

Fox snaps up other networks' affiliates

Lured by football, dozens of stations rush to join

By Steve McClellan

The Fox network is quickly parlaying its National Football League win into new station affiliations.

Since the network acquired the rights to National Football Conference games last December, about three dozen stations have signed up to carry Fox programming. Many of the deals have been completed within the past two weeks—about half of them at last week's National Association of Broadcasters convention in Las Vegas.

Fox Broadcasting Co. President Lucie Salhany would confirm only that the network has made "dozens" of deals. She refused to identify any of the stations, citing network policy that stations make their own announcements.

With the recent deals, many of which take effect in the third quarter, Fox has full-time affiliation agreements with 144 stations. Another 40 stations take some Fox programming. The network's U.S. household reach will be more than 95% when all these deals kick in. Salhany says the network's goal is to have a Fox presence in every market in the country in the not too distant future.

Of the three-dozen new agreements, about a third are full-time affiliations

and the rest secondary affiliations spurred largely by a desire to acquire carriage rights to NFC games.

The secondary affiliation deals also call for the stations to carry six hours or more of other Fox entertainment programs in non-prime time periods, such as early fringe, prime time access and late night. In some cases, programming details still are being worked out.

Many of the secondary affiliations also involve a cash fee, but one that is not always payable to Fox. As one

Fox source put it, "That's a negotiating point that varies with each deal. And it goes both ways."

In the past two months, the network has convinced at least three network affiliates to

switch to Fox, while at least two others—WJKA(TV) Wilmington, N.C., and KTAB-TV Abilene, Tex.—confirm they are considering such a move.

Of the three stations that have converted, only KARD-TV Monroe, La., confirmed it is switching from ABC to Fox next month. Station General Manager Lydia Sandifer says KARD-TV was

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talking to Fox before the network got the NFC rights. "But that obviously helped the decision," she says. Another key factor was market overlap with more than three other ABC affiliates.

WJKA-TV General Manager Ty Watts confirms that his station is "seriously considering" switching from CBS to Fox. He expects to make a decision by April 15. Watts also cites overlapping coverage by three other CBS affiliates in his market. Fox has indicated that its cable service, FoxNet, will be deleted from the station's coverage area if a station signs on.

Wayne Roy, general manager at KTAB-TV Abilene, Tex., also confirms that he is considering switching from CBS to Fox. "It's a tough decision, and we have a long-standing good relationship with CBS," Roy says. But the loss of the NFC would have a "significant economic impact" on the station. He cites "significant public interest" in the Dallas Cowboys locally.

Last week, CBS affiliate WSBT-TV South Bend, Ind., confirmed it has signed as a secondary Fox affiliate, giving it rights to NFC games. Station Manager Roland Adeszko says the station also is committed to carrying other Fox shows. "They're talking about six or seven hours a week" commitment in non-prime time periods, he says.

In addition to the affiliation switches Fox has scored, the network has signed several new stations that hope to get to air by the third quarter. They include outlets in Macon, Ga., and Medford, Ore.; Chico-Redding and Eureka, both California. ■

Affiliate loses '60 Minutes' in football play

CBS has drawn a line in the sand concerning affiliates who agree to pick up National Football Conference games from Fox next fall. CBS affiliate WSBT-TV South Bend, Ind., was one of the first to announce such a deal last week, and the network responded quickly, saying it would pull *60 Minutes* from the station because of anticipated football overruns. The network said it would offer the program to another station in the market. "WSBT-TV is free to carry NFL football or any other programming it chooses," a network statement said.

In addition to pulling the top-rated Sunday news magazine, the network said it would, "of necessity, have to consider the impact of WSBT-TV's apparent inability to carry *60 Minutes*—a signature program of the CBS Television Network—on its long-term relationship with CBS."

CBS executives refused further comment, as did officials at WSBT-TV.—SM