

Chapter 1

(Introduction)

The Street Fighter Takes On The Two Champs

For many growing up during the 1960's, ABC-TV seemed to talk to us. It was always hipper than either CBS or NBC-TV. Turns out, that's correct. ABC head Leonard Goldenson set out to go for a younger demographic - as far back as 1954. But there's much more to the story.

When Leonard Goldenson's United Paramount Theaters bought and began operating ABC-TV - it was a dawg. This was 1953 - and competitors NBC and CBS-TV were already making money. Not so for ABC-TV. It was in a fight for survival and had no momentum. But it did have a cash infusion from the theater group and the TV network now had Leonard Goldenson - whose ideas and vision cemented ABC-TV's destiny.

Two major problems plagued the network - distribution (TV stations) and programming. CBS and NBC locked-up the best available TV stations outside the top-10 markets and - they had their radio star power locked up in television. Not so for ABC-TV - which, in April of 1953 - had 13 primary affiliates serving about 35% of the country. Places such as Syracuse, Rochester and Providence wouldn't see ABC-TV programming for years - but they could tune into CBS and NBC.

Also in 1953 - another network - Dumont - was fighting for ad dollars, affiliates and programming. It was a 2 ½-station world where there were four networks. What to do? First knock off the other weak competitor - Dumont. What came first? Better programming.

The theater cash infusion gave ABC-TV a respectable programming season in (1953-1954) - that accomplished two things: It was far and away better than rival Dumont and established ABC-TV as a "film" network - as NBC and CBS were concentrating on live TV, believing first - TV was a live medium. Leonard Goldenson reasoned that good entertainment could also come from film. That, to the audience - it didn't matter. He was right. Television didn't have to be a live medium. It was an early lesson ABC taught to the two giants.

With that - Goldenson and ABC set out to acquire programming from motion picture studio world. Nobody was thinking this way. He had to convince the movie industry, its enemy - television, was its friend and that producing programming for TV was the way

to go. As luck would have it - Walt Disney was seeking a TV network partner for his new park. Both CBS and NBC turned him down. Disney himself was hitting a brick wall - as no one would help finance his new park - which they saw as another "Coney Island" - and not a money maker. Goldenson agreed to give Disney 34% of what he needed plus one other thing. Disney had to produce programming for ABC-TV - a new show each year in 1954, 1955 and 1956.

The first program offered was "Disneyland" which was a virtual version of Walt's new and upcoming park. Walt Disney knew the power of promoting his movies through TV appearances - so why not come up with a program that could showcase and promote his new park? Week-after-week? It was sheer genius. The park was a success from its July/1955 opening day. It was no secret as Walt featured the park's build-out progress during the show's first season of 1954-1955 and viewers couldn't get enough. ABC-TV's "Disneyland" stayed near the top of the ratings for four years. By 1958 - the park had accumulated over 10 million visitors.

Soon as Disney was committed to TV - Goldenson got the ear of Warner Brothers head Jack Warner - that he needed to be in television. It wasn't long after - Warner Brothers along with Disney, helped ABC-TV achieve ratings success, despite lacking the station affiliate lists of NBC and CBS. ABC was starting an incredible trend. It's safe to say that Goldenson really got the film industry behind TV. Warner and, 20th-Century Fox had stepped up TV production by the late 1950's. And - that helped the industry because independent producers such as Four-Star - began to bring quality network programming to TV.

Think younger - CBS and NBC may have had the talent, but most of which came from a another decade. Goldenson set ABC-TV programming to be "younger" - even hiring young executives. Stars such as Dick Clark and James Garner would set the tone. This would help the network compete for ad agency dollars - as the network would commission studies concluding indeed, that "younger was better." This was revolutionary thinking during the 1950's. Even if a show wasn't in the top 10 or 15, it could be delivering decent younger-skewing numbers - and that kept some ABC-TV shows on longer than the overall ratings might have indicated. This actually worked more in ABC-TV's favor as baby boomers became a potent spending force starting in the late 1950's into the 1960' and 1970's.

