

TELEVISION

Nielsen Ratings

1. (1) **The Cosby Show**, NBC
26.1 rating, 23.6 million homes.
2. (2) **Roseanne**, ABC
24.7, 22.3 million homes.
3. (3) **Cheers**, NBC
24.1, 21.8 million homes.
4. (4) **Golden Girls**, NBC
23.5, 21.2 million homes.
5. (X) **Sister Kate 2nd Preview**, NBC
23.0, 20.8 million homes.
6. (5) **Murder, She Wrote**, CBS
20.7, 18.7 million homes.
6. (X) **Doogie Howser, M.D. Special**, ABC
20.7, 18.7 million homes.
8. (X) **SNL 15th Anniversary Special**, NBC
20.3, 18.4 million homes.
9. (7) **Matlock**, NBC
19.6, 17.7 million homes.
10. (8) **Who's the Boss?**, ABC
19.5, 17.6 million homes.
11. (X) **Bob Hope's Lucy**, NBC
19.3, 17.6 million homes.
12. (9) **Unsolved Mysteries**, NBC
19.2, 17.4 million homes.
13. (10) **60 Minutes**, CBS
18.5, 16.7 million homes.
14. (6) **Chicken Soup**, ABC
18.4, 16.6 million homes.
15. (11) **Growing Pains**, ABC
18.1, 16.4 million homes.

Listings include the week's ranking, with full season-to-date ranking in parentheses, rating for the week, and total homes. An "X" in parentheses denotes one-time-only presentation. A rating measures the percentage of the nation's 90.4 million TV homes.

Fledgeling Fox network toughs it out

BILLY STOCKARD

t.v.

Ten years ago, no one in the television business would have thought an independent network could challenge the Big Three (ABC, NBC and CBS) in any time slot on any day. But as the new television season kicks off, it's obvious that independent networks like Fox and the Turner group will be around well into the '90s.

For Fox, it's been a long uphill battle to the break-even point. Since the network's birth in 1986, advertising revenues have been well below startup and operating costs. In addition, Fox has met with topsyturvy ratings and reviews, beginning with *The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers*, which flopped during the network's first season. But as Fox celebrates its third birthday, things may be changing.

Fox's main strategy for attracting viewers is to offer aggressive programming in areas where network television is traditionally weak. For example, *21 Jump Street* has captured a teen audience that is largely uninspired by traditional family programming and nighttime soap operas on the Big Three. *The Tracey Ullman Show* is another example; it's the first variety/comedy skit program to gain acceptance since *The Carol Burnett Show* in the late 1970s.

This method hasn't met with complete success, however. *Married ... With Children*, though it has a

loyal audience, is one of the most questionable of Fox's choices. ABC seems to have taken the same approach with more success in *Roseanne*, which also depicts a working-class family in humorous situations.

A second factor that has helped Fox grow is smart choices for time slots. By choosing Sunday nights as a main target, Fox has challenged the Big Three on their weakest ground. Offered choices like *Murder She Wrote*, *My Two Dads* and whatever movie happens to be playing, many TV viewers are turning to Fox for their slick programming (*21 Jump Street*) and humor (*The Tracey Ullman Show*). Another smart idea was pitting *The Arsenio Hall Show* against the more traditional Johnny Carson and Pat Sajak. Hall offers guests that are less established, but more interesting to viewers under 30. By avoiding direct competition with *Late Night with David Letterman*, the network has managed to capture a significant chunk of the talk show audience.

Another important step for Fox was capturing a three-year contract for \$1 million to air the Emmys in 1987. It was a validation of Fox's national status and its ability to beat

the Big Three. However, the deal did not work out the way either side wanted it. Rumor has it that The National Academy of TV Arts and Sciences wants to pull out of the deal with Fox because of dismal ratings, although this year's showed some improvement. Just who will host next year's ceremonies is still up in the air, but Fox is hoping to hang on.

Signs indicate that the three years of hard work for Fox is beginning to pay off. Verne Gay of *Variety* said the network "turned a slight profit or, at worst, broke even for the fiscal year ended June 30." This is the first time since the network's conception that Fox hasn't lost money. Gay also reported that advertising sales were way up this year, mostly because Fox has snagged a large portion of the "teen viewing audience." The network's \$300 million sales were "well beyond Fox's projections."

This is definitely good news to Rupert Murdoch's bank books. The sly Fox chief has seen many of his affiliate stations drop out because of low ratings and hopes to start reversing that trend, both through advertising and programming expansion.

This season is allowing the network to capitalize on its programming successes as well. Fox expanded its offerings from two to three nights, leaving the rest of the time for local affiliates to fill. In addition, Fox is experimenting with *Booker*, a spin-

off of the surprise hit *21 Jump Street*, and *Alien Nation*, a drama based on the 1988 movie of the same name. The network will emphasize *The Tracey Ullman Show*, which won four Emmys just a few weeks ago, as proof that Fox has quality programming as well as less traditional shows.

