

TQS wins in CRTC hearing on TV sports broadcasting

MONTREAL – Télévision Quatre Saisons Inc. has been exonerated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) following charges that the French-language network had failed, in its 1987 fall program schedule, to meet the criterion for its broadcast license.

The CRTC ruled recently against charges by two Quebec-based broadcast organizations, Réseau Pathonic Inc. and Réseau de télévision TVA Inc., that TQS had ruled out the broadcasting of sporting events in the licensing decision of Sept. 6, 1985.

The conflict arose when, in April 1987, TQS negotiated with O'Keefe Breweries, owners of the Quebec Nordiques, for the rights to four NHL playoff elimination rounds and the Stanley Cup finals after TVA backed out of the same deal with O'Keefe.

Unexpectedly, the Nordiques rose through the play-off standings, drawing an estimated two million television viewers to TQS. This season, the brewery signed with TQS for regular season (26 games) and playoff coverage after TVA

specified that it would carry only 15 games.

Following an Ottawa hearing on July 9, the CRTC ascertained that the TQS can carry sports according to the terms of its network license. Representing TQS at the hearing was Jean Pouliot, president and chief executive officer of CFCF Inc. (licensee of TQS), André Picard, TQS programme director and Jean Belanger, vice-president of governmental affairs for CFCF Inc.

Adrian Pouliot, vice-president and general manager of CFCF Inc. who was also in attendance, characterized the hearing as a "report card presentation" of TQS achievements since the CRTC authorized a single television station in 1985.

It was noted that one year later TQS (CFJP-TV, channel 35 cable 5 in Montreal), had developed into a satellite broadcasting network capable of reaching 85 per cent of the Quebec population through a rebroadcasting station in Quebec City and five regional affiliates (five or eight affiliates).

The transition from station to network with the blessing of the CRTC meant an increase in

broadcast hours from 77 to 94 hours per week and capital expenditure of \$40 million (1986/87) compared to an anticipated \$23 million.

It was during that initial licensing hearing in 1985, explains Pouliot, that TQS outlined plans for a distinctive programming look with which to find a competitive niche between existing broadcasters, and to counter VCR and pay-TV viewing trends.

Although sports coverage was not included in the initial TQS programming mandate, Pouliot says sports coverage was not ruled out as a "future possibility." Nor did the CRTC impose any condition regarding sports coverage when it issued the license in 1985.

"We looked at sports that were narrowcasted and decided that TSN did a fair enough job at covering darts. So we told

the CRTC that there was no room, at that time, for sports in our schedule, which didn't mean we would not eventually have sports," explains Pouliot.

"We never said that we would never carry sports. We said that we would not carry sports in the fall of 1986. There was a perception in the press that we would never carry sports. Even the CRTC got that impression. Perhaps it was our fault. But there is enough evidence in front of the CRTC to support what we did say."

The Montreal Canadiens and the Quebec Nordiques had already shown interest in negotiating with TQS for hockey broadcast rights should a network license be obtained by TQS. Furthermore, Pouliot says, the CRTC was informed of these negotiations prior to its decision to grant a network license in late 1986.

"Once we became equivalent to Radio-Canada and TVA in reaching 87 per cent of the Quebec population, the breweries (team owners, Molson and O'Keefe respectively) became very interested in us," says Pouliot.

This desire by all parties, including TQS, to have and to

hold larger audiences, combined with the evolution of TQS into network status and a reported decrease of 200 hours devoted to sports by CBC and TVA between 1985 and the winter of 1987, led to the broadcast coverage agreement between TQS and O'Keefe Breweries for the 1987-1988 NHL hockey season.

Sports programming on TQS in 1987-1988 will also include World Series baseball, curling, golf and the possibility of Formula One racing. Canada Cup hockey was featured several weeks ago.

A message to shareholders from J.A. Pouliot in the CFCF Inc. quarterly report for the nine months ending May 31, 1987 reads: "Our new fall 1987 program schedule, while keeping our top programs, includes several established television hosts with new programs, a new drama series, special sporting events and weekly NHL hockey which we feel will achieve high station ratings."

Accumulated costs at TQS for the nine months ending May 31, 1987 were \$11.8 million after revenues of \$11.6 million, costs of \$32.3 million and tax credits of \$8.9 million.

Grierson to T.O.

TORONTO – The Ontario Film Association will sponsor the 13th Annual Grierson Documentary Seminar to be held Nov. 8 to 13 at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

An opening night reception, public screenings and a public forum on Canadian broadcasting will be held in addition to the five-day seminar during which film and video makers, academics and industry professionals will exchange ideas on the state of film and video in North America.

The programmers are Geoff Pevere of the Perspective Canada series at the Festival of Festivals, Lise Steele, a Canadian video artist and Tom Waugh, professor of Film Studies at Concordia University. Magnus Isacson will chair the sessions.

Issac Julien, Robert Frank, Kay Armatage, Laura Sky, and Alanis Obomsawin will be among 17 invited film and video makers, and will bring films and videos dealing with sexuality, racism, new technology and other topics.

Explains Nora Currie, seminar coordinator: "The seminar is an attempt to get to the roots of the documentary film and video dealing with social issues and how we, as viewers, respond."

This year marks the first time that the Grierson Seminar has moved from Niagara-On-The-Lake to Toronto.

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