

SEEN & NOTED THIS WEEK

A SEASON ON THE BRINK (VIDEO) TWO SPUDS
POINT OF ORIGIN (ONE SPUD) ONE SPUD
INTO THE HEAT (COMING ALONG NICELY)

SPUD RATING LEGEND

TWO XL SPUDS — Absolute Must See
TWO SPUDS — Worth Checking Out
ONE SPUD — Take It Or Leave It
NO SPUD 4U — Just Plain Sucks



VOLUME 200

WELL HERE WE ARE AT COLUMN 200. AND YOU KNOW WHAT? THE GOOD MOVIES ARE STILL GOOD, THE BAD ONES ARE STILL BAD AND FRANK CARUSO'S AND MINE IS COMING ALONG NICELY.

The Big Heat hovers the Big Valley like some sort of curse. You wanted summer, Mr Spudly DoRight. Well you got it. 34 degrees with a humidex of 41. 41! Cripes...It's 41 in Rhyad in the summer and that's the hottest place on the planet most of the time.

Fortunately Spud Central came equipped with an excellent air conditioning system and is a relatively airtight house. I run the A/C for about an hour in the morning and then shut it off till late in the afternoon, then put in on for another hour. That's really kind of all I need. I don't want to sound all precious about this but if everybody did that, we'd save ourselves a shitload of energy and never have to worry about brownouts or exploding transformers ever again. Sometimes, I feel like such a good citizen. I've got the super silent fan on a stool about 6 feet away, my Loblaws Lemon Ice Tea and I'm like ... Heatwave? What heatwave?

One of my pet projects for the summer, while the TV viewing is crappy, is to seek out as many movies as I can that are made for the big US Cable channels Like TNT, Showtime and HBO. Everybody needs a pet project. And besides most of these movies are a hell of a lot better than the lower budget direct to-video-crap that's out there. You know the kind of movies that attract guys like Eric Roberts and some of the lesser known Baldwins. Mostly I have had good luck with these movies. They're usually made from very good character driven scripts and if they aren't biopics, they are usually based on some sort of reality.

A SEASON ON THE BRINK (TWO SPUDS) (VIDEO—PRODUCED FOR ESPN)

I like sports movies because they usually always have a clearly defined story arc. There's always some big thing that everybody is pouring all their blood, sweat and tears into to get through victoriously. They're usually about the triumph of the human spirit in some form or other. And all that jazz.

But *Season On The Brink* is a compelling sports story that really has none of the above going for it.

It's basically a biographical slice of the life of one of the most sadistic bastards who ever lived in the sports world. And I'm not talking about Ty Cobb, who was probably the all time biggest pain in the ass. No this story is about legendary Indiana basketball coach Bobby Knight. Bobby Knight makes people who are obsessed with winning look like pussies. He doesn't give a rat's ass about anybody's feelings. He believes firmly in terrorizing people into performing for him on the basketball court. And he becomes almost clinically depressed whenever he loses. None of this is very healthy, and it's sure not a lot of fun to watch in a movie. But Brian Dennehy, who plays Knight, in what was ESPN's first foray into feature film making, is so compelling to watch, that you're more than willing to put up with the fact that this movie looks like some sort of bush league effort.

At the end of this film there are a bunch of interview clips featuring Bobby Knight and through them, you can appreciate just how amazing a performance Brian Dennehy laid down in the two hours that came before.

This movie isn't about much, other than a close look at Knight in what appears to be the 1985 season, in which the Hoosiers lost the division title and therefore their shot at the March Madness tournament which determines the best collegiate team overall.

The one thing that comes across in spades here is that the young black and white men on the Hoosiers team are so intimidated by Knight and his Gestapo coaching tactics that they are always a bit off their game, so it's no wonder they weren't successful. Also it doesn't help these kids that Knight is always throwing up the names of other famous Hoosiers like Isiah Thomas and Quinn Buckner, who came before them, just to make them feel like crap.

