

Ch. 20 and the Astros to sign a 10-year pact

By EDDIE SEFKO
Houston Chronicle

The Astros and Ch. 20 aren't married, but a new contract about to be consummated will make a longstanding legal union between the two.

The Astros and Ch. 20 (KTXH) are close to signing an unprecedented agreement that will grant the independent station exclusive television rights for all road games during the next 10 years.

Never has there been such a lengthy television contract among Houston's professional sports franchises.

NOTEBOOK

The contract should be finalized sometime near the end of the month, said Vince Barresi, KTXH's vice president and general manager.

"We hope to enter into a long-term agreement with the Astros soon," said Barresi. "That's about all I can say at this point. It could conceivably happen in the next two weeks."

Others in the business locally say the deal is essentially completed, with only signatures needed to make it official.

The Astros approached Houston's other independent stations, KHTV (Ch. 39) and KRIV (Ch. 26), with the 10-year deal, but got no takers.

"I understand Ch. 20 has got it," said Jerry Marcus, GM of KRIV. "We talked to them (the Astros) about it, but there were several problems."

"Our No. 1 program is news at 7 p.m. There would have been a number of times when we would have had to preempt our news for baseball. Plus, there are a lot of uncertainties involved with a long-term situation. Ten years is a long time. Normally, a contract like this is only three or four years."

Ch. 20 has had the Astros' road games for the past three seasons, and that contract extends through next season. The KTXH deal, however, will give the rights to the station through 1996, something the Astros feel will help their stability.

Regional cable channel Home Sports Entertainment carries the Astros' home games.

The major difference between the long-term contract and past Astros' TV packages, said Marcus, is that Ch. 20 will purchase the commercial time as part of the deal. In the past, the Astros kept all the commercial time with the exception of four minutes given to the

station.

Ch. 20, however, will pay a rights fee to the Astros, and retain the commercial time.

Interestingly, new Astros GM Dick Wagner has his roots in the business in Cincinnati, where Taft Broadcasting Co. is located. Taft owns KXTH.

Around the dial

As if we hadn't noticed, CBS is focusing this NFL season on the 49ers instead of its sure ratings lure — the Cowboys. The ratings may dictate a change to the old style. ABC's NFL ratings are up 19 percent over last year, while NBC's is up 13 percent. As for CBS, it is showing just a 3 percent increase.

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