

PROGRAMING

TINKER TIME: NETWORKS DO PRIME TIME SHUFFLE

After four weeks, networks start shifting players, going to bench to shore up weaknesses, find new strengths

With only four weeks played out in the new season, CBS, NBC and Fox have already made changes to their prime time schedules, with NBC and Fox having gone to the bullpen, turning to back-up series in order to shore up underperforming time periods on their schedules. Furthermore, ABC may be next, given the problems the network is facing on the latter portion of its Wednesday night lineup.

Following the changes made by CBS and NBC two weeks ago (CBS flip-flopped two series on Friday night, preferring *Brooklyn Bridge* in the 8 p.m. time period over *Princesses*, and NBC pulled *Real Life* and *Exposé* from its Friday lineup, putting *Matlock* back into action in the 8-9 time period), Fox has overhauled its Friday and Saturday night lineups. On Friday, Fox has pulled *Ultimate Challenge* from the 9-10 time slot, moved *Best of the Worst* to 9-9:30 from the 9:30-10 time slot on Saturday night and has moved *Totally Hidden Video* to the Friday 9:30-10 time period from Saturday at 9-9:30. The network is also planning a title change for *Best of the Worst*, with *Asylum* the choice according to sources.

With the removal of two series from the Saturday night lineup, Fox has pulled two series from the shelf to fill the slots, with *Charlie Hoover* being slotted in the 9-9:30 time period and *Get a Life* returning to the schedule at 9:30-10. The Friday night changes become effective Nov. 8, and the new Saturday night lineup will be in place Nov. 9.

The remainder of Fox's back-up series are all half-hour comedies and include *Hotel Dicks* from Twentieth Television, starring Morris Day and Jerome Benton, *Down the Shore* from HBO Independent Pictures, starring Louis Mandylor and Anna Gunn, *Stand by Your Man* from Twentieth Television, starring Rosie O'Donnell and Rick Hall, and *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventures* from Lorimar Television, starring Evan Richards and Christopher Kennedy.

Also last week, NBC announced it was pulling *Man of the People* and *Pacific Station*



John Mahoney of CBS's 'Human Factor'

from the Sunday 8-9 time period and replacing them with *Hot Country Nights* from Dick Clark produc-

tions. The new series, which features live performances by country musicians and comedians, will debut Nov. 24. The two comedies will be pulled effective Oct. 27. In the interim NBC will schedule special episodes of *Unsolved Mysteries* on Nov. 3 and 10, and an episode of *Night Court* in the 8-8:30 slot on Nov. 17, leading into the network's airing of *Back to the Future III* at 8:30-11 p.m.

Both *Pacific Station* and *Man of the People* will return to the network in December according to the network, with the latter possibly getting the 9-9:30 slot on Friday night following *Matlock*, since the two shows draw similar demographics.

NBC has also done more tinkering on Friday night by flip-flopping *Dear John* and *Flesh N' Blood* so that the latter now occupies the 9-9:30 time period. That change will become effective Oct. 25.

NBC's back-up lineup consists of three series, two half-hour comedies and one hour drama. *Nightmare Cafe*, from

FOX BAGS FRIDAY-TO-MONDAY MOVE

With the recent announcement of schedule changes on Fox's Friday night lineup (see story, this page), the network has decided to abandon its previously announced plan to switch its Friday lineup to Monday night beginning in January. Fox's original plan called for the network to schedule series programming from Thursday through Sunday with the Fox Night at the Movies on Monday night during the fall when competition is stronger on Monday night with football airing. Beginning in January after the conclusion of football season, Fox had anticipated moving its Friday lineup to Monday and slotting its movie night on Wednesday. Peter Chernin, president, Fox Entertainment, said the network's growth on Friday night was the motivation to stay with the current configuration. "The season's initial ratings show that Fox has established a foothold on Friday as the three networks have declined. One of the goals of our 52-Week Plan is to aggressively strengthen our schedule. The opportunities to enhance our Saturday performance and position Friday for improved long-term growth build on our plan and make it worthwhile to continue programming on Friday," he said.

While the failure of any of the networks to seriously challenge ABC on Friday nights makes it more attractive for Fox to remain on Friday night, another reason Fox may have decided to continue with its current schedule is the daunting task of scheduling series in the highly competitive Monday night. The most-watched night of television of the week includes the breakout success of CBS's comedy lineup on Monday night as well as NBC's improvement in the 8-9 time period leading into *Monday Night Movie*.