

TV's latest wacky game show craze is a combination of 'Survivor,' 'Boot Camp' and 'Weakest Link.' Its innovation: The fun isn't guessing who wins, it's picking who loses. Humiliating? You bet. But that's life on...

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**T**HE BBC's hot new game show "Dog Eat Dog" has a novel twist: that Saturday night, but deals in humiliation.

Contestants don't strive to be the best in any event, they just try to figure out which opponent is the most likely to be the worst loser television! Apparently, that's a winner.

Even before it hit British TV in April, "Dog Eat Dog" was being sniffled over by American networks (notably NBC) and local versions are already scheduled for France and Australia. Last Wednesday, NBC announced it had won the rights to stage "Dog Eat Dog" here, perhaps as soon as this summer.

The hype was ridiculous, says producer Mike Agnew, who describes a bidding war in the States, and intense interest worldwide. Clearly, it's a dog eat dog world, but for any TV property that combines "British" and "game show," these are the salad days.

The game works like this: The audience is introduced to six players in a "Boot Camp" setting that includes 24 hours of

"rigorous" testing and a bumper car-style driving course.

"Hopefully, by the time the game starts," says Agnew, "you have an idea who might win, who might lose and who you hope loses."

Then, the players vote on who is most likely to fail at a particular event — with the rascalous quizzer tossing trivia math and spelling tests to scoring through an elaborate simulated driving range. The "most likely to lose" contestant then tackles that event: if they win, they get to vote off one of the players who singled them out; if they lose, the host (in Britain, it is an underhanded young woman named Ulrika Jonsson) sends them bravely over to the losers' bench.

# DOG EAT DOG



Ulrika Jonsson (above), the host of "Dog Eat Dog," is no Anne Robinson — not by a mile. But she does the dirty work on the hit Brit show's contestants (left) who can end up looking like numbskulls.

Even the finale is geared to words being. When one player remains, he or she still needs having to actually demonstrate smarts. They're simply given a category — such as "sports" or "literature" — and then asked to pick the loser who will most likely fail at answering a trivia question about that topic.

If the final contestant stumps the losers with three questions,

he wins. If the losers answer three questions right, they split the \$5,000 prize. And those questions aren't so tough.

The British "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" is far tougher than its American counterpart, but "Dog Eat Dog" is pretty complicated even for us Yanks.

"The questions are thoroughly tested," says Agnew, "if you are fairly average, you should be

50-50 as far as your chances."

The most memorable contestant so far was a lovable British doofus named Nathan.

A benign young fellow, Nathan seemed hapless at everything and gathered good-natured laughter from the audience at every mention of his ineptitude. In fact, he seemed such a non-threat that the others ignored him and focused on each other and events; Nathan stumbled into the finals and won it all.

The newspaper made a hero of him and Nathan is enjoying that new sort of five-minute fame that today TV is now famous for.

"Was he quite so clueless?" Nathan looked like he would fail, admits Agnew "but the best way to play the game is not as straightforward as it looks."

"He did incredibly badly when we were on location. He asked me what one question [on a test] meant and I had the feeling he knew what the question was."

In other words, Nathan may have been playing up his hapless shock to fall the others into a false sense of security.

Either losers are the most likely to succeed on "Dog Eat Dog" or Nathan pulled a Machiavellian stunt that would have

turned the schemers on "Survivor" green with envy.

Like "Survivor" — and unlike "Weakest Link" — "Dog Eat Dog" doesn't seem so dependent on the personality of its host. Neither as late as Robinson's tripe as clumsy as Regis, the cool-looking Jonsson is making the most of her latest hit.

A former weathergirl on a morning TV show, she shot to prominence by hosting the British version of "American Gladiators." "I'd never worked with Ulrika before, but she has the personality we were looking for," says Agnew. "We didn't want Anne Robinson, but she's very straightforward. And we didn't want the typical bubbly Saturday night presenter. She can commiserate without being maudlin."

Agnew knows the media loves an hot show is intense.

But since he's not involved in negotiations and won't get a cut of the final profits (the BBC is a nonprofit trust, it's unfortunate that the game's developer has no foreign networks showering him with champagne or dinner invites).

"God, I wish they would," he laughs. "But it was lovely of you to call."