was an interesting experience," says Daniels, "I really wanted to get back into the radio business."

Capital Cities heard his request and returned him to WPAT in 1971, this time as general sales manager. It was there that he got to know current ABC Radio Division President Jim Arcara, who at that time was general manager of WPAT.

In 1979, Daniels left WPAT to become a general manager himself. He and his family moved to Rhode Island, where he took the position of vice president and general manager of WPRO-AM-FM Providence. The AM station was adult contemporary; the FM was contemporary hit. Combined with his exper-

ience at easy listening format WPAT, Daniels was getting a feel for a variety of formats.

Daniels was made WPRO president in 1984, remaining in that position until 1986, when he once again convinced Capital Cities to give him some time away from the office.

This time around, it wasn't athletics but academics that interested him. He opted for the Harvard Advanced Management Program and seven hours of study nightly. Daniels sat in classrooms with domestic and international business executives from a variety of fields. Entering Harvard 29 years after earning his undergraduate degree, he says, was an "invigorating" experience.

An invigorated Daniels completed the management program and began his present position as president of the ABC Radio Network, where he oversees seven radio networks and a variety of feature programs that are provided to more than 2,000 affiliates nationwide. On the programming side, Daniels's approach could be called conservative.

"Rather than have eight, 10, 12 or 14 minor shows that we would put out in the course of a year, our basic philosophy is to give our stations just the blockbusters," he says. This February, he says, one such "major" new ABC show will premiere. "If we come out with a new show," he adds, "that show has got to be very, very well researched by us, and we have to know that that's going to be an important contribution to radio stations."

He says many station affiliates today appear to be looking for more information-oriented programming. Another program type that he says affiliates ask for frequently is comedy, which is an area not completely unfamiliar to Daniels: his 25-year-old son, Greg, is a writer for television's *Saturday Night Live*. If all goes according to plan, Daniels himself may try his hand at comedy.

"What I would love to do, if I perfect myself and get enough confidence, is go to a comedy club and get up and perform," he says.

"He has a very dry sense of humor," says Radio Network Association President Peter Moore, "and a good delivery." Comedy aside, he also describes Daniels as "forthright," a quality recognized by several colleagues as among his strongest features.

"As a competitor, I have to say that he's one of the more stylish, classy and upfront guys," says Tom Gatti, senior vice president and director of sales, DIR Broadcasting. "I wish there were five more of him in this business."

Daniels remains unmistakably bullish on the business of network radio, while not forgetting the importance of local radio. "There's a great deal of similarity between running a radio station and a network," he says, adding, "except that the radio network is a lot larger." ■