

FILM REVIEWS

John Trent's Crossbar

d. John Trent asst. d. Tony Lucibello, Richard Flower sc. Keith Leckie, Carol Fisher ph. Vic Sarin, Mike Storey, David Towers sp. Doug Wardle light. Archie Kay, John Wilson, Len Watier, Harry McLachlan cast. Bill Clemenis, Ian Challis design co-ord. Bob Powers p. designer Robert Forrow asst. design. Alicia Grunsky set dec. Bob Parker, Graeme Maitland, Doug Tiller make-up Inge Klaudi, Mieke Koekkoek stage Bill Stunden, John McCarthy, Ralph MacDonald cost. Horst Danz, Ken Druce, Sarah Currie hair Barbara Alexander l.p. Brent Carver, Kate Reid, John Ireland, Kim Cattrall, Murray Westgate, Sean Sullivan, Jan Muszynski, Sara Bostford, Larry Reynolds, Tom Butler, Steve Pernie, Peter Krenz, Lynn Spence, Deborah Kipp, Myron Natwick exec. p. Stanley Colbert p. Brian Walker prod. co-ord. Duncan Lamb, Bonnie Falcker post. p. Toni Mori p. sec. Vickie Ohashi unit manag. Sylvia Snow pub. Wendy Forbes p.c. CBC col. 16mm running time 78 min.

Cinema's new hero is the crippled athlete. Rivalled in popularity only by the perpetrator of bank heists, the disabled jock is now the preeminent, courageous and inspirational movie character. One thinks of the paralyzed skier in *The Other Side of the Mountain* and *The Other Side of the Mountain Part II*, the blind figure skater in *Ice Castles*, and the hapless boxer in *Rocky* and *Rocky II* — whose principal handicap seemed to be stupidity.

As admirable as many of these struggles are, they remain shallow as film stories because of their literal-mindedness. Such movies are always promoted as being 'inspiring' and 'heart-warming', but the situations of the main characters are so far removed from the viewer's experience that only sympathy, and not empathy, is felt. Is it not possible to be 'inspired' by anything other than the flight against an obvious physical impairment? As a subject of film drama it's just too pat and ready-made.

Crossbar, a 90-minute drama which was broadcast on the CBC on October 6, is a Canadian contribution to this sub-genre. A novelization of the film, written by John Gault and based on the screenplay by Keith Leckie, is described as "the inspiring story of two courageous Cana-



For *Crossbar*'s Aaron (Brent Carver) and Katie (Kim Cattrall) it's 'nowhere to go but up' — and over!

dian Olympic athletes who together won a heart-thrilling victory," and as a "beautifully inspiring story you won't be ashamed to cry over."

It concerns a young high-jumper, Aaron Kornlyo (played by Brent Carver) who, after winning a bronze medal at the 1976 Olympics, loses one leg in a farm accident. He attempts, with the help and sometimes hindrance of his parents (played by Kate Reid and John Ireland), and his friend and fellow athlete, Katy (played by Kim Cattrall), to overcome his injury and qualify for the 1980 Games in Moscow. One's skepticism about the plausibility of a one-legged high-jumper is eliminated by the knowledge that a Canadian, Arnie Boldt, holds the world record in that

event in the Olympics for the Disabled.

Predictability, predictably, is the film's fundamental problem. A well-worn plot device, which could be called the Big Switch, is used over and over again: a situation is introduced, stays the same for awhile, and then is quickly reversed, producing, one supposes, a dramatic mini-climax. This has the effect of making almost everything black or white; there are few subtle gray shadings. For example, Aaron's father, Myles, discourages him from training, and the two have a running feud. By the end of the story, they are totally reconciled, and Myles cheers his son on. The young athlete, in a short stint as a high school coach, makes an enemy of Langley, a cocky student trying the high jump. In a later scene, the two

become good buddies, and both jump excellent heights. The pattern repeats itself again and again: first the sports bureaucrats will not let Aaron compete, then they relent under pressure at the proverbial last minute. Suspense soon dissipates.

