

TURMOIL ON 'TODAY'



Courtesy of NBC

KATIE COURIC (right) interviews the so-called "runaway bride," Jennifer Wilbanks, and Wilbanks' fiancé, John Mason, for the "Today" show last week.

Will Katie Couric survive frustration and 'diva' criticism?

By Matea Gold
Los Angeles Times

By now, the story's become part of the Katie Couric legend.

In October 1992, Couric, still a relatively new face on NBC's venerable morning news program "Today," was finishing a live tour of the White House with then-first lady Barbara Bush, when a surprise guest wandered into the Blue Room — President George H.W. Bush himself.

Bush apparently had planned just to say a quick hello on national television, but a poised Couric kept him there for 19 minutes. She quizzed him about the burgeoning Iran-Contra scandal and his recent debate performance against Bill Clinton and Ross Perot, confirming her journalistic credentials in the process.

Though it was not apparent to viewers that day, another crucial dynamic was also at work: Couric's symbiotic relationship with Jeff Zucker, then "Today's" executive producer. From his perch inside a satellite truck parked in the White House driveway, he shouted questions into her earpiece, helping her turn the chance encounter into a newsmaker interview.

First paired in 1990 when he produced the segments she did as a national correspondent for the program, Zucker's brash, hyperkinetic style and Couric's unflappable charm quickly proved a winning combination. By the next year, they had risen to the top slots at "Today," where the relentlessly driven producer — just 26 — helped the novice anchor hone her "America's sweetheart" persona.

Together, they helped catapult "Today" back on top of the morning-show pack, where it has remained for nearly a decade. Along the way, they forged one of the most successful and profitable partnerships in broadcast news.

That relationship continued after Zucker left the program to climb the network ladder in 2000, providing Couric with a strong ally in NBC's executive suites. But since then, a persistent unsettledness has hung over "Today," where yet another executive producer — the third in five years — was installed in April, after a harsh wake-up call from a suddenly surging competitor, ABC's "Good Morning America."

Now president of NBC Universal Television Group, Zucker said the recent change in management

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Who is Alexis Glick?

The basics: She was Morgan Stanley's chief of floor traders at the New York Stock Exchange before joining CNBC's "Squawk Box" two years ago, and "Today" (as correspondent) just recently.

Let's get even more basic: The 32-year-old mom has two young kids ... her husband runs a photography company in Manhattan ... her maiden name is Donnelly ... she grew up in Westchester ... and got a degree in political science from Columbia University.

And now, let's get reeeally basic: Alexis Glick could be the next Katie Couric.

Yes, yes, this is a ridiculously premature declaration, and absolutely no one at "Today" is talking about this publicly — nor do they dare. But the thought has certainly entered some heads over there, and because "ridiculously premature declarations" are our business, here goes.

■ Speculation has it Couric will stay one more year (her contract is believed to be up in May) and then sign a so-called "victory lap" deal, giving NBC just enough time to fold in a successor.

■ Ann Curry has likely been scratched off the short list, and observers say she was recently named new co-host of "Dateline" to set the table for her eventual "Today" exit. Newsreader Natalie Morales is a long shot, and so is Campbell Brown ("Weekend Today").

■ OK, what about Alexis? She's clearly bright, and as one person who knows her says, "she has got great warmth and natural appeal. The question is, does she have enough natural chops to carry it off?"

— Newsday

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courtesy
CNBC