So what's Fox's status after three years? *American Film* writer Tom Carson maintains that Fox is destined to be a doormat forever.

"Fox has hardly been an alternative in any sense that most viewers recognize. [The network has] found their audience by aiming lower." Carson, like ABC, CBS and NBC, doesn't view the fledgling company as any real competition. Instead, he says that the Big Three have learned from Fox's few successful shows "that there's a bigger untapped audience for junk out there than they thought."

While the critics still may be skeptical, it's obvious that Fox has carved some sort of niche for itself. The fact that this fourth network has broken even for the first time in three years says a lot. If Fox can continue to boost ratings, maybe it can attract the talent necessary to push it ahead in the quality territory, too. Whatever Fox's fate, its competition with the Big Three can only work for the audience's benefit.

Stay tuned next week for an analysis of the Turner Group's road to commercial success.

General College: Sex, violence, and secret pasts

I know that everyone is getting excited about the new fall season on TV, but don't forget that next week the STV season begins. Just to make sure everyone is prepped, here's the second installment of *General College* trivia, I mean History.

One of the newest characters is Violet, who brought just a little bit of a secret past with her. She was introduced as your basic girl-next-door, you know, the innocent virgin type. Violet soon became close to Ken, who really was the innocent virgin type. But that was all taken care of in one of those social message scenes (the message being a glorious statement of safe-sex and mutual respect in the form of a discussion over birth control). Their cuteness continued for a while until we learned the truth about cute innocent Violet — the lying tramp.

It all started when Ken got a job singing at a restaurant, the Double D, run by Damon Davenport (brother of all the coke fiends and sleazoid extraordinaire in his own special way). The waitresses there double as prostitutes, and guess who used to wait tables for Damon? Violet! Now Damon wants her to go back to work at the Double D, and alas, Violet has been forced to agree, because if she doesn't, Ken will find out the truth. Maybe she really does love him, but how long can she keep this from Ken? (And would he really care? It might

BRYAN BURNS

soaps

be a turn-on.)

Life has been rough for Ken's last girlfriend, Meg, too. After being raped by her roommate's boyfriend, she was kind of in a slump. But now Meg has gotten sweet revenge on her assailant and feels like she can help others by working as a peer counselor. Poor Kyle was the freshman sensation of the soccer team, but was left para-

lyzed after a fall from a balcony. Not only did the soccer team find a new goalie, but his girlfriend Carmen took off, too. Now Meg is bringing him out of depression and something romantic as well as clinical is developing there, especially when he recovers the use of his body.

Billy and Paige are a couple of veterans who should be able to deal with college life by now, but Paige has become really stressed out. Sure, her last boyfriend raped her roommate and the one before that cheated on her with her roommate, but now she has Billy. Cute, supportive, hon-

est, trustworthy Billy, who wants to help her, to be her friend. What a great guy. But it's not enough for Paige, or maybe it's too much. Anyway she has turned to food as comfort — and to bulimia. Happy or not, we know she doesn't have much time left with Billy; she's on her way out of town. Last spring, *General College* had viewers vote as to how Paige should take her exit from the show: graduate, leave to write a book about her intense life in school, study abroad in Paris or enroll (commit) herself into a clinic. (I voted for the last; the girl really needs help. But Paris

isn't too bad either. And who could graduate in only four or five years?)

So that's about it. What can we look for this Fall on *General College*? Keep an eye out for Paige's exit, Simone's children, Alex's schizophrenia, Zoe's gossip, Violet's past (and Ken's reaction), plus Kyle's recovery and maybe even a few surprises.

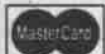

General College will begin running Oct. 2. Regularly it runs Mon-Thur at 11 on STV (Cable 11), along with *Campus Profile* and *Off the Cuff* (at 10 and 10:30). The new STV sitcom *Those Crazy College Kids* is scheduled to run once every two weeks.

湖南 HUNAN 南
CHINESE RESTAURANT

790 Airport Road - next to Save-A-Center
Weekday Lunch Specials \$4.29 includes
Choice of Hot & Sour Soup/Egg Drop Soup/Wonton
Soup/Choice of Fried Rice/Steamed Rice/Lo Mein
and free appetizers.

Cantonese Dim Sum
Brunch Sat. & Sun. Only, 12 noon-2:30 pm
OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

CALL 967-6133
FOR RESERVATIONS & TAKE-OUT

Planned Parenthood
Kroger Plaza, 93 Elliott Road, Chapel Hill
Affordable Health Care • Health Education • By Caring People

- Physical Exams for Women
- Birth control Information & Supplies
- Free Pregnancy Testing & Counseling
- Treatment for Vaginal Infections
- Treatment for Sexually Transmitted Diseases

All Services Confidential • Special Rates for Students

CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT 942-7762