And, building new, younger star power was cheaper than "buying" established stars. For the record - ABC-TV did try its hand in bringing suave Bing Crosby to television as well as Frank Sinatra and later Jerry Lewis. None of them were successful for ABC-TV - but

Dick Clark, James Garner, Edd Byrnes and Chuck Connors? They were great for ABC-TV!

In 1956 - Dumont went away - and freed up TV stations that shared Dumont and ABC-TV programming such as WNHC-TV New Haven. Little by little - ABC-TV was making a dent. By late 1958 - it put out its first #1 ad - that ABC-TV was indeed - the #1 TV network on certain nights. And, it was the only -TV network delivering younger demographics - so much-so, it came up with a 1958 campaign for ad agencies - calling it the, "Get Age" audience 18-49.

"Firsts" during this era - ABC-TV became the first network to program movies. It also began implementing strategies such as "counter" programming; started the 1950's "adult western" trend, and - it became the first network to embrace rock 'n roll. It also created TV's first pop culture icon with Davy Crockett. "Disneyland" and its associated theme parks may not have been around today without ABC-TV.

ABC-TV primary stations signed on - but slowly. There were only 108 TV stations on the air by April 1952 and two-thirds were CBS and NBC stations. Many more were coming - but not on channels 2-13.

In 1948 - The FCC froze licensing of new TV stations. Why? VHF channels 2-13 were not enough to cover the country. Another set of channels/frequencies were needed. The freeze was lifted after April of 1952 - but the TV world would change.

TV was delivered to homes by way of (locally) licensed TV stations with a transmitting antenna - direct to homes with TV sets that either had an indoor or outdoor antenna. Who could ever forget "rabbit ears" of two antennas protruding from a TV set? The range of a typical competitive VHF TV station was about 75 miles from its transmitter. Early UHF - not quite - about 55 miles.

The FCC's Sixth Report and Order of 1952 - allowed for new channel availabilities - many on the new Ultra High Frequency (UHF) band of channels. These new channels (14-83) were in a radio spectrum with much shorter wavelengths. This was a problem - because TV station antenna and transmitter designs were not at their UHF best. And - on the TV/consumer side - TV sets mostly contained the original Very High Frequency (VHF) band of channels - 2-13. You had to spare another \$75.00 to purchase an additional UHF tuner.

Pulling in a UHF station on a tuner was trickier. It wasn't the same experience or as easy as channels 2-13. And as stated - UHF TV stations didn't have the coverage of

VHF stations. They were termed, “weaker.” although technically, they put out more power - but the higher frequencies were more directional and tolerated small hills and buildings much less than VHF.

In the radio world - UHF was termed more “lossy” than VHF - the signal disappeared more with the same distance. And, UHF stations required more transmit power than their VHF counterparts - that meant - UHF transmitters needed more electricity - making a typical UHF station more expensive to run. Many early UHF stations went dark including affiliated ABC-TV stations - such as Channel 43 in Bridgeport, CT and Channel 66 in Kingston, NY.

The other issue for ABC-TV - was shared programming - or secondary affiliates. Many areas had only one or two TV stations before - and just after the freeze. For example In 1953 - KFMB-TV in San Diego (channel 8) aired programming from CBS, ABC and Dumont. It was the only way ABC-TV could be seen in San Diego during that time. And, KFMB-TV only aired the best shows - from ABC, CBS and Dumont. Without primary affiliates - this was the only way 1950’s ABC-TV programs (and on a limited schedule) could be viewed in places such as Boston and Pittsburgh. You really had to have a primary VHF (channels 2-13) affiliate to compete.

The FCC’s Sixth Report and Order - mixed many markets with VHF and UHF stations - something called, “intermix.” If the UHF was the third TV station - most likely “it” would become the market’s ABC affiliate. Not a good situation, as they had a hard time competing with the VHF’s. ABC lobbied hard to get the FCC to add VHF’s to these markets. The problem was - technically - it was a challenge. In some markets - ABC was successful in getting the FCC to assign (new) VHF channels that were short spaced.

Short space means that; for example, if you put a channel 7 in New York City - the next channel 7 needed to be (at minimum) 150 miles away. Short spacing means you moved a TV station “closer” but that meant potential interference. This was necessary to put channel 13 on the air in Albany, NY - as it was short spaced to channel 13 in New York City by about 20 miles. The FCC didn’t do these often - but they did a few and it helped ABC-TV.

