

TV BRACES FOR SMITH RAPE TRIAL

Pool provider Court TV will offer optional feed that will mask identities of the witnesses

Court TV made its mark last week with unblinking coverage of the jury selection in the William Kennedy Smith case, labeled as a television first by the fledgling cable network. But the coverage was just a taste of the job that lies ahead for the nation's news organizations, bracing for the maelstrom that will hit when the highly publicized rape trial gets underway next month.

Presiding Judge Mary Lupo last week rejected a request by Smith attorneys that cameras be banned from the jury selection process, which is expected to continue right up to the opening day of testimony. The decision echoed an earlier ruling by Lupo allowing cameras to cover the main portion of the West Palm Beach trial when it begins on Dec. 3.

"Court TV is doing quite a good job at the moment of raising questions over whether a person can get a fair trial," said Everette Dennis, executive director, The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, referring to last week's jury selection coverage. "That may be one of the more interesting things that will



Court TV covers the Smith rape jury selection

come out of this trial."

News organizations will find themselves in a whirlwind schedule when the celebrated trial opens next month. Journalists working on the case last week said that Lupo wants to have the trial wrapped up by Dec. 20, and will keep the court open seven days a week to meet the deadline.

Court TV, which is serving as the pool camera, plans to continue providing gavel-to-gavel coverage of all pro-

ceedings. So far, ABC, CBS and NBC have no plans for live coverage of the case. CNN will have extensive to continuous coverage "depending on the nature of the trial," according to Earl Casey, vice president and managing editor, domestic newsgathering.

Court TV is providing two feeds: one features no alterations; the other uses a mosaic wipe to alter the image of the alleged rape victim and a 20-second tape delay to allow for deletions of her name during testimony. Court TV itself is airing the edited version in keeping with the protective policy that has been in place at most major news organizations.

"We'd like other outfits to live with the rules that we've set, but we didn't want to impose our editorial restrictions on anybody who takes the pool," said Court TV executive producer Steve Cohen.

NBC News, which created a storm of controversy last April when it identified the alleged victim, has not ruled out naming her in future coverage.

"It depends on what we're reporting and in what context," said an NBC News spokeswoman. "The decision would be on a case-by-case basis."

The case continues to provide ample fodder for syndicated reality shows, with *A Current Affair*, *Hard Copy* and *Inside Edition* among those that have been aggressively pursuing it. —#

11-YEAR TIME BROKERAGE DEAL FOR MICHIGAN TV'S

Merger joins affiliates of two different networks; ad sales included

LIN Broadcasting's WOTV(TV), an NBC affiliate in Grand Rapids, Mich., has signed a time brokerage agreement with ABC affiliate WUHQ-TV Battle Creek, Mich., in which WOTV will pay WUHQ-TV a signal fee to air local programming for both stations starting Nov. 11 and to sell its advertising time. WOTV will also assume WUHQ-TV's expenses and liabilities.

The merger will keep WUHQ-TV alive. John Lawrence, president of WUHQ-TV parent Channel 41 Inc., said: "We could no longer run this station without a partner."

Besides merging two different network affiliates, the 11-year agreement also terminates the efforts of Northstar Television Group—which owns ABC affiliate WZZM-TV Grand Rapids—to acquire WUHQ-TV. Northstar Television had reached an agreement with Channel 41 Inc. to buy the station for \$10 mil-

lion. The sale had been approved by the FCC, but Northstar was apparently unable to close on the deal.

Another twist to the merger is that one rep firm will handle both stations. Currently, Seltel reps WUHQ-TV, with Blair repping WOTV. Bob Groothand, president and general manager, WOTV, said Blair will rep both stations.

The partnership will also allow WUHQ-TV to provide a five- to seven-minute news update on events in Battle Creek and Kalamazoo for its primary viewers. WUHQ-TV has tried on three separate occasions to launch its own newscast without success, the last time in 1985. That program ran for about two years and, according to Jerry Colvin, executive vice president and GM, lost about \$2 million. Groothand said five people will be added to WUHQ-TV for its newscasts.

Details have to be worked out, including how the selling of local ad time will

be divided between the two stations. However, since all advertising revenue generated by WUHQ-TV will go to WOTV, that may not be of paramount concern.

Satellite stations owned by the same companies are commonplace, but now more satellite station relationships between different companies are starting to appear. Two months ago, Act III Broadcasting reached a time brokerage agreement in which the signal of its Fox affiliate WNRW-TV Winston-Salem, N.C., is now simulcast on Guilford Telecasters' WGGT(TV) Piedmont, N.C. Earlier this year, ABRY Communications signed two independent stations to carry the signal of its Birmingham, Ala., Fox affiliate in Gadsden and Tuscaloosa. ABRY pays the two stations compensation and receives some local program rights held by the other two stations. LIN Broadcasting will also receive WUHQ-TV's programming rights. —#