

TALK-SHOW THRONE

Oprah's got Donahue on run

by KATHRYN BAKER
NEW YORK (AP) — After 20 years on television, Phil Donahue is being challenged for the daytime talk-show throne by Oprah Winfrey, whose show has been syndicated across North America less than a year but is dwarfing Donahue in the ratings.

The Oprah Winfrey Show made its debut in September. By February, it ranked third of more than 400 syndicated programs. Donahue was 10th, up a notch from the year before.

In New York, Los Angeles and Atlanta, the three biggest out of about 40 TV markets where the shows are head-to-head, Oprah out-rates Donahue by a wide margin.

The most recent A. C. Nielsen Co. ratings available for syndicated shows report that Winfrey had an average 10.7 rating for February compared with Donahue's 7.9. Winfrey's victory came even though her show was seen in more than half the markets in the morning when audience levels are lower.

By this fall, the show will air almost exclusively in the afternoon, so the ratings are expected to be even higher.

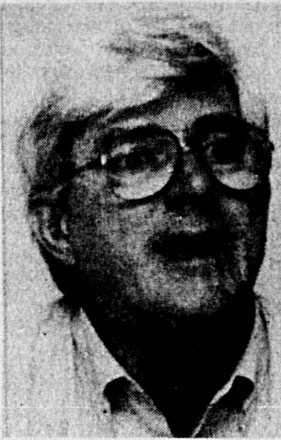
Michael King, president of King World, the syndicator of Winfrey's show as well as the top-rated Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy, says advertisers buying time on Oprah in markets where it will be on in the afternoon this fall have been guaranteed a record 14.0 rating.

The rating is a percentage of households using television in the markets where the shows air.

"Oprah's a natural," King said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles. "Not to knock Phil, but he's been around 20 years. . . . You just didn't go up against Donahue. But he's not unbeatable any more."

"It's not that Donahue's so bad, because he's not. His show's been very successful for a long time. I think we all get peaks and valleys, and I think the best is behind Donahue. He's still got his audience. She's bringing people to television and helping the whole industry."

"She's doing phenomenally well, that is true," said Donahue spokesman Penny Rotheiser in a telephone interview. "With that, some people have assumed that means Donahue is down. That is not the case. The truth is, we're doing better than we've ever done, so there's obviously room for both."



DONAHUE



WINFREY

The Chicago-based Oprah is seen in about 145 markets. Donahue, which moved from Chicago to New York in 1985, is seen in more than 200.

Donahue was recently dropped due to low ratings by his former home station in Chicago, WBBM-TV. He has been picked up by WFLD.

Both shows feature audience involvement. Winfrey tackles such subjects as phobias and will disputes.

Donahue's topics are similar, but he is sometimes criticized and often satirized for featuring guests with uncommon sexual orientations.

The program director at KCNC-

TV in Denver said last week the station was dropping Donahue this fall because of its sexual content. But Tom Shannon, head of sales for Multimedia Entertainment, which syndicates Donahue, said the show was moved to another station "because of business considerations" and that content never came up.

During the February "sweeps,"

when local ratings determine advertising rates, Donahue ran a week of shows that were taped in the Soviet Union and made a serious attempt to examine U.S. and Soviet perceptions of each other.

Oprah, however, got big ratings and publicity when the show originated from Cumming, Ga., where Winfrey, who is black, confronted an all-white audience of 100 residents of Forsyth County, where no blacks live.

"I think that show was the difference in pushing her into superstardom," King said. "People weren't all that familiar with who she was. The show really built from that day on. It just really became a phenomenon."

Winfrey, nominated for an Academy Award for her supporting role in The Color Purple, is anticipating a move to prime time, in an ABC sitcom produced by King World. She still will do the talk show.

ABC has ordered 13 episodes, but the show is not on the fall schedule, because Winfrey didn't think the pilot was good enough, King said. It could make its debut mid-season.

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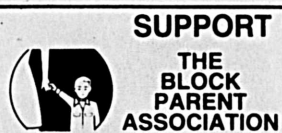
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Page 18 - Superba bath coordinates . . . Superba Sway Curtain No. 31885 is no longer available.

Page 28 - Feature price for Weatherbeater Latex Flat Exterior paint is incorrectly priced at Sears Reg. 31.99, Sale 15.99. Should read: Sears Reg. 33.99, Sale 16.99.

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