

● REALLY BIG SHOW

American Dreams:

A star is born



Brittany Snow roared out of nowhere last week to the top of the Sunday night heap.

American Dreams
Sunday, 8 p.m., NBC

EVEN before "American Dreams" debuted last week, its bright teenage lead Brittany Snow was singled out as a breakout star.

Now, with the nostalgia-driven show debuting at No. 1 in its timeslot, the 16-year-old Florida native has the hit series to prove it. Many are saying she's the most promising young actress to come out of TV since Claire Danes on "My So-Called Life" and Sarah Michelle Gellar on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

"Sarah Michelle Gellar is my favorite actress in the world," says Snow, who also thinks Danes is terrific. "And her career is kind of like mine in a way. She was on 'All My Children' for three years play-

ing a really nasty character. And I was on 'Guiding Light' for three years. Then she took a year off and then she got 'Buffy.' I took a year off and now I got 'American Dreams.'"

Snow has captured the innocent appeal of Meg, a high school student living in Philadelphia during the early '60s who became a regular on "American Bandstand." The pure joy on Snow's face as she hop-scootches down the street, learns a new dance step or just hugs her Dad is at the heart of this subtle, ambitious drama's appeal.

"I know I'm a lot different than Meg but when the camera is rolling I forget about it," says Snow, who happily broke away from studying Algebra II, her "very, very worst subject ever" to do an interview.

"In one scene, my Dad was yelling at me. I obey my parents and I'm pretty boring but I might have stood up for myself.

But Meg is so weak in a way and such a little girl, that she wouldn't. Because it was Meg, my voice got really high and I started to cry."

For now, Snow's tears are tears of joy, like the time she found out the part of Meg was hers.

"I read for the network executives and then I left the room," remembers Snow. "Then Jonathan Prince, the executive producer, told me to come back in. There were 20 people there all in suits and they were all intimidating."

"He said, 'I want you to do it again.' I said, 'Okaaaaaay.'"

"And he said, 'But I want you to do it on TV because you've got the part.' I started jumping up and down and I was crying and all these people who seemed really intimidating were really nice and everyone was hugging me and it was the best experience ever." —Michael Giltz