Pants fall; video of incident stirs debate on airing footage

By HOWARD KURTZ
Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Don Imus wanted to run the footage but couldn't get permission from his bosses at MSNBC.

Fox News Channel aired the footage as an example of life's embarrassing moments.

CNN refused to carry the footage on grounds of taste.

C-SPAN edited out the footage — which it now says was a mistake.

The videotape that many Washington journalists were anguishing over Wednesday involved the receiving line at Tuesday night's state dinner for South Korean President Kim Dae Jung. A renowned video artist, Nam June Paik, left his wheelchair, grabbed his walker and was shaking hands with President Clinton when his pants suddenly dropped to his ankles.

The embarrassing moment — compounded by the artist's lack of underwear — lasted more than 10 seconds until another Korean came to his aid. Clinton's expression did not change.

Fox resolved the question — to air or not to air — in the affirmative.

"We digitized his face and private parts in order not to embarrass him," said Dennis Murray, executive producer of Fox News Channel, which used the footage on its "Fox News" morning show. "It was a jumping-off point for a discussion about your most embarrassing moments. We really went out of our way not to be tasteless.

But network executives later discussed the matter with Fox News President Roger Ailes, who said he was disappointed with the decision and would not have run the footage because it provided a laugh at a disabled person's expense.

Imus joked about the incident through much of his radio show, which is simulcast on MSNBC. "It doesn't get any better than this," he said. But his MSNBC producer refused to air the videotape.

"Embellishments happen any time you're in public life," he said. "But if anyone's pants fall down while shaking hands with the president, I can't imagine The Post not covering it. And I don't think we want special treatment as a disabled group."

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A Dancer's Debut

MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV did something last night that he had never done before: He danced at a political event, a fund-raiser for PETER VALLONE, the City Council Speaker and a candidate for governor. "Peter Vallone has always worked hard for arts in New York City," Mr. Baryshnikov said, "and I'd like to see him continue this work for the state."

JAMES BARRON
with Phoebe Hoban

for HBO next week, with SPIKE LEE directing.

3 Win Kyoto Prize

Assuming that the call went through in the middle of the night, the video artist NAM JUNE PAIK is $351,000 richer today. The Inamori Foundation, started in 1984 by the industrialist KAZUO INAMORI, chose him for one of three Kyoto Prizes and was scheduled to call him at his loft in SoHo by 2:30 A.M.

He probably had an inkling that the call was coming. After all, the foundation had summoned him to Kyoto, Japan, last month.

But the group, though eager for the publicity that comes with giving away big money, wanted to be the one to give him the official word. So it sent out a press kit on the condition that he not be contacted until after the all-important call.

"If he doesn't pick up, they keep trying," said JENNIFER FRIEDMAN, a spokeswoman. The other two winners, who were to have been called at the same time, were Dr. KURT WUTHRICH, a pioneer in molecular and structural biology, and Dr. KIYOSHI TITO, a mathematician and professor emeritus at Kyoto University.

A hazy line separates hope from the vulgar state of denial.

When she experienced other difficulties in life, did she turn from them? How did she behave when her mother was dying of cancer, five years ago?

"I was realistic," Ms. Toll says. "I did say to her, which my sister didn't, 'You know it could reverse' or that 'there will be a new drug.' I would say this to her to the day she died. Once she started to talk to me about her funeral and I started crying. After this she never mentioned it to me again."

"I took my pictures once to an art therapist," Ms. Toll says. "She said the girl in the pictures was pretty connected, steady, adjusted. She is surrounded by friends; there is no sense of aloneness without others. There was a great deal of love behind these artworks."

Her wish to keep where she lives and works out of the papers:

"There are all kinds of neo-Nazis and crazy people out there," Ms. Toll says. "Why should they know where I live? Let them look for me."