



Above, left to right: Anchors Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw and Ed Bradley (filling in for Dan Rather) opened their newscasts on March 24 with the Jonesboro tragedy. With Bradley on CBS is Bob McNamara.

Network coverage

March 24 Day of the shootings

EVENING NEWSCASTS

"ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings"

- Morton Dean in Jonesboro with a report on shootings.
- Michelle Norris segment on a recent national report saying schools are safer.
- Interview with director of National School Safety Center.

"CBS Evening News with Dan Rather"

- Bob McNamara leads the broadcast from Jonesboro.
- Interview with the Rev. Rodney Reeves of Jonesboro.
- Richard Schlesinger reports on shootings in Kentucky and Mississippi; interview with school safety expert.

"NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw"

- Ed Rabel in Jonesboro. His report includes words from eyewitnesses and the Arkansas governor.
- Jim Atwood with more eyewitnesses.
- Reaction from President Clinton, en route to Africa, segueing to a Pete Williams report on the same school safety survey mentioned in the ABC newscast. NBC's take is how violent schools have become. Only at the very end does Williams note that "most students will never see any violence."

ANALYSIS

Tom Brokaw had the best opener, wrapping up what most people must be thinking about "three (school) shootings in five months." NBC devoted the most time to the story and used greater resources. ABC found a silver lining in the gloom, while NBC was alarmed and alarming. CBS was rather bland. No one stumbled and all three provided competent accounts.

None of the children interviewed seemed reluctant and they appeared to enjoy being on camera. There seemed nothing intrusive: The children were not captured on the run or pulled from a crowd.

MAGAZINE SHOWS

"Dateline" (NBC)

- Jim Avila offered an expanded version of what appeared earlier on "NBC Nightly News," leading with a memorial service.

March 25

MORNING TALK SHOWS

"Good Morning America" (ABC)

- Opens with Dean Reynolds in Jonesboro and a wrap-up of shootings. Interview with a student who was at the scene. The youngster is in control, a bit nervous and well-hand-

dled by the interviewer. Next, an interview with a paramedic, then an update on the condition of the wounded.

- A doctor says access to guns is cause; Boston specialist says it's not just guns, but kids learning to deal with anger through violence.
- "American Heartbeat" goes to Kentucky for interviews with relatives of children killed in shootings there.
- Three clergymen say let the children talk it out.

"Today" (NBC)

- Katie Couric does the hard lead with Jim Avila in Jonesboro doing the mop-up. Segment from the memorial service, in which we see a youngster surrounded by cameras.
- Couric reprises earlier school killings in the South.
- Ed Rabel has more family reaction in Jonesboro.
- Couric interviews media specialist for Arkansas State Police. Then she interviews a construction worker who held a child as she died. Breaking down on the air, he reflects the shock of the town.
- Pete Williams looks at Mississippi and Kentucky shootings. He reports that youth crime is up; kids are more likely to pull a gun than make a fist. Then he says the number of actual killings compared with 1993 is declining and that violence does not touch 95% of all students.
- Ann Thompson in West Paducah, Ky., with parents whose child was killed in the shootings there.

ANALYSIS

For the morning after, with much not known, the "Good Morning America" segment on guns is respectable, though it may overstate what the ripple effect will be. No sign of camera crew harassment is evident in the "Today" interview with the youngster at the memorial service, who was as poised as a politician.

EVENING NEWSCASTS

ABC

- Peter Jennings opens with "efforts to make sense" of the killings. Dean Reynolds, in Jonesboro, names the suspects; still photos are shown.
- Rebecca Chase talks about the South and guns.
- Michelle Norris looks at steps being taken nationally to protect students.
- Tom Foreman reports on parents' legal responsibilities for actions of children.
- Peter Jennings looks at the movement to try juveniles as adults.

CBS

- Jim Axelrod reprises shootings. The names and photos of the suspects are not used until he's well into his report.