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Ellen Gray: 'Project Runway' undergoes a time change



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PROJECT RUNWAY. 9 tonight, Bravo.

PORTFOLIO.COM last week ran a story suggesting ratings for Bravo's "Project Runway" might be down this summer because some contestants are boring.

Never mind that there have always been boring "Runway" contestants - personally, I don't even bother to learn their names till we're down to about a half-dozen - or that the story itself quoted a Bravo rep as noting that ratings were actually up from last year for some episodes.

I'm personally thinking sabotage by Bravo and its parent, NBC Universal.

Not of the show itself - whose producers have every reason to try to keep it as addictive as ever as they prepare to launch Season 6 on Lifetime this fall - but of the show's relationship with its viewers, whom Bravo would rather not see follow "Runway" to another channel.

Those would be its tired, easily befuddled viewers, who this season were asked to remember that "Runway" had moved to 9 p.m. Wednesdays from its previous 10 p.m. time slot.

And while it could be argued that anyone with a working DVR, including me, should not be thrown by a time-slot change in 2008, because we're living in a Post-TV Schedule world, I am, nevertheless, thrown.

There are still a few shows I want to watch in real time. Even if I know that what I'm watching was taped months ago and that two of the contestants are now dating and that tonight's show is no more live at 9 than it would be if I watched it at 10, I want to remember to see it at 9.

Or at least to have it back on at 10.

Woodruff on China

With just two days to go until the Olympics opening ceremonies, some people are probably already tired of hearing about China.

But while the Games will come and go - after 3,023 tear-jerking profiles of athletes who've overcome innumerable traumas on their way to Beijing - China's here to stay. And ABC News' "Primetime" (10 tonight, Channel 6) has a refreshingly hard-edged look at some of the ways what one interviewee refers to as the world's largest developing country is affecting the rest of the world.

"China Inside Out" begins with ABC News' Bob Woodruff returning to the place his news career began - China's Tiananmen Square, site of the 1989 student protests, during which Woodruff, a lawyer then teaching in Beijing, served as a translator for foreign journalists.

It's yet another sign of Woodruff's near-miraculous recovery from the injuries he suffered while reporting in Iraq 2 1/2 years ago that he still speaks Chinese well enough to have conducted some short interviews in the language for tonight's report, including one with a Chinese contractor working in Angola.

Woodruff went to Angola to look at the way Chinese money and labor are transforming the war-torn African nation by helping to improve its infrastructure in return for jobs and oil.

"Angola is well-known as one of the most corrupt countries in Africa," says Woodruff, but the oil-hungry Chinese, whose money comes with far fewer strings than most Western powers would attach, have priorities beyond reform.

After Angola, it's a trip to Brazil, to look at the facts behind the recent doubling in the price of soybeans. Thanks to an increasing shift in the U.S. from soybeans to corn - from which ethanol can be made - Brazil is expected to pass the U.S. in soy exports next year. Last year, China imported 34 million tons of soybeans to deal with its increasingly prosperous citizens.

And from there, he's off to Cambodia, where Chinese businesses looking for even cheaper labor than they can find at home are opening factories at the rate of one a month.

It's the kind of reporting we're used to seeing on PBS' "Frontline" - or on, say, the Discovery Channel, where Woodruff's former ABC News colleague, Ted Koppel, did his own four-part series on China earlier this summer. Not too many pretty pictures, no paranoia, just a clear-eyed assessment of China's place in an increasingly interdependent world.

Like ABC News' excellent "Hopkins" - which ends its seven-week run tomorrow night - it no doubt finds its way into prime time (and on to "Primetime") right now because the entertainment division's cupboards are bare.

Not to worry. It's summer. And a little thinking never hurts.

'True' story

When I asked last week for someone to send me a picture of of one of the local ads for HBO's new vampire series, "True Blood," I hadn't counted on Matthew Wabals, of Queen Village, who said he'd snapped a cell-phone picture of one near 6th and South streets a week or so earlier to show a friend "who happens to like vampires."

For his foresight, Wabals wins a red "True Blood" T-shirt with the slogan, "Friends Don't Let Friends Drink Friends."


It might be best to wear this one after dark. *

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