

Sorkin on the Racing Line

BOTH *THE SOPRANOS* and *Band of Brothers* were HBO cable productions, and their collective impact might tend to persuade us that network television was left nowhere. But it's a law of the arts that a stylistic innovation gets instantly everywhere, like heat or cold; and in fact, even while HBO was still thinking of *Band of Brothers*, it was a network, NBC, that took the new long-look format in an unexpected new direction, with *The West Wing*, created by Aaron Sorkin. The word "created" always looks excessive when it pops up among the titles on a screen, but in Sorkin's case it fits. Working on his own, he could seldom do structure like an HBO team: he has a frat-house penchant for slapstick, and his idea of a climax can be a plaster ceiling falling on the hero's head. But *The West Wing* had so much growth potential that there was very soon no question of his working alone. Though he did much of the writing