

'Davis Rules' leaves ABC, Murphy's Law behind

Comedy finds new home at CBS

By Suzanne Gill

Funny thing about ABC. They seem to have more comedies than sense. The network has four half-hours in the Nielsen top 10, but with dogs like "Baby Talk" and the rapidly deflating "Who's the Boss?" and "Growing Pains" still on the air, there hasn't been room for several other series the network still has in production. A case in point has been the Randy Quaid-Jonathan Winters comedy "Davis Rules," about a junior-high-school principal, his dad and three kids, which had the red-carpet treatment just last January, being introduced in the prime half-hour following coverage of Super Bowl XXV.

A similar situation existed two years ago for "Coach," the series starring Craig T. Nelson and Shelley Long, which was put aside after a well-received spring season in favor of "Chicken Soup." When the "Soup" soured, "Coach" came off the bench. Since then, the series has become a top-10 hit.

This season, the loss of "Good & Evil" and the semi-retirement of "Sibs" made room for a drama, "Civil Wars." So Carsey-Werner, the producers of "Davis Rules," who were completing production of their second set of 13 episodes in December, agreed to let the series be sold to CBS, where a time slot could be found on Wednesday nights. After a Dec. 30 preview, "Davis Rules" officially debuted on its new network Wednesday, Jan. 1.

"I was really happy to hear that CBS picked up the show," says Quaid. "It was sort of languishing over at ABC. We were making these shows week after week, but we never knew when we were going to be on the air, and they couldn't

really find a place for us.

"So when Marcy (Carsey) announced that we'd been sold to another network, and that we were going to be on the air on Wednesday nights, it was just great news for everybody."

The sale makes sense for CBS, struggling to be thought of as a purveyor of quality comedy, and struggling even more since Redd Foxx's death put "Royal Family," one of the darlings of its new season, into the shop. While not a breakaway hit for ABC, "Davis Rules" has established name value, and it provides a much needed partner for "Brooklyn Bridge," another CBS property still seeking an audience.

With the move, Quaid becomes one of the few actors to have worked for all three major broadcast networks. (He spent a season on NBC's "Saturday Night Live" in the mid-'80s.)

The Texas native's career started with a part in "The Last Picture Show," which led to two other films for director Peter Bogdanovich, "What's Up, Doc?" and "Paper Moon." Of those early days, Quaid says, "I've had a lot of self-doubts. The first time I ever saw myself on the screen was in dailies for 'What's Up, Doc?' and I thought, 'Oh, my gosh. My ears are too small, my nose is too big' — all these really critical things. I couldn't understand why they had me out here doing movies. But I've been really pleased with the way my career's turned out," he reflects.

And no wonder. In 1972, he earned an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of a kleptomaniac sailor in "The Last Detail," with Jack Nicholson and Michael Moriarty. He

has Emmy nominations for "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "LBJ: The Early Years," which also netted him a Golden Globe.

"I've done a lot of different things and played a lot of different characters. I've played leading men as well as character roles. I really consider myself more of a character actor than a leading man."

Quaid's other credits include "Midnight Express," "Fool for Love," "Days of Thunder," the cable movie "Dead Solid Perfect" and, on the stage, "True West," which co-starred his brother Dennis. Last year he took on the comic role of Feet Samuels in PBS' "Bloodhounds of Broadway," a Prohibition-era romance in which he was paired with Madonna. "I liked working with her," Quaid says. "I think she's just wonderful."

For all this, Quaid was initially reluctant to make a series, partially because it is so easy to be struck in a bad show. "I had been resisting television series for a long time," he says. "When Carsey-Werner offered this to me, I told them no and hung up the phone and thought that was it, but they came back. They asked me to come to their office, and they presented the idea."

"They were so enthusiastic about it, and the character sounded like a character I would like to play, and Jonathan Winters playing my dad — he's always been a real idol of mine, ever since I was a kid. So it felt right, and I decided to do it."

"I had just done about 13 movies back-to-back over a three-year period, and I was burned out on movies. I thought it would be nice to have a place to go to work every day here in town."

What more could an actor want — except to see his show finally get on the air?



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