Second Night of 'Idol' Stronger Than Premiere

Rash Report: CBS Comes in Second for the Night

By John Rash

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MINNEAPOLIS (AdAge.com) -- Maybe the season premiere of Fox's "American Idol" was just a warm-up act. Or maybe all the news about 10% fewer viewers overall and 15% lower ratings in the ad-centric 18-to-49 demographic reminded some that the country's favorite show was back. But somehow night two of "Idol's" two-part season premiere -- was slightly higher-rated than the first, a feat not achieved in five years.

Still, the 11.8/30 rating and share was down 6% from last year's second showing. It may take a week or two to get a firm fix on this year's ratings.

Weaker competition
The competition also wasn't as keen on Wednesday as it was on Tuesday. ABC, for instance, underdelivered even on its fourth-place Tuesday finish with a 1.7/4 for Wednesday's three-hour "Lost" rerun.

NBC wasn't any more compelling, tying ABC for third by channeling a pop-culture phenomenon of a
generation ago -- "Knight Rider" (1.6/4). A "Law and Order: SVU" repeat at 9 p.m. was even lower, with a 1.2/3. An original "Law and Oder" at 10 p.m. matched its season average with a 2.3/6.

The 10 p.m. winner was CBS's "CSI: NY," which was down 11% from its regular ratings to a 3.2/8. And unlike on Tuesday night -- when CBS's strong drama lineup of "NCIS" and "The Mentalist" matched or beat their original-episode season averages -- Wednesday's "Idol" fighters, "The New Adventures of Old Christine" (1.9/5), "Gary Unmarried" (2.1/5) and "Criminal Minds" (3.2/8), were down 10%, 9% and 18%, respectively. Still, just like on Tuesday, CBS finished second on Wednesday with a 2.8/7.

Also hit hard were the new CW series "13 Fear Is Real" (down 45% to a .6/1) and a repeat of "90210" (off 40% to a .3/1), as both are particularly susceptible to losing young women to "Idol." The CW finished fifth for the night with an overall .5/1.

WHAT TO WATCH:
Thursday: A long-lasting institution that once met with high ratings and magazine cover stories says goodbye on Thursday night. NBC's "E.R."? No, President George W. Bush, who will start off the night with a farewell address at 8 p.m.
Friday: Catch it while you can: The low-rated but highly honored "Friday Night Lights" makes its season premiere on NBC.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: Maybe as an homage to "E.R.," but more likely a reflection of cutthroat network competition, ABC runs an all-medical lineup of its own, with two episodes of "Scrubs" followed by dramas "Grey's Anatomy" and "Private Practice." Will it lead to healthier ratings?

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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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