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No foolin': hard work pays off for 'Magnum'

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By ROBERT BARR

TOM Selleck has no reservations about making a fool of himself. After all, he's the guy who turned up on David Letterman's show, stuck his face in a tank of water and favored the nation with his impression of a motorboat.

He got a bit annoyed, however, when the ratings appeared to make a fool of his show, "Magnum, P.I."

In a showdown between two former college jocks, Bill Cosby ran Selleck ragged on Thursday night. Selleck congratulated Cosby for an excellent show, but burned at the sniping he felt "Magnum" was taking as it nearly dropped out of the Top 50.

"What I think people forget is that we were at a level, even at 48th, where we could have stayed on the air for several years," Selleck said on the phone from Honolulu.

This season, CBS has moved "Magnum" into a later time slot Wednesday nights, and the show



Magnum (Tom Selleck) finds out he may have a child (Kristen Carreira) on "Magnum, P.I."

is prospering. Last week, it was 22d in the ratings.

"I'm real pleased that there has been a response," Selleck said. "It vindicates the show."

This year's high-rated "Magnum" is the same show as last year's struggling "Magnum," Selleck said.

With one difference — there is a much deeper

personal commitment from the star.

This summer Selleck turned down movie offers and spent the 10-week break working with the writers and producers.

Not only was there ratings pressure, but "Magnum" was not immune to the cost-cutting going on throughout CBS. "I

knew if we didn't have our stuff together, budget consciousness would result in pulling quality off the screen," he said.

In the previous seven seasons, Selleck said, production of "Magnum" began in August. This year, they got going in mid-June.

"We haven't had a turkey we've had to slip in this season," he said.

Indeed, Selleck claims the best shows this season are yet to come. One involves the possibility that bachelor Magnum has a 5-year-old daughter, and another tells of a chase for a serial killer.

There's also a "cross-over" show with "Murder, She Wrote," in which Selleck and Angela Lansbury appear on each other's shows to wrap up a single case.

The remarkable comeback for "Magnum" comes in the last year of Selleck's contract.

"I have some tough decisions to make," he said.

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