

Dealing for Nixon Interviews

By John Carmody

Richard M. Nixon will meet next week in San Clemente, Calif., with "several people who are interested" in bidding for the rights to a series of taped television interviews with the former President.

Nixon's agent, Irving P. Lazar, reportedly is now asking \$750,000 for a series of three or four one-hour TV interviews.

Lazar said yesterday that next week's talks at the one-time Western White House are designed to help Nixon decide which of the potential producers "he'd have the greatest rapport with" when and if the proposed series is taped, probably early in 1977, following the presidential elections.

Lazar refused to name the two independent TV producers whose representatives are slated to meet with Nixon, but other sources indicate that David Frost, who has reportedly put together a group of British, French and West German backers, would be at the discussions.

Meanwhile, negotiations between Lazar and NBC News for the presidential memoirs have progressed to the "preliminary answer" stage, according to NBC president Richard Wald.

Wald, who said the negotiations are "kind of complicated with very strict ground rules," stressed that the network is not bidding at the "highest price" Lazar is reportedly asking—about \$750,000.

Lazar reportedly approached ABC

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and CBS, as well as NBC, in mid-July with a proposal that, at the time, precluded any mention of Watergate in interviews to be conducted with the former president.

Both ABC and CBS flatly refused to pursue negotiations, with officials of both networks offering at the time the "Catch-22"-like explanation that without a discussion of Watergate, the proposed interviews would be without interest but, if the interviews included Watergate they would then comprise "hard news," for which ABC and CBS currently insist they would not pay money.

Lazar said yesterday the former President has told him he is now fully prepared to appear "in any format—

with a single interviewer or panel, whatever—and is prepared to discuss with complete candor, with no ground rules whatsoever, Watergate, domestic policy, foreign policy—anything, of course, except probably some details of his personal life."

NBC's Wald said yesterday the network would "make a great effort to make [the series] as interesting and as historic a retrospective as we could." Wald declined to discuss details of the current negotiations or the potential reactions from network competitors.

CBS News president Richard Salant, who drew considerable industry criticism last winter for approving a \$100,000 payment to former Nixon aide Bob Haldeman for two TV one-hour interviews (which finally, produced almost no "hard news" when telecast in late March), said yesterday that he's made [my] mistake with the Haldeman thing, now I want NBC to have a chance to make theirs."

Lazar said that all negotiations are "very far from settled," pointing out that no programs are scheduled to be taped until after the November 1976 presidential elections "at the earliest," if a contract is signed.

Wald said that NBC had not been invited to attend the San Clemente meeting next week. He said that Lazar had called him recently and given NBC "a preliminary answer" to a set of "complicated ground rules" that would govern an eventual pact.