On the other side, the FCC did turn certain markets into all-UHF (islands) - where every network was on an even footing. For example - Fresno, California originally had VHF channel 12 and several UHF channels. The VHF clearly had an advantage (it was CBS). In 1961 - the FCC made Fresno a UHF island - and channel 12 was moved to channel 30. ABC got channel 47 and NBC was on channel 24.

Every little bit helped, but ABC-TV still, by the late 1960's - had less (total) affiliates and the most UHF affiliates - as compared to CBS and NBC.

So, the ABC-TV uphill battle on the station front – it needed primary affiliates and competitive affiliates - that is everyone: NBC, CBS and ABC on VHF with equal signals - or all UHF.

The reality was - in many areas outside top markets - the ABC affiliate was on a UHF that was competing with another network on VHF. A good example of this was in Jacksonville, FL - where ABC-TV was on UHF channel 17 - with CBS and NBC on VHF channels 4 and 12.

In 1974 - ABC-TV was found on channel 39 UHF in San Diego. CBS was channel 8 and NBC was channel 10. When ABC-TV hit #1 in 1975 - channel 10 lobbied to become an ABC-TV affiliate - and it did. This was repeated in other markets. Being #1 actually helped ABC get better stations. The other factor helping ABC-TV with distribution - cable-TV. As more homes signed on - It didn't matter what channel you were tuned into VHF or UHF - they all came in clear.

Neither CBS nor NBC had these initial affiliate issues (to any extent) and in many (early) TV markets – there were two VHF availabilities only. As ABC-TV was late to the game in building their network to competitive status - everything else was late - including news building and sports coverage. News especially. ABC sports excelled quickly during the 1960's but news took a while longer. As late as 1967 - ABC's evening news had half the audience of either CBS or NBC.

The ABC-TV story is the greatest media-building story in history. I've presented this month-by-month so you can see and feel its legacy. The final chapter of this e-book contains more ABC-TV fascinating facts under the chapter, "The 1-2-3's of ABC-TV/Did You Know?"

I began gathering this information back in 1998 - for my "this-week-in-history" site (the only one at the time) called pophistorynow.com. The research comes from a myriad of sources - NY Times, LA Times, Chicago Tribune, Variety, TV Guide, Broadcasting and many other sources. It's as thorough (I hope) as possible and presenting it this way - is the best way. I've also included "related" news - so you can better put the reading in in context.

Enjoy the greatest media story... And, you'll love chapter 16 - "The 1-2-3's of ABC-TV."
Sincerely - Man From Yesterday

Chapter 2

ABC-TV The Beginning



1944 - Founder Edward G. Noble changes the NBC radio “Blue” network to the American Broadcasting Company - a name he purchased for \$10,000 from the owners of radio station WOL, Washington D.C.

1946 - ABC wins four construction permits for TV stations in NY, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco. It also purchased WXYZ radio in Detroit (from King-Triedle Broadcasting) and their construction permits for a TV and FM. All are on TV channel 7.

1948 - To finance their new TV operations - ABC issues 500,000 shares of stock at \$9.00 each.

1948 - First two ABC-TV stations - WFIL-TV and WMAL-TV. WFIL-TV was first affiliate. (ABC owned TV stations not yet on the air). First ABC-TV program transmitted April 10, 1948 with “On The Corner” with Henry Morgan.

Fred Allen once called ABC-TV, “the bastard network” because nobody could get anywhere on it.

Chapter 3

1951 - 1953 ABC-TV Starts Its Journey



May 1951 - CBS is considering purchasing ABC for a reported price of \$28 million. ABC, in which the majority stock is held by Edward J. Noble, has TV stations in New York, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco and Los Angeles. ABC was bought in 1943 by Mr. Noble for \$8 million before it had TV facilities. He did so by purchasing NBC's "Blue" radio network.

