

# Broadcasting

## Summer heats up for networks

NBC's Olympics is top draw; other networks planning counterprogramming moves

By Steve Coe

**N**BC's massive coverage of the summer Olympics from Atlanta—July 19 through Aug. 4—is the 800-pound gorilla of network summer programming, but that intimidating presence isn't stopping the competition from counterprogramming to varying degrees.

NBC is not relying completely on the XXVI Olympiad to attract viewers during the summer. The network also will debut one series and return midseason hit *Boston Common* to the schedule with original episodes.

NBC's *Dark Skies*, a science fiction hour, most likely will debut on the Sunday or Monday night following the conclusion of the Olympics. The two-hour pilot will be followed by six hour-long episodes. If the series, about a young couple on the run from an alien force and government operatives, is successful during its summer run, it will be a candidate to return during midseason next year.

*Boston Common*, which has established itself quickly since its debut last month, will return with four original episodes during the six weeks after the Olympics and before the start of the



Fox is fighting the Olympics flame with 'L.A. Firefighters,' a new action series.

fall season. Where the show will air during the summer will be determined once the fall schedule is announced next month.

Preston Beckman, senior vice president, program planning and scheduling, says the network originally planned to debut a comedy during the summer, but changed course with the success of *Boston Common*. "We've been so pleased with [its] performance that we decided that rather than spend the money to launch a new show we

would order more episodes of [one] that was already working."

Beckman says the network is in good shape in terms of scheduling a lot of original programming during the summer because NBC executives predicted that the network would have a successful season. "Before the start of the season we said: 'Let's assume we're going to have a good season and won't need to order a lot of back-up [programming].' As it turned out, we didn't need to order a lot of back-up, and we had money to order programming for summer. We've also been stockpiling movies, so we have about six made-fors that we'll premiere."

Additional NBC summer programming includes the National Basketball Association Finals, which begin at the end of May or beginning of June, and baseball's All-Star Game, which takes place July 9 at Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia. The network will also continue to air original episodes of *Dateline* in its four airings throughout the summer.

### Fox

Fox is planning to debut series during the next three months.

On tap are *L.A. Firefighters*, an hour-long action series, and the comedy *Last Frontier*. The former follows the personal and professional lives of a group of firefighters and is expected to premiere on Monday, June 3, in an undetermined time period. Fox has ordered six episodes of the show, which is produced by Gordon Greisman Productions with Greisman serving as executive producer.

The network has ordered eight episodes of *Last Frontier*, with its debut date and time period still to be determined. The series, about three

### 'Cape' co-star; Ex-'Extraordinary'

Actress Bobbie Phillips has signed to star opposite Corbin Bernsen in MTM Television's upcoming first-run action hour *The Cape*. Phillips will play ex-Navy officer Barbara Shannon on the new fall series about astronauts and the space program. Phillips is now a regular on ABC's *Murder One*.

Elsewhere on the Corbin Bernsen front, MG/Perin will not bring its weekly first-run hour *The Extraordinary* back for a third season in the fall. MG/Perin officials say the decision was prompted by sluggish international demand for new episodes of the series, hosted by Bernsen, that explores reports of paranormal activities and other strange phenomena. —CL