

# TV Tuesday

# Smells like teen spirit

## 'One Tree' out of 'Creek's' shadow

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**C**HAD Michael Murray had that rare opportunity for an actor: his choice of parts.

After recurring roles on "Dawson's Creek," "Gilmore Girls," and the romantic lead in what would turn out to be the smash hit film "Freaky Friday," Murray needed to choose between two new shows.

Did he want to star as the moody rebel in Fox's summer series "The O.C."? Or did he want to star as the moody rebel on "One Tree Hill" on his old stomping ground, the WB?

Murray chose "One Tree Hill." Then, of course, "The O.C." exploded into a pop-cultural phenomenon.

"The first few weeks of the show," laughs creator

Mark Schwahn, "I would only imagine that Chad figured he made a mistake."

Indeed, "One Tree Hill" — the story of two high school rivals who find out they have the same father — opened to disastrous reviews and poor ratings. (It airs Tuesdays at 9.)

"The press was pretty brutal on us," says Schwahn. "A lot of people said, 'They're trying to reinvent 'Dawson's Creek.'"

Even fans of the show wondered on websites how many episodes it would last before getting the ax. Four? Five?

"Everyone was really panicky when the first ratings came out," says the 22-year-old Murray. "Everyone was just freaking out. I was the only person that laughed. I laughed absolutely hysterically. I

thought it was great!

"Man, if we're going to suck, dude, I want to be at the bottom of the barrel so that we can climb up."

Indeed, the ratings climbed steadily every week as viewers got to see basketball-loving Luke (Murray) fall for Peyton (Hilarie Burton), the girlfriend of his spoiled, wealthy rival Nathan (James Lafferty). Of course, things have changed since then; this is a soap, after all.

"One Tree Hill" became a top-five hit for teenage girls (the WB's first and best audience), it hit a ratings peak in late November before going on a two-month hiatus and now the show is back.

Schwahn also happily details a number of key adjustments they made since its debut.

First to be cut down?

The countless scenes of basketball, though Schwahn says this has more to do with the rigors of filming them than anything else.

They also sped up certain revelations to clear up the murky backstory and then lightened up the prom queen-like Peyton.

"I was a little surprised that the angst Peyton was displaying in the first few episodes got a negative reaction" admits Schwahn. "But of course, she's attractive to look at and she's in the middle of it all, so to have a 'woe is me' attitude really turned some people off."

So now, with Murray hitting all the teen magazines and ratings on the upswing, "One Tree Hill" looks set to settle in to being not a "Dawson's Creek" knock-off but... the new "Dawson's Creek."



Chad Michael Murray and Hilarie Burton plant the seeds of teen angst on "One Tree Hill."