NBC's 'Biggest Loser' Turns Into Biggest Gainer

Rash Report: Finale Inches Past Season Average

By John Rash

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MINNEAPOLIS (AdAge.com) -- Sure, Fox's "American Idol" won, but "The Biggest Loser" was the biggest gainer, as the three-hour season-ender of NBC's unlikely reality hit was up 2% over its fall finale and, more tellingly, increased its season average rating 12% in the ad-centric 18-to-49 demographic. Still, the 4.7/13 rating and share was only good enough to put NBC in second place to Fox's 6.1/16. But the network was well above CBS (3.1/8), ABC (1.9/5) and the CW (1.0/3).

From the title to its tonality, "Biggest Loser" upends today's celebrity culture of pretty, skinny stars and makes celebrities out of just a few of the estimated two-thirds of the population considered obese or overweight. Through a combination of inspirational and aspirational stories, "Loser" is one of the few solid series NBC can build on after a season in which it will finish fourth overall among adults 18 to 49.

The season won't end until next week, but it's likely Fox will finish first in the demo, mostly due to
"Idol" (8.0/23). Yet while it won last night, it still lost 13% of its season average. But even a show as popular as "Idol" can't power an entire network, so Fox used its hit effectively to push "Fringe" (3.9/10), its sci-fi drama whose season finale delivered 22% more than its series premiere last September.

CBS, which will likely once again win the household ratings race, also created a hit in "The Mentalist" (3.3/8). However, up against "Biggest Loser," "Idol" and ABC's "Dancing With the Stars," "The Mentalist" was 11% off its season average. Once again, however, CBS loyalists gave the network considerable consistency: "Mentalist" lead-in "NCIS" matched its average rating, and lead-out "Without a Trace" (2.8/7) was up a tenth of a ratings point from its season average.

ABC, conversely, rode a ratings roller coaster, with two episodes of "According to Jim" (1.0/3 and 1.1/3) leading into its reality franchise "Dancing With the Stars," which spiked 182% over its lead-in, delivering a 3.1/8. Then the network headed right back down again, as the season finale of "Cupid" (1.5/4) fell by half from its lead-in (which probably means it was a series finale). "Dancing" bucked not only rodeo star Ty Murray but 16% of its average audience this season.

On the CW, "90210" (1.2/3) continued its struggles, as this week it was off 20%, while lead-in "Reaper" held its .9/2 average.

**WHAT TO WATCH:**
**Wednesday:** From "Biggest Loser" to "Lost," it's season-finale time. Tonight the ABC drama has its annual cliffhanger. Of course, if you view, you already knew that. If you don't, the opaque plot may make it impossible for casual viewing.

**Thursday:** Conversely, casual viewers are welcome to the wedding on "Grey's Anatomy," ABC's less ambitious but more accessible drama, which has its two-hour season finale.

**WHAT TO WATCH FOR:**
"America's Next Top Model's" last strut down the catwalk to give the CW its highest ratings this spring. Then, inexplicably, the network to chase that audience away with yet another rerun of "90210."

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*NOTE: All ratings based on adults 18-49. A share is a percentage of adults 18-49 who have their TV sets on at a given time. A rating is a percentage of all adults 18-49, whether or not their sets are turned on. For example, a 1.0 rating is 1% of the total U.S. adults 18-49 population with TVs. Ratings quoted in this column are based on live-plus-same-day unless otherwise noted. (Many ad deals have been negotiated on the basis of commercial-minute, live-plus-three-days viewing.)*

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