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NBC HALTS OLYMPICS FOR PROMOTIONAL MONKEYSHINES

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NEW YORK (AP) — Viewers were incensed Sunday night when NBC cut away from the Olympics' conclusion to air a sitcom featuring a monkey.

During 16 days from London, the sprawl of Olympics coverage was seemingly indomitable, running roughshod through the NBC schedule. Yet Sunday's package of highlights from the closing ceremony deferred meekly to the preview of a new NBC comedy, "Animal Practice," which then was followed by a half-hour of local news.

When taped Olympics coverage came to a grinding halt at 11 p.m. Eastern time, viewers were advised that the festivities would resume in one hour.

Accordingly, at midnight Ryan Seacrest greeted viewers who had chosen to stick it out.

"Welcome to the London closing party," he chirped. "Now it's time for the big finale."

That would be a medley pounded out by The Who. Songs included such favorites as "Baba O'Riley" and "My Generation," but not, as put-upon viewers might have noted, "Won't Get Fooled Again": After all the build-up, The Who were on hand for just eight minutes.

Olympics host Bob Costas then delivered a rhapsodic postscript before declaring a wrap for NBC's Olympics coverage at 12:35 a.m. For this, viewers had waited an extra hour on a work night.

And by then, many of them might have been wondering why the ceremony package couldn't have aired intact, ending conveniently at 11:08 p.m. and only slightly delaying NBC's monkey business.

Agitated viewers with a long memory were likening Sunday's Who-Airs-When fiasco to NBC's "Heidi" moment nearly four decades earlier.

That was the faceoff between the Oakland Raiders and the New York Jets on Nov. 17, 1968, when Oakland scored two touchdowns in the game's final minute to overwhelm New York's 32-29 lead. But viewers in the East didn't see the impossible comeback, because NBC broke away from the game with the Jets still ahead to air its TV film "Heidi" at the scheduled 7 p.m. start time.

There was no Twitter then, but there was Sunday night — and it lit up with complaints.

"No better way to turn people off a new show than to preempt the who & other rock legends for it," tweeted Nate Barlow.

And Nina L. Diamond voiced her ire in even stronger terms: "I think NBC has managed to become even less popular than Congress."