In a way though, you have to feel sorry for an asshole like Bobby Knight. He is completely and utterly enslaved to the concept of winning at all costs, which really runs counter to the notion of helping players become the best that they can be, which, was what I always thought coaching was mainly about. Unfortunately this all happens in America, where idiots like Bobby Knight attain a kind of folk hero status, mostly among semi-redneck people, whose own fathers had to or just liked to kick their asses in the hopes of helping them grow up strong and tough. I guess in America or at least the midwestern part of it, that's a real necessity, cause you never really know just how many Bobby Knights are lurking out their in positions of power.

This film is worth seeing, as I said for Dennehy's performance and secondarily for the statement it makes about collegiate sports, and the pressure that is exerted on young athletes to succeed at all costs. The ironic thing, I guess, is that only a very small percentage of the kids who play collegiate sports ever make it to the professional ranks. They're just playing for the love of the game. It's too bad more coaches couldn't pick up on that simple fact. But watching this movie, it's painfully obvious that the coach's agenda is radically different from the players'.

POINT OF ORIGIN (ONE SPUD)

(VIDEO PRODUCED FOR HBO)

This HBO movie stars Ray Liotta and John Leguizamo, which I don't get at all. These guys are a lot bigger than this film. But here they are. It's the story of an arson inspector (Ray) who is a real fanatic and kind of a weirdo fire department nerd, who during the course of an investigation of serial arson writes book about the case and eventually gets arrested and sent to the hooscow for setting some pretty horrendous fires. (This is a true California story, cause it's too ridiculous to have happened anywhere else.

The reason I'm telling you so much about this movie is that it's a true single spudder and barely worth watching. Although there are some very innovative visual effects and Ray and John are always fun to see, 'cause they're hard workin' thespians, the script for this film was obviously written by a pre-pubescent teenager and the direction overall is abysmal. This movie was so wrapped up in making itself look distinctive (probably so the director could impress the suits @ HBO and get on their A list) that he kinda forgot he was telling a story here. Of course, there wasn't much he could do because the screenplay was obvious, tedious, incredulous and that made me furious. The story tries like hell to remain enigmatic and in the hope that a little guessing game will carry you along, but there's a very fine line between being enigmatic and just plain confusing. Plus there are a number of scenes in this film which you think will be resolved and never are, which again draws attention to the bad writing and adds to the confusion.

So what started off to be a really neat idea, with a couple of great actors, ended up completely ruined by a director trying too hard to impress the suits and a writer who probably couldn't figure out how to untie a knot in his shoelace. Well at least that's my theory. Where would I be without my theories?

INTO THE HEAT UPDATE

Frank Caruso showed up yesterday with the first 50 minutes or so of our movie, Into The Heat, in a rough cut form. There is another hour or so of footage to shoot, ideally in Costa Rica, where Frank has some connections.

It's kind of a weird feeling sitting there watching stuff that you have written being acted for that length of time. After a few minutes, you kind of fall into the rhythm of the movie and start to see what it could be when all the music, sound effects, CGI effects and colour corrections are done. I haven't really been through this process before so I don't really have a frame of reference. Frank says it's the best first cut he's ever done, but that he has about a thousand notes, for things he would like to do with it to tighten it up and make it better.

After we looked at the cut, we took off over to Tim Horton's, where we seem to have all our important meetings (how Canadian is that), and discussed what we needed to do the rest of the story to make it work with the cut we now have. One of the things that Frank has decided is to go back to something more closely resembling the original ending which I wrote. We decided to make one of the characters more violent. We also figured out a way to insert another fight scene which Frank shot, but that didn't have a place in the movie. Remember we're making a low budget action

adventure film here. Not Road To Perdition or Gangs of New York. (Don't I wish?). Anyway, the bottom line here is the same as the bottom line of most of the meetings I have with Frank. More revisions. But, I have to say, I've been through a lot more grief resulting in a lot less result. So on the whole, I'd have to say we're progressing nicely.

Anyway, I have to cut it short. This is the long weekend and, unfortunately I have a ton of work to do. See you next week.