June 1951 - ABC and United Paramount Theaters agree to merge in a \$25 million agreement - giving the company money - and Leonard Goldenson- UPT President. The Theater division was spun-off from the studio division last year - and on its own - does very well. ABC under Edward Noble - was stuck as no new money was coming in and he could not get financing. Without this type of deal, ABC was bound to go away.

April 1952 - TV freeze ends. There are 108 TV stations on the air. The FCC opens up new TV channels across the country, and that will include a new TV band - UHF - channels 14-83. The ABC-TV network barely exists and it is - the fourth network.

May 1952 President Truman conducts a White House TV tour. With the President from CBS-TV - Walter Cronkite, Bryson Rash from ABC-TV and NBC-TV's Frank Bourgholtzer.

1953 - (February) ABC and Paramount Theatres (officially) merge. The new company has about 1,900 employees. ABC-TV has 13 primary affiliates - covering about 35% of the country. Along with owned and operated stations in New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, San Francisco and Chicago - they include WFIL-TV (Philadelphia), WCPO-TV (Cincinnati), WMAL-TV (Washington, D.C.), and WJZ-TV (Baltimore), WLTV (Atlanta).

1953 - ABC says a strategy is to sign studio production deals, since, the network has no real “star” power as does NBC or CBS. Leonard Goldenson is leading the way.

More 1953 - ABC tries its hand at bringing in “star power” - with Ray Bolger (Where’s Raymond?), Danny Thomas (Make Room For Daddy), Paul Hartman (Pride of the Family), and others such as Sammy Davis Jr., Arlene Dahl, George Jessel and Joel Grey. Radio show, “Ozzie and Harriet” is adopted for TV.

ABC-TV Gross revenues

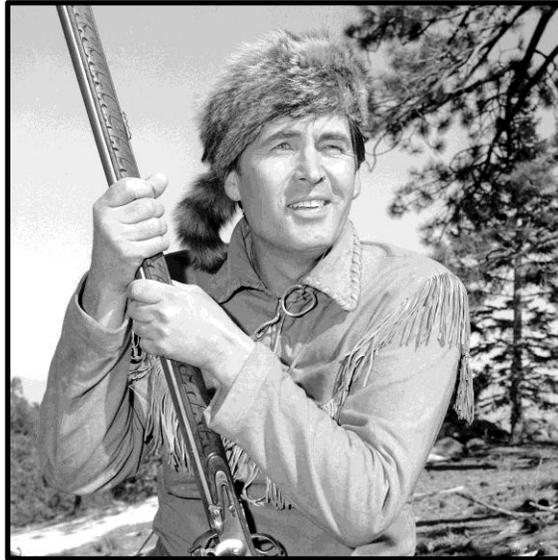
1952 - \$18,353,000 CBS - \$69,058,000 NBC - \$83,242,000

1953 - \$21,110,000 CBS - \$97,466,000 NBC - \$96,658,000

1954 - \$34,713,000 CBS - \$146,222,000 NBC - \$126,074,000

1955 - \$51,393,000 CBS - \$189,018,000 NBC - \$163,384,000

Chapter 4



1954-1959

Disney And Warner Brothers. Disneyland, Davy Crockett, Mickey Mouse Club; Dick Clark And Rock 'n Roll. ABC-TV Gets Serious With A Full Daytime Schedule. ABC-TV Gets Respectable Ratings. Biggest Show - Disneyland. ABC Scores Other Top-10 Shows. ABC-TV first #1 Advertisement.

1954 1954

1954 - Fascinating Fact - "The Lone Ranger" is seen on ABC-TV plus CBS-TV.

Fascinating Fact - ABC-TV news anchor (15 minutes each weeknight) John Daly is also seen each week as host of the popular CBS-TV show, "What's My Line?" He's better-known to TV viewers on the CBS-TV show - even though he's an anchor and an executive with ABC-TV.

Notes - Ratings - January/1954 - ABC-TV's biggest ratings come from two weekend religious-slanted shows - "Hour Of Decision" - Billy Graham Sunday (daytime) "Greatest Story Ever Told" - Also - Sunday (daytime).

