

Wes Craven, is an hour drama that centers on the operators of a friendly but strange cafe. *Home Fires* is a half-hour domestic comedy from Bruce Paltrow, Tom Fontana and John Tinker, producers of *St. Elsewhere*. Norman Lear is the creator of *Love Child*, with John Forsythe set to star.

Thus far, with three weekly ratings victories to their credit, CBS has only done minor work on the schedule. However, with the death of Redd Foxx, star of its Wednesday night comedy *Royal Family* and the cast shake-up on *Princesses*, the network may need to turn to projects on the shelf sooner than anticipated. Among the comedies on reserve are two animated projects, *Fish Police* from Hanna-Barbera, featuring the voices of John Ritter and Jo Beth Williams, and *Family Dog* from Amblin Entertainment, which has been in a state of reconfiguration for more than a year. The only other comedy is *Rachel Gunn R.N.*, starring Christine Ebersol in the hospital-setting comedy. The list of dramas includes *The Human Factor* from Universal Television, starring John Mahoney, which CBS is reportedly excited about. Also, actor Jack Scalia has another network go-around in MCA's *Tequila and Bonetti* (formerly *Tequila and Boner*) about a cop-and-dog team. CBS also has *Boys of Twilight* from TriStar Television, starring Wilford Brimley, about cops in a resort town.

ABC, yet to make any changes, may use one of its dramas on back-up status to stabilize its Wednesday night lineup of six comedies, which has been tailing off dramatically after 9:30 p.m. Speculation has Steven Bochco getting another crack at the Wednesday night 10-11 time period after last year's *Cop Rock* attempt. This season, ABC has Bochco's *Civil Wars* ready for use with Mariel Hemingway and Peter Onorati in the starring roles. ABC also has three other dramas available. *Saturdays* from ABC Productions may be tailor-made for the network's problems on Saturday night in either the 9-10 or 10-11 time period now occupied by *The Young Riders* and *The Commish*. *Young Indiana Jones* has been speculated as the replacement for *MacGyver* in the Monday 8-9 time period leading into *Monday Night Football*. Thus far this season, ABC has been getting trounced in the first hour by CBS's and NBC's comedies. Another potential candidate for either Saturday night or the Monday 8-9 time period is *The Human Target*, starring Rick Springfield in the Warner Bros. drama based on the D.C. Comics character.

On the comedy side, ABC has five sitcoms in the wings including *Billy*, a

spinoff from *Head of the Class*, starring comedian Billy Connelly, and *Davis Rules*, starring Jonathan Winters, who won an Emmy for his role. *Billy* is produced by Warner Bros., and *Davis Rules* is a Carsey-Werner production. Other

comedies include *Julie*, starring Julie Andrews in a domestic sitcom from Blake Edwards and Viacom, *Capital Critters*, an animated series from Steven Bochco, and *Room for Two*, starring Linda Lavin, from Warner Bros. —SC

NBC LIKELY TO DROP SATURDAY CHILDREN'S FARE

Gains by Fox, affiliate defections prompt reassessment

NBC is seriously considering getting out of the Saturday morning cartoon business next season, sources at the network said last week.

In part, the reassessment is due to substantial gains that the Fox Children's Network has made in the daypart. In addition, Saturday morning viewing of the top three networks among children 2-11 is down 20% for the first four weeks of the new season. Affiliate defections at all three networks are contributing to the downward ratings trend.

KCRA-TV Sacramento, KING-TV Seattle and KRON-TV San Francisco are among the NBC affiliates that have opted to pre-empt Saturday morning schedules for news programs. In addition, CBS affiliate KIRO-TV Seattle and ABC affiliate WHAS-TV Louisville, Ky., have made similar moves.

NBC remains third among children 2-11 in the daypart among the big three, with Fox a very close fourth. (Fox beat NBC in the 2-11 demo one week.)

For the first three weeks of the 1991-92 season, NBC's Saturday morning slate has dropped 25% from a year ago among children 2-11 to an average 3.8 rating. Fox Children's Network is up 24% in the same period, with a 3.6 average. First-place ABC, with an aver-

age 6.1 rating, and runner-up CBS, at 5.9, are both down 18% in the same demo.

There has been speculation for several seasons, prompted perhaps by the network's efforts to draw older children and teens to the Saturday morning lineup with reality shows such as *Saved by the Bell* and *Saturday Morning Videos*, that NBC would abandon Saturday morning cartoons. But for the first time, sources at the network are acknowledging that a complete reformatting of the daypart is under consideration. "We are looking at various options for the daypart," said one network executive. "We are committed to a full [children's] slate for this season, but we have not made any decisions beyond that."

The network is in a holding pattern on the future of Saturday morning, said a network executive, because NBC Entertainment President Warren Littlefield and his team are scrambling to fix key weaknesses in prime time, including Friday and Sunday nights.

Meanwhile, the network has decided not to replace Al Carosi, vice president, children's programming, who resigned two weeks into the new season. The interim head of the daypart is Linda Mancuso, who previously reported to Carosi. She will now report to John Miller, executive vice president, advertising and promotion and daytime and children's programs. That decision, coupled with an earlier one not to fill a children's program development post vacated last summer by Janet Sonski, fueled speculation NBC was headed in another direction on Saturday mornings.

As to possible alternative programming, NBC News has long been lobbying for a shot at producing a Saturday version of *Today*. At least one sports leisure magazine show is also said to be in development. During the basketball season, the network leads out of Saturday morning with a magazine program called *NBA: Inside Stuff*. —SM

NEW PLAYERS FOR 'COACH'

MCA has sold the off-network sitcom *Coach* to two more top-10 markets—Cox stations KTVU(TV) Oakland, Calif., and WKBD(TV) Detroit. Two weeks ago, the show was launched in syndication with a sale to the Tribune stations in the top three markets: WPIX-TV New York, KTLA(TV) Los Angeles and WGN-TV Chicago. The show will bow officially in fall 1994, although stations have the option to start it as early as 1993.