

'Hard Copy' Hardball

Star Boycott Forces Change in Tabloid TV Tactics

By Sharon Waxman
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LOS ANGELES, Nov. 5—In the war between celebrities and the tabloids, chalk up one battle for the famous. The war, however, goes on.

Faced with a rapidly growing boycott by such stars as Madonna, George Clooney, Whoopi Goldberg, Steven Spielberg, Dean Cain and the entire cast of the top-rated show "ER," the owner of "Entertainment Tonight" and its tabloid sister "Hard Copy" agreed to change some of its sleazier tactics.

Paramount Television Group said it would no longer "solicit, purchase or

air celebrity footage" taken by camera operators who harassed their subjects or surreptitiously filmed them inside their homes. Celebrities have been particularly incensed by the "video paparazzi"—often teenagers with home video cameras—who stalk stars and then shout obscenities or insults to get a response on tape, which they then sell to tabloid shows like "Hard Copy," "American Journal" or "Inside Edition."

The boycott was initiated last week by "ER" star and movie actor Clooney, who said that "Hard Copy" had broken a written agreement not to do stories about him. This week the ban gave every indication of spreading

throughout Hollywood's A-list, with Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman and Jim Carrey close to signing on, according to their publicists and agents.

In a letter to Clooney last March, Paramount Television President Frank Kelly wrote, "Hard Copy will not be covering you in any future stories," and promised to look into some of the provocative tactics of the videotapers. Nonetheless, "Hard Copy" recently ran two stories about the television star.

"I'm not talking about censoring anyone, suing anyone—all I'm saying is I don't want to put money in their pockets" by helping "Entertainment Tonight," said Clooney, who recently completed two movies and is shooting a "Batman" sequel. "I got into this industry, so I'm willing to take some of shots, but it doesn't seem fair that my parents have people following them around and baiting them, or someone calling out, 'Who's the fat chick you're with?' You go ape-[expletive]."

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Madonna joined the boycott after "Hard Copy" ran video footage of the singer-actress and her baby inside her Los Filas home, apparently shot from just outside her property. In a letter to "Entertainment Tonight," Madonna said she would give no further interviews for her upcoming movie, "Evita."

"It does not make any sense that your parent company would have one show supposedly supporting my endeavors in a respectful and dignified manner while sanctioning another show to come into my home with their cameras and emotionally rape me and the people I love," she wrote with her customary understatement. "It's time that members of the entertainment community get together and take a stand against this kind of terrorism."

Even the normally soft-spoken Spielberg came out fighting, saying, "For too long, garbage has been for sale at outrageous prices." He banned interviews with "Entertainment To-

night" for his blockbuster sequel to "Jurassic Park," called "The Lost World."

In its statement, Paramount Television said: "With the dramatically wider use of video cameras and concurrent increase in freelance videographers, some have gone beyond fair, intelligent newsgathering. Neither Paramount Television nor 'Hard Copy' want to support these activities." The new policy bans footage in which the subject was harassed "solely to provoke a reaction," or which shows a celebrity's address or involves "unauthorized footage of a celebrity or their children in the privacy of their home." It also banned illegally obtained footage.

Clooney said that while the policy change appeared to address his concerns, he needed to consult the other actors who had signed on to the boycott before declaring victory.

The controversy highlights some of the mutual back-scratching involved in

publicizing entertainment, which frequently includes deals for interviews or pictures negotiated between stars, studios, publicists and so-called entertainment journalists. Paramount Television's deal with Clooney in March, for example—after he first threatened to boycott—was to refrain from covering him on "Hard Copy" if he would continue to give interviews to "Entertainment Tonight." Then, in an effort to resolve the renewed dispute last week, Paramount's Kelly offered to promote friends of Clooney who are struggling actors if the star would drop the boycott, the actor said. He declined the offer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a George Clooney photo gallery and a list of his shows and films, click on the above symbol on the front page of The Post's site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.washingtonpost.com>