

Talent show wars...

JEALOUS ARSENIO SCHEMES TO GET EVEN WITH EX-LOVE PAULA ABDUL

ARSENIO HALL signed up to host Star Search to get even with his ex-flame, American Idol judge Paula Abdul, say sources.

"One of the main reasons Arsenio agreed to do Star Search was to take on Paula's American Idol," a pal of both reveals. "He wants to do whatever he can to knock Paula and her show down a notch or two."

For a stretch in 1989, Arsenio and Abdul were two of Hollywood's biggest stars – and its hottest couple. His talk show was a rollicking late-night sensation while she was sweeping the MTV Awards – which he hosted – on her way to notching three No. 1 singles from a multiplatinum album.

Although Abdul's publicist, Jeff Ballard, tells GLOBE that "Paula and Arsenio never dated and were only friends," the romance was so well-known that a gang member who lusted after the former Los Angeles cheerleader once called Arsenio and threatened to blow him away. Arsenio claims that he got into a car chase with an unknown assailant the next night.

The relationship with Abdul soured when she started singing the wedding bell blues, say sources.

"Arsenio really adored Paula, but she wanted that ring on her finger," confides the pal. "Taking the advice of his friend Eddie Murphy, Arsenio insisted on staying single. So she told him to hit the road."

Arsenio went on to date singer Sinead O'Connor. Meanwhile, Abdul married and divorced twice – to Emilio Estevez and clothing magnate Brad Beckerman – and also dated John Stamos.

Both of their careers fizzled for a while. But then the Fox hit American Idol took the country by storm last fall and Abdul was thrust back into the limelight.

"Arsenio saw all the attention Paula was getting from American Idol and he immediate-



FLASHBACK:
The happy
couple in 1989

ly knew he wanted to be on a hot reality show, too," explains the pal.

Arsenio's efforts to launch his own version of the talent show came up short. So he accepted CBS' offer to emcee Star Search, a revamped version of the Ed McMahon-hosted program that showcased young talent, including Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, LeAnn Rimes and Christina Aguilera.

"Arsenio swallowed his pride when he decided to do Star Search because it's just a job," says the pal. "It wasn't his own show, like he had before."

The Arsenio Hall Show ran from 1989-94 in syndication. Recently, Arsenio has been performing stand-up comedy shows.

"Stand-up isn't very prestigious," notes the pal. "It's not like being on a top-rated TV show. That was the only way he could get even with Paula."

But he didn't get even



American Idol judges
Simon Cowell,
Paula and Randy Jackson



'He wants to knock Paula & her show down a notch'

– her show averages about 25 million viewers while his had around 15 million during its first run.

Although sources say that Arsenio, 45, and Abdul, 40, remain on friendly terms, they add that neither is above throwing a jab at the other.

"Arsenio used to call Paula 'Yo-Yo' because of her weight going up and down and that would really irk her," reveals the pal. "And she would criticize his hairstyle, which seemed to change every week for a while."

"Arsenio elbowing in on the reality show craze is just another way of him poking her in the ribs, saying, 'I can do anything you can do.'"

– ROBIN MIZRAHI