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Awards News

NATAS blocked by Emmys

Arbitration panel halts broadband awards plan

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An arbitration panel has halted the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences' plans to launch a bevy of new Broadband Emmy awards.

Instead, the panel sided with the Los Angeles-based Academy of TV Arts and Sciences, which had accused its New York rivals of attempting to establish a new Emmy infrastructure without permission.

As a result, NATAS has also been forced to back off plans to award Broadband Emmys in categories such as comedy or drama, and scrap a previously announced deal with MySpace to hand out awards.

"This is a resounding victory for our Television Academy and duly establishes that NATAS' misguided actions were clearly inappropriate," said outgoing ATAS chairman-CEO Dick Askin. "The ruling is a confirmation that NATAS was in violation of our existing agreement and must cease and desist on any future violations of any unauthorized usage of the prestigious Emmy Award and brand without our approval."

NATAS president-CEO Peter Price said the org would "move forward as the panel instructed us to do.

"We would have preferred our way, but apparently the panel preferred ATAS' way," Price said. "If that's the better way of proceeding, then that's the way we will proceed."

The arbitration panel's rulings ended the latest chapter in an inter-Academy rivalry that dates back several decades. Ironically, a recent thaw in that rocky relationship had led to talks two years ago about merging operations. Such an integration proved tougher than expected, so both sides decided instead to investigate new ways to work closely together -- including a jointly administered Broadband Emmy Awards.

The orgs had been holding discussions earlier this year on how to launch such a Broadband Emmys structure when NATAS announced plans to award up to 15 Broadband Emmys this year, and followed that up by striking a deal with MySpace to hand out the kudos.

That's when ATAS grew suspicious that NATAS was going its own way without permission.

Such a move, ATAS said, would violate the terms of a 1977 agreement that split the TV academy up in the first place. Under

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that arrangement, neither org can launch an awards ceremony without the other's permission.

That's when the bi-coastal relationship once again soured. ATAS launched arbitration on the matter, but began to worry that NATAS was pushing ahead with the Broadband Emmys anyway. Citing the MySpace pact as the final straw, ATAS filed suit in U.S. District Court, asking for an injunction preventing NATAS from moving forward with any Broadband Emmys.

A judge dismissed the request, however, and sent the dispute back to the arbitration panel.

Now, as part of Tuesday's ruling, the panel told NATAS that it cannot give out any Emmys for programming, Broadband or not, that would fall under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles-based Academy of TV Arts and Sciences (which administers the Primetime Emmys), such as drama, comedy or variety.

Both acads can continue to pass out Broadband Emmys, the panel added -- but must keep those categories within and relevant to pre-existing ceremonies (in NATAS' case, that includes the Daytime, News and Sports Emmys).

Also, neither academy is allowed to come up with new Emmys that are specific to distribution platforms, the panel said -- and no Emmys for non-TV devices (think iPod or cell phones).

Meanwhile, the ruling also brought the possibility of a Spanish Language Emmy Award show back on the table.

ATAS and NATAS had sketched out a proposal for such a kudofest back in February, at the same time the orgs were discussing their joint Broadband plan. But the Spanish-language talks broke down after the Broadband scuffle at the end of March.

ATAS will now have the chance to either agree to the pact -- which would revolve around a show jointly administered by both orgs -- or explain why it won't give its consent to such a program.

In another finding, the arbitration panel gave NATAS 21 days to explain why the International TV Academy should be prevented from awarding a special Emmy at a 2008 Cannes ceremony. The International acad gave an award at a 2007 Cannes event, which the panel ruled didn't harm NATAS.

The panel also said ATAS could continue to pass out Emmys to non-news or non-journalism-related documentaries (something it has done for 30 years). And it gave ATAS permission to pursue attorney's fees and costs -- something an insider at the org said it planned to do.

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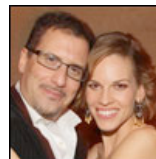
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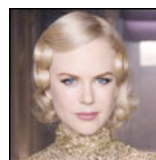
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