At the end of *Crossbar*, there is an attempt at profundity which ignores basic human psychology. Just before Aaron is to make the jump which would qualify him for the Olympics, he reaches some sort of nirvana beyond the sordidness of competition; because he now knows his limits and has proven something to himself (coming this far despite his injury), there is no need to go on to Moscow in 1980. The apprehended truth then, supposedly, is that the purest athletic spirit is superior to competition — a script development which makes a sequel unlikely, and which does not satisfactorily explain away Aaron's previously intense ambition.

The film's best moments are its most strictly visual ones. At the opening, after a montage of the 1976 Olympics, we see Aaron asleep, re-living his accident as a nightmare, the vision of a harvesting machine moving inexorably closer. He wakes in a cold sweat, and is next down standing at his bedroom window, the first time we see that he now has only one leg. The filmmakers use Arnie Boldt in the jump sequences, and because of the clever use of camera angles and intercutting throughout *Crossbar*, it really seems as if Brent Carver, as Aaron, has only one leg.

All of the high-jump sequences are fascinating to watch: clearing the crossbar, like many accomplishments, looks easy, but is very difficult. Unfortunately, Aaron's work to increase his jump height is given less screen-time than the melodrama. After several botched attempts at jumping, his progress is ludicrously compressed and before we know it he has cleared the qualifying height of 6' 8". The filmmakers may have felt that there was not enough of a story to be had by concentrating on the actual training and jumping, but a sports movie that actually showed more than a minimum of sports, and explained an athlete's obsession would be very welcome.

The acting in *Crossbar* is uniformly fine. Brent Carver plays Aaron as a sort of witty, country-hick jock. Kim Cattrall gives her character, Katy, formidable determination and confidence, a frequently irresistible force against various immov-

able objects. John Ireland and Kate Reid are equally convincing; you can easily picture the daily life of the Kornylos outside the limits of this particular story. Murray Westgate stands out among the supporting players as a sports official who is so confidently glib that you become certain there is more to the character than is visible at first glance.

Crossbar is enjoyable entertainment, and — unlike many Canadian films — could never be accused of pessimism. It is hopeful, and given the proximity of the Moscow Games, timely.

Gerry Flahive

Don Shebib's Fish Hawk

d. Donald Shebib sc. Blanche Hanalis from a novel by Mitchell Jayne ph. René Verzier ed. Ron Wisman sd. Ingrid Cusiel l.p. Will Sampson, Charlie Fields, Geoffrey Bowes, Mary Pirie, Don Francks, Chris Wiggins, Kay Hawtrey, Mavor Moore exec. p. Stanley Chase, Daniel H. Blatt p. Jon Slan p.c. Fish Hawk Co. Inc. (1978) p.c. 35 mm running time 97 min.

The sole redeeming feature of Don Shebib's latest film, *Fish Hawk*, is that it is a Canadian film that stars neither Donald Sutherland nor Christopher Plummer. This is particularly depressing because I (like so many others) clung to the hope that Don Shebib would fulfill the exciting promise of *Goin' Down the Road* and *Between Friends*. Nothing in *Fish Hawk* suggests those films were made by the

same man.

Fish Hawk, according to the press release, is family entertainment about the relationship of a drunken Indian and a young white boy in turn-of-the-century rural Ontario. After learning from one another, they separate to foster firmer identities on their own native soils. I don't think I'm revealing too much of the plot by adding that only the Indian has any dignity: all the whites over twelve are bigots, idiots, or themselves closet drunks. Even decent Don Francks, the boy's father is less than a MAN. He's henpecked, and likes to tie one on to escape his wife.

Since this is a family film, the truth is told. Eventually each character reveals him/herself to be a real mensch. They are all good old boys. But that in itself does not exclude drama. Indeed, there is danger: two struggles with nature's fiercest — a grizzly bear and a wild boar. Of course in these struggles the skill of the Indian, the man closest to nature, is called upon to save the skin and commerce of his white neighbours. His struggles with the animals direct him away from drunkenness toward a path of dignity and self-help. At the end of the film he decides that his place is not with the white man, but rather with his own people, the Osage.

Fish Hawk is a film that contradicts the *auteur* theory, or as Shebib would put it, all that crap French intellectual critics spewed out in the 50's. The film has no directorial character. There is none of the moody energy of Shebib's previous work, nor are there any attempts to expose the raw nerve endings within the dramatic situations — the type of directorial approach Shebib shared with his Italian-American counterpart, Martin Scorsese, when both directors used techniques that

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