January/1954 - ABC Affiliate KBTB Denver - lists these as some of the best-performing shows in terms of getting ratings and sponsorships:

“Make Room For Daddy,” “Ozzie and Harriet,” “Super Circus,” “You Asked For It,” “Pepsi Cola Playhouse,” “Kraft Theater,” “Stu Irwin,” Motorola TV Hour.”

January/1954 - A hip show for the young set, “Paul Whitman’s Teen Club” - a music how produced out of WFIL-TV in Philadelphia. Announcer is Philadelphia DJ Dick Clark. Seen Saturday nights on ABC-TV and sponsored by Tootsie Roll.

February/1954 - ABC-TV begins first daytime TV show - Don McNeal’s Breakfast Club (from its radio). Positions it after NBC-TV’ s “Today” and before CBS-TV’s “Arthur Godfrey.”

February/1954 - ABC-TV station WBKB-TV (channel 7) in Chicago fires comedian Jack Eagan who does a live show on the station - over a long kiss on the program. Eagan had starlet Cleo Moore on his show - wanting to find out “how they do it in Hollywood.” The pair kissed for more than 2 minutes. The station received hundreds of protests, charging the host with “vulgarity, “coarseness” and “bad taste.” “I have no guilty conscience. I have been very happily married for 18 years to a very wonderful little lady who knew what I had planned for the program. If she had thought there was anything unladylike or rude in it, she would have told me.”

February/1954 - ABC-TV had total gross ad sales of \$20,329,953 in 1953. Radio did better at 29,376.799. Broadcasting - February 15, 1954 pg 34.

February/1954 - ABC-TV announces that “The Mask” - a live Sunday night show, will be repeated in prime time - two more times the same week - Tues and Weds nights. Kinescopes. Program costs are \$25,000 for the hour. Those are just the costs.

March/1954 - Walt Disney signs with ABC-TV. ABC says the agreement with Disney is a “state secret.” ... Disney, originally had been turned-down by CBS and NBC, but - he came to the right place. He asked ABC-TV to come-up with an equity position in a new park he’s building. Seems like the banks and other financial types don’t want to put up the money for the park, which they see as another Coney Island - not a money maker. Leonard Goldenson said, he needed much more - that Disney had to provide programming. Disney agreed, and will add one new program each year for three years (initially).

April/1954 - ABC-TV conducts gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Senator Joseph McCarthy hearings - daytime on ABC. (it’ll end in June).

June/1954 - ABC Paramount Theaters declared stock dividend of 25 cents a share to preferred common stock. June 14, Broadcasting page 104. Payable July 20.

June/1954 - ABC Adds four affiliates up to 198 (but many are secondary and UHF dawgs) including channel 66 WKNY in Kingston, NY. Also added - WLOS Asheville, Beaumont TX and Billings, MT (VHF's).

August/1954 - Disneyland will debut on ABC-TV - Wednesday, October 27. Teaser promos have been running since July 15 - first month - "Walt Disney Is Up To Something Big On ABC-TV." August 15 - changed to - "Walt Disney Is Up To Something Big On ABC-TV This Fall."

KABC-TV - the Los Angeles owned-and-operated ABC-TV station - promotes the new "Disneyland" series at the Los Angeles County Fair in September. The KABC-TV booth was designed by Walt Disney and features a mural of Disneyland.

September/1954 - ABC-TV adds "Kukla, Fran and Ollie" - a 15-minute puppet show seen just before John Daly's news report - weeknights.

October/1954 - ABC-TV adds 13-weeks of NCAA football beginning September 18. Later, it's announced that ABC-TV lost \$1.8 million on NCAA coverage. President Leonard Goldenson said though - the NCAA gave the TV net much needed "prestige."

October/1954 - Walter Winchell - The Super Scooper begins his third year on ABC-TV with the same sponsors as last season - Gruen Watch and American Safety Razor. The Winchell show - as in the past - runs 15 minutes.

October/1954 - Disneyland debuts on October 27. First ratings period - ABC-TV finally lands a show in the top-10.

October/1954 - Rin Tin Tin debuts on ABC-TV. Sponsored by National Biscuit.

November/1954 - "Disneyland" set to air three parts of "Davy Crockett" starring Fess Parker and Buddy Epsen. First to air in late December 15 is, "Davy Crockett Indian Hunter." Second to air on January 26, 1955 - "Davy Crockett Goes To Congress" and third set to air March 2 - "Davy Crockett at the Alamo."

