

Coke stops advertising with WWF

ATLANTA (AP) — The World Wrestling Federation (WWF) is too raw for Coca-Cola, which has stopped advertising on the increasingly raunchy WWF telecasts despite their sizzling popularity.

Coke ended its two-year advertising relationship with the WWF last month, citing objectionable language and content on broadcasts such as the Monday night cable program "RAW is WAR," which draws about 6 million viewers each week.

The world's biggest soft drink company still advertises with WWF's main rival, World Championship Wrestling (WCW), a subsidiary of Time Warner's Turner Broadcasting System. The WCW has been accused of making its story lines more racy to compete with the WWF.

But Coke said the WWF has gone too far. Stone Cold Steve Austin swills beers, spouts profanity and salutes other wrestlers with obscene gestures. The Godfather enters the ring dressed like a pimp and accompanied by scantily clad women. Female wrestlers pull each other's hair and bikinis as they stumble around in high heels.

"It crossed the line in terms of content, particularly in terms of language and story lines," Coke spokesperson Bob Bertini said yesterday. "It's not about one episode or one particular character. It's what we observed over a period of time."

Coke's decision comes as the Parents Television Council, a Los Angeles-based conservative group, is pressuring advertisers to drop WWF's weekly "Smackdown!," which is the top-rated program on the fledgling UPN.

The Air Force and Army have already suspended WWF ads, and several companies are

Bad to the bone

Advertisements by Coca-Cola will no longer be shown during the World Wrestling Federation's telecasts. The company cites the WWF's lewd language and story lines. Here is a look at the top draw in the 1980s and early 1990s compared to today's WWF superstar.

THEN



Hulk Hogan
Favorite saying: "Would tell his young fans, called Hulkamaniacs, to eat their vitamins and say their prayers. The most recognized wrestler in the world, Hogan signed with World Championship Wrestling (WCW) in 1994 after years with the WWF. He is considered a role model and positive force to his loving and adoring fans."

NOW



"Stone Cold" Steve Austin
Favorite saying: "And that's the bottom line, 'cause Stone Cold said so!" The WWF's top attraction, the beer-swilling, gun-toting and head-banging Austin is as well known for extending his middle finger as for pinning opponents. The mere sight of him entering the ring drives crowds into a frenzy."

Wrestlers behaving badly
Here are some results of an Indiana University study:
1,658 times that wrestlers grabbed or pointed to their crotch.
434 uses of an obscene phrase.
157 instances of flipping the bird.
128 incidents of simulated sexual activity.
47 incidents of simulated Satanic activity.
42 incidents of simulated drug use.
*WWF programming was monitored for 100 hours.

Sources: Compiled by AP wire reports; World Wrestling Federation; AP/Ed De Gassio; World Championship Wrestling

considering it, L. Brent Bozell III, the founder of the Parents Television Council, said.

"We're telling these companies you can no longer distinguish the values of the sponsor from the values of the show they sponsor," Bozell said.

WWF chair Vince McMahon blasted Coke's decision as "discriminatory, hypocritical and an affront to free speech" and labeled Bozell "a right-wing zealot."

Coke's decision will not hurt WWF revenue. It has a firm grapple hold on a young male audience that is increasingly hard for advertisers to reach.

Advertising money from Coke made up 3 percent of WWF revenue, but its ad slots were "immediately snapped up by the movie studios and video game manufacturers at a premium," WWF spokesperson Jim Byrne said yesterday.

"This is almost a hide-your-eyes kind of thing" for advertisers, Steven Karel, managing director of Extreme Championship Wrestling, the No. 3 player in the industry, said. ECW is credited with pioneering wrestling's more lascivious and violent leanings, especially on its uncensored pay-per-view shows.

Court to address hate crime punishment

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court will referee a dispute over how to punish hate crimes, setting the stage for a ruling that will affect anti-bias laws in most states.

The court said yesterday it will decide whether state judges can impose longer prison terms based on their own determinations that crimes were sparked by prejudice. A decision is expected by late June.

At issue in a New Jersey case is whether a jury should decide if racial hatred prompted a man to fire shots into a black family's home.

Nearly all the states enacted hate-crime laws in the 1980s. They provide extra punishment when crime victims were selected because of their race or religion, or in some instances sexual orientation.

New Jersey was one of the first to adopt such a law, in 1981. The state bans the burning of crosses or placing of swastikas on public or private property with the intention of terrorizing others through threats of violence.

Also outlawed is placing such graffiti on houses of worship or in cemeteries. The state's law was expanded in 1990 to provide stiffer penalties for such common crimes as assault and harassment if prejudice played a part in selecting the victim.

Charles C. Apprendi Jr. of Vineland, N.J., was arrested in 1994 after shots were fired into the home of a black family living in his otherwise all-white neighborhood. No one was injured in the shooting.

"[The New Jersey Supreme Court does] punish more severely crimes involving particularly vulnerable victims."

— New Jersey Supreme Court ruling

Apprendi said he fired four or five shots into the house, telling police he wanted to give the family who lived there a message that they did not belong in his neighborhood.

He later said he was unfairly pressured into giving police what he contends was a false statement, and that his gunfire had been randomly directed when the house's purple front door caught his eye. His lawyers now contend there was no racial intent.

Apprendi pleaded guilty to a firearm

violation and possessing a bomb in the house, all of which carried a maximum 10-year prison sentence. At a plea hearing, he admitted his purpose for firing at the house was to frighten the family.

After prosecutors sought a 21-year sentence under the state's hate-crime law, the state trial judge imposed a 10-year term. The judge said prosecutors had offered persuasive evidence that Apprendi's act was racially motivated.

Apprendi appealed the 12-year sentence, saying the hate-crime law had been decided by a jury using the highest legal standard — whether prosecutors provided proof of racial hatred beyond a reasonable doubt.

The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled against Apprendi, upholding the 10-year sentence by a 5-2 vote last June.

"We do not punish thought," the court said. "We do punish more severely crimes involving particularly vulnerable victims." It added that the existing law's "biased purpose" does not have to be proved to a jury beyond a reasonable doubt.

Apprendi's appeal said his sentence was "critically flawed" and should have been treated as an element of the offense to be considered by the jury.

Boeing to join FAA in examining production of crash

SEATTLE (AP) — The Boeing Co., embarrassed by a recent string of production lapses, will join the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in examining its production and quality-control systems, the government and the aircraft maker said yesterday.

The decision to conduct the separate but simultaneous reviews comes a month after the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990, a Boeing 767, but results from other incidents, including:

- An airline telling Boeing that two of 16 bolts holding the vertical stabilizer onto the tail of a 767 were not sufficiently tightened.
- Assembly line mechanics at Boeing's Everett plant, where 747s, 767s and 777s are built, reporting that fuel tank repairs were being made after the tanks had been inspected and that debris such as sealant tubes and rivet guns were occasionally left behind.

• An adhesive being improperly applied to a condenser drier that keeps moisture from dripping onto cockpit electronics. The drip shields also did not meet flammability standards, prompting Boeing to briefly halt delivery of 50 airplanes while the problem was replaced.

• The discovery of adhesive in some air ducts used in airplane cabins, requiring that some ductwork be brought up to FAA standards.

None of the problems posed a direct safety hazard and no accidents resulted. But they came in the shadow of the massive EgyptAir crash, in which all 217 people aboard died when the plane plunged into the Atlantic Ocean off Massachusetts' Nantucket Island Oct. 31.

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