COMICS

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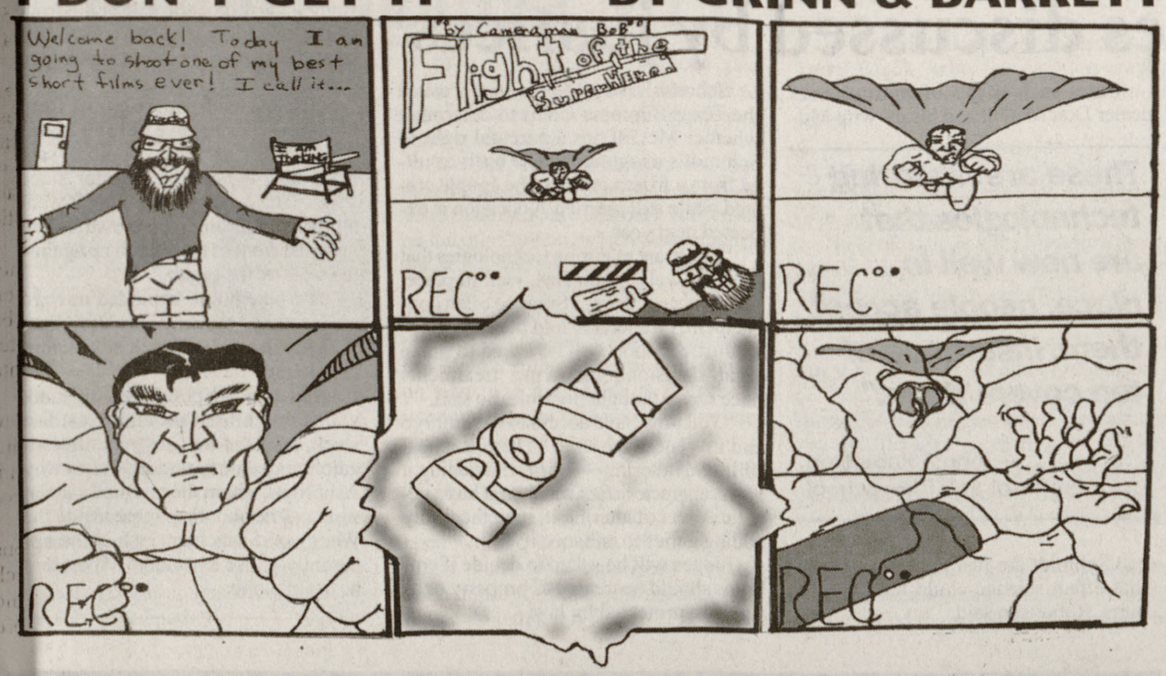

'Millionaire,' Super Bowl top Nielsen

NEW YORK (AP) — A super week put ABC ahead of its rivals for bragging rights as the season's most-watched TV network.

ABC crushed its competition last week behind Sunday's competitive Super Bowl game between the St. Louis Rams and Tennessee Titans and another record-setting performance by "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire."

Sunday's ABC Super Bowl telecast was up 7 percent in ratings over the 1999 game, according to Nielsen Media Research. ABC had worried that a game featuring two relatively small media markets would show ratings weakness.

After the Super Bowl, the three most-watched programs of the week were all showings of "Millionaire." The game show's Tuesday audience of 35.3 million was its largest yet.

With the Academy Awards ahead on ABC and "Millionaire" showing no signs of weakening, ABC is on target for its first ratings season championship since 1994-95.

"I really think it will be pretty difficult ... for another network to make up that deficit," said, Larry Hyams, chief researcher for ABC.

For the season so far, ABC has averaged 13.7 million viewers in prime-time. CBS has 12.9 million viewers, and NBC has 12.8 million.ABC finished third behind CBS and NBC last year in household ratings. It has won the season ratings race only four other times: three times in the late '70s and in 1994-95.

ABC had record-setting ratings for two of its other shows last week, thanks to a little help. "Dharma & Greg," directly following Tuesday's "Millionaire," and "The Practice," on right after the Super Bowl, both had their most popular episodes.

For the week, ABC averaged 27.6 million viewers in prime-time last week (15.6 rating, 25 share), CBS had 11 million viewers (7.6 rating, 12 share), NBC had 10.5 million viewers (7.4, 12), Fox had 7.9 million viewers (5.3, 8), the WB had 4.1 million viewers (2.9, 4), UPN had 4.1 million viewers (2.8, 4) and Pax TV had 1.1 million viewers (0.8, 1).

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