December/1954 - in the fall debut season, ABC-TV also has big ratings with Disneyland and "Rin Tin Tin."

1955 1955

January/1955 - ABC begins airing a Country and Western music show "Ozark Jubilee"

January/1955 - TV Ratings -

Jackie Gleason (CBS) – 53.4 Toast of the Town (CBS) – 51.8 I Love Lucy (CBS) – 51.2
Bob Hope (NBC) – 46.8 Dragnet (NBC) – 45.7 Milton Berle (NBC) – 45.7 Max Liebman
Special (NBC) – 43.3 **Disneyland (ABC) – 42.9** Groucho Marx (NBC) – 42.0 GE
Theatre (CBS) – 41.0

February/1955 (related) - Dumont – television's "fourth" network is cutting back. Last month, Dumont eliminated the greatest share of its AT&T line charges by cutting back on the use of the coaxial to as little as 10% of what it was a month earlier. The network is laying-off more people this month and is down to one full-time advertising salesman – Harry Pertka. (This is good news for ABC as some TV stations air ABC and Dumont programming such as WNHC-TV, New Haven).

February/1955 - ABC-TV owned and operated WABC-TV debuts "Entertainment" a live weekday variety show with Tom Poston as emcee.

February/1955 - Davy Crockett – Because of the recent ABC-TV/Disneyland showing of Davy Crockett, there's going to be lots of phonograph record action. Out front is Columbia Records/Fess Parker's version of "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" but it's one of several to hit the marketplace. The others are by Bill Hayes and Tennessee Ernie Ford and yet another by Rusty Draper. What's interesting is, Burl Ives cut the song some time ago, and Decca is re-releasing his version.

March/1955 (related) - The FCC proposes to congress to authorize it to conduct a sweeping study of the entire broadcasting industry. One concern is TV stations assigned to UHF (Ultra High Frequency) - Channels 14 - 83. Many have trouble competing with their VHF counterparts (channels 2-13) and some have already sign-off. A delay in developing high-power UHF transmitters coupled with the amount of TV sets that can receive UHF may well be a factor in UHF troubles. Out of the 35 million TV sets now in use, only 5 million can receive UHF broadcasts. The commission wants to meet with TV manufacturers to discuss the feasibility of making more all-channel sets.

March/1955 - The largest production schedule of any single television producer is set for the 1955-1956 TV season by Walt Disney. Disney says it will have a total of 126

hours of new programming on ABC-TV - "Disneyland" (26 hours) and the new "Mickey Mouse Club" (100 hours). "Mickey Mouse Club" will debut October 3.

"Disneyland" will include two color films similar to the Davy Crockett epic of this year. First one is "Powell of the Colorado," story of the exploration of the river, to be done in two parts. Second is the tale of John Coulter, first white man to reach Yellowstone. Fess Parker will probably be featured in both.

March/1955 - More About Disney's "Mickey Mouse Club" - Walt Disney will produce its second series for The American Broadcasting Company - "The Mickey Mouse Club." The release says the program will combine entertainment with information and will be produced with the help of scientists, educators, naturalists and other authorities around the world. The program will be broadcast late afternoons beginning in October. It will be the only daytime program broadcast on ABC-Television. Don McNeill's "Breakfast Club" just went off the air.

April/1955 - ABC-TV is looking to opening a "film center" whereby new shows will be staged and filmed. The network is leading the way to film - as opposed to live TV. It's seriously considering a location in Hollywood.

April/1955 - The airing of "Davy Crockett" gives ABC-TV's Disneyland its first original star - "Davy Crockett." Merchandising is popping up everywhere. "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" by Bill Hayes hits #1 on the national charts.

April/1955 - "Disneyland" repeats score better than original - second time. That is, the first three "Disneyland" episodes, when repeated earlier in 1955 - did better in the ratings than the original airings. Some "Disneyland" episodes were aired up to a third time - before the new season, and the ratings stayed respectful - not less than a 50% share of the audience (broadcasting - Oct 1955).