

ENTERTAINMENT

Gumbel object of network bidding war

NEW YORK (AP) — Two years ago this week, CBS won an intense three-network bidding war for the services of former "Today" host Bryant Gumbel by agreeing to pay him nearly \$5 million a year.

Now he's virtually an invisible man.

His newsmagazine canceled, Gumbel hasn't appeared on the air for CBS since he was host of a news special in December. It's not clear when he'll appear on-screen again. CBS says it is discussing future projects with Gumbel, but won't disclose more.

To some at the network, the comeback path appears clear: a return to morning television as host of CBS's perpetually struggling "This Morning," where Gumbel would compete against the morning institution where he reigned for 15 years.

Gumbel's agent, Ed Hookstratten, said CBS officials have talked with Gumbel about being host of the morning show, but the idea is a long way from reality. Gumbel sent word through a spokeswoman that he didn't want to talk publicly about the possibility.

"He enjoyed his 15 years



BRYANT GUMBEL

on "Today," Hookstratten said. "He's been away from it for a few years. He may be amenable to it, I don't know. But it hasn't gotten to the point of 'Hey, Bryant, will you do it?'"

Bringing Gumbel to "This Morning" would allow CBS to take a serious run at ABC's "Good Morning America" for second place in morning TV, an increasingly lucrative time of day for networks. "Today" is so far ahead that it's not a realistic target at this point.

"This Morning" very briefly surged past "Good Morning America" in the ratings at the end of last year, but has settled back into third place since Diane Sawyer and Charles Gibson were installed as hosts of the ABC show.

CBS is talking about a range of changes to "This

Morning," now anchored by Mark McEwen and Jane Robelot, CBS News President Andrew Heyward said. "We are pleased with its progress but are not satisfied," he said.

"Bryant and I are colleagues and friends and we talk all the time," Heyward said. "Of course, the morning show is part of this. But there have been no offers, no negotiations, no demands. All of this is a work in progress."

"Good Morning America" may actually pave the way for Gumbel's return. Luring Sawyer and Gibson to be hosts established the precedent of news stars returning to morning television, making it easier for CBS to approach Gumbel about this job. Sawyer worked for CBS's morning show in the early 1980s.

"I think it would be slightly strange for those of us who worked with him every day to be competing against him," said Jeff Zucker, executive producer of "Today." "On the other hand, I would certainly welcome it because more competition is always great and Bryant is certainly terrific at this. It would be strange but kind of fun."

But it's far more

complicated than adjusting a chair for him on the morning show set.

CBS is considering an expensive real estate deal to build a street-front studio for "This Morning" off New York's Central Park, imitating the successful "Today" window at Rockefeller Plaza. Without it, many at CBS doubt Gumbel would want the job.

"This Morning" would also probably have to change its unique format that turns over much of its first hour to its affiliates for local news.

The network gave away that time a few years ago to stave off a mutiny by affiliates angry at low ratings. Persuading these local stations to give the time back, or perhaps accept time in the second hour, would take delicate negotiations.

A key man in these discussions is Steve Friedman, executive at CBS's affiliate in New York City. Friedman's also a former executive producer of "Today" when Gumbel worked there. A decision on what to do about "This Morning" is expected before an important meeting of CBS affiliates in June.

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Michael Jackson seeks South Africa hotel stake

NEW YORK - Pop superstar Michael Jackson and his business partner are in talks to buy a \$60 million stake in hotel and casino group Sun International South Africa Ltd., according to sources familiar with the situation.

Jackson and Detroit businessman Don Barden are seeking to buy a 28 percent investment being sold by major shareholder North West Development Corp. Ltd., said the sources, who declined to be identified.

The pair has been searching since last year to invest in the booming hotel and casino business.

They have scouted properties in the U.S. Virgin Islands and held preliminary talks with Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide Inc. last October to buy the Desert Inn resort in Las Vegas.

They have considered other properties in Las Vegas, and also unsuccessfully tried to build a casino in Detroit.

One source said Barden was expected to fly to South Africa next week in hopes of completing the deal.

Shares of Sun



MICHAEL JACKSON

International, known as Sisa, rose sharply in South Africa on speculation about a potential deal with Jackson. Sisa declined comment. Jackson, Barden and North West could not be reached for comment.

The company had a monopoly on South African casino gambling until 1996, when the government opened the industry up to competition.

Barden is chairman of Majestic Star Casino, which owns a riverboat casino in Gary, Ind. Industry analysts peg his personal wealth at \$2 billion.

"Jackson is well advised by Barden, who has an exceptional business mind," said Warren Marr, leisure industry analyst with PricewaterhouseCoopers in Philadelphia.

Study looks at music-math link's impact on comprehension, skill

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Music lessons coupled with a special computer program significantly increased the math skills of children at an inner city elementary school, according to a study.

Learning piano and how to read music helped the children to recognize rhythmic values, note values — such as an eighth note being half of a quarter note — and identify letter names — E, G, B, D, F — from a note's scale placement, the researchers said.

The computer program included spatial exercises such as assembling pieces of a puzzle and arranging geometric pieces in particular orders, according to the report in Monday's edition of Neurological Research.

"The learning of music emphasizes thinking in space and time," the report said. "When children learn rhythm, they are learning ratios, fractions, and proportions. ... With the keyboard, students have a clear visual representation of auditory space."

The four-month project

was led by University of California, Irvine, professor Gordon Shaw, whose previous studies have linked music with above-average skills in spatial concepts found in mathematics, architecture and engineering.

At the 95th Street school, which ranks 48th on the list of Los Angeles' 100 poorest-performing institutions, 136 second-graders were divided into several groups, some receiving piano and nonverbal computer training, and others receiving a mixture of computer and English-language math instruction.

The students' test results were compared to a 1997 pilot study in which 102 second-graders in below-average schools in Orange County were given only computer program and traditional math teaching.

The Los Angeles students scored 27 percent higher than their Orange County counterparts in their ability to understand and analyze ratios and fractions — concepts usually not introduced until sixth grade.

"That 27 percent increase

was just in four months," Shaw said Friday.

"Continued music training would continue to boost that. Kids who could play more

sophisticated music would increase their enhancement in math skills."

But a Dartmouth College professor who has studied

possible learning benefits from music said he needed to see details of the study before he would agree with the researchers' conclusions.

"You have to be careful that the test subjects do not know what the experiment is designed to show," said

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