

# The TV That Really Needles Nixon

New York

President Nixon may think he is taking a beating at the hands of network news commentators, but lately other segments of television have been taking up where the straight news programs leave off.

A sportscaster recently referred to him in prime time as "Tricky Dickie," and Johnny Carson has been zinging him steadily in his opening monologue on the "Tonight Show."

Public figures, even presidents, have always been fair game for comedians and their joke writers, but it would be hard to recall a comparable time when Carson, who reaches 14 million viewers nightly, zeroed in so frequently on one target. In a way, he is probably acting

as an escape valve for the country: Watergate hurts so much it is probably better to laugh at it.

While the newscasters can only report deadpan the story of the White House tapes, Carson can mirror what is on many people's minds, saying the unsayable and getting a laugh at the same time: "I wouldn't say the

President is a sore loser. . . . He's sending the tapes to Sirica. . . . Nobody said they had to be on spools."

Another time: "Nixon got a little confused. . . . Instead of a tape recorder, he tried to play the tapes on a power saw."

When Mr. Nixon fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox, Carson's gagmen came

up with: "Personally, I don't think the President is acting like a king. . . . After all, he only fired Archibald Cox. . . . Originally, he planned to have him beheaded."

Carson plants his barbs and skips away with the comment: "I'm not taking a stand. I'm just reporting the news."

As irreverent as Carson is, he still has not gone as far as sportscaster Don Meredith during an ABC telecast of a Monday night football game. After watching Mr. Nixon's favorite football team, the Washington Redskins, lose to Pittsburgh, Meredith observed that if they kept losing, "Tricky Dickie" might drop in on a practice session.

The remark lit up ABC switchboards and caused presidential speechwriter Patrick Buchanan to be awakened from sleep by an angry "former high administration official" (the following week Meredith apologized to the president on TV.)

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