

Jump Cut

By George T. Marshall

(November 2006) It was a warm and crisp night in August. The weather was that perfect blend of summer heat, pleasant evening breeze, and no humidity. The lines stretched to the left and the right of the theatre entrance, flowing down the neighboring side streets like a giant "U." Hundreds of people had been waiting hours for what was an "event" presentation. This was the night of the premiere of a new documentary film by Rhode Island director, Craig Shapiro. The location was the historic Columbus Theatre on Providence's newly revitalized Broadway. The film having its world premiere was "Ice Kings."

A trek from Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley to the capital city of Providence is not something that seems to happen naturally nor normally in Rhode Island. The local joke is that the locals hate to travel and that a trip more than five miles was a major event. For lovers of sports, particularly hockey, coming to Providence was a necessity on this night in August to see a film that carried a lot of local buzz.

Why? Because the documentary touched lives while resonating a unique chord that was distinctly Rhode Island.

THE BACKSTORY

In March of 2004, Toll Gate High School upset Mount Saint Charles Academy's men's ice hockey team and pushed them off the state championship throne they held for 26 years; the longest consecutive championship streak in national high school sports history. In a state where hockey is as important as Texas football, the win immediately became legend.

At Mount St. Charles, 75-year-old head coach Bill Belisle and his assistant coach and son, Dave Belisle owned the state title since the Carter Administration. Their legendary program, set deep in the French Canadian area of Woonsocket, RI has been considered the greatest high school sports program in the history of hockey.

Mount St. Charles Academy is a coeducational Catholic junior-senior high school located in the Bernon Heights section of Woonsocket. Founded by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in 1924, the campus consists of over 22 acres and two main buildings -- the school and the Brother Adelard Ice Arena.

The Mount has produced some of the NHL's best: Garth Snow, Brian Berard, Keith Carney, Mathieu Schneider, and Brian Lawton. In telling the story of the Mount, the story also included all the great Rhode Island teams and players that the Mount had to go through.

In 2004, in the best of 3 game finals, the Toll Gate Titans shocked everyone with a 4-3 win in the opener, followed by a 4-0 shut out in Game 2 to make Rhode

Island Hockey history. It was a wake up call and a testament to the endurance and importance of the sport to so many.

Craig Shapiro captures the zeitgeist of the period in his dynamic and involving work; making this a film to watch as it progresses from the festival circuit to the mainstream.

Just who is this filmmaker? Why drew him to this topic? Where does he see his film going? These are questions that intrigued me and that I addressed in a recent conversation. (Craig, by the way, is a 1989 graduate of Toll Gate High School, but that was not the main reason he had for making this film...)

GTM: Could you tell us a bit about yourself; your educational background and how you became involved in filmmaking?

Craig Shapiro: I was born in Quincy Mass in 1971; both of my parents went to Boston University. We moved to Rhody shortly thereafter and In 1993 I graduated from the University of Rhode Island with a degree in political science ... moved to NYC in 1994 and have lived here ever since. I taught tennis, floundered for a month as a financial planner, strung tennis rackets, and then in 1997 my friend got me a job as a production assistant on HBO's "Inside the NFL" ...and it at HBO Sports where I began to hone my skills.

GTM: You've set up your own company in New York; how did that come about?

Craig Shapiro: In November 2004 HBO Sports approached me to produce and direct a series of documentary style boxing shows that preview upcoming blockbuster fights, called the "COUNTDOWN" series. It was at that point I formed Magic Garden Productions.

GTM: What is the mission of the company?

Craig Shapiro: We want to tell interesting stories that will allow us to do HBO quality work...all of the time.

GTM: Can you tell about some of the productions you've undertaken?

Craig Shapiro: I am currently in the middle of production of a one hour retrospective on Andre Agassi's career for The Tennis Channel, which is slated to air in February. In addition to "ICE KINGS," I most recently produced and directed "THE COUNTDOWN TO TARVER-HOPKINS," a 30-minute documentary boxing preview show that premiered on HBO May 27, 2006. In 2005, I produced, directed and conceptualized the look for the "COUNTDOWN" series, which made its debut on HBO2 in June 2005 with "COUNTDOWN TO GATTI – MAYWEATHER," followed by "COUNTDOWN TO HOPKINS-TAYLOR" and "COUNTDOWN TO TARVER -JONES 3" which aired in July and September 2005, respectively.

I produced and directed features on Kate Winslet and Alicia Keys for The Glamour Magazine "Woman of the Year Award Show," which aired on NBC in December 2004. I produced and directed "The Maxim Magazine Hot 100" for VH1, an hour countdown show that premiered in June. Additionally, I conceptualized and directed the high definition look of the show, and conducted provocative interviews with Rachel Hunter, Ashanti, Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, and Jessica Simpson.

From here, I produced and directed "All Access- NASCAR FEVER," a behind the scenes look at NASCAR courtesy of NASCAR superstar Dale Earnhardt Jr. and the band 3 Doors Down which aired on VH1 in November, 2003.

After that, I produced segments for VH1's "I Love the 70's," which was instrumental in the network achieving their most successful summer ever. From here came an opportunity to produce segments for "All Access- Skin Deep," an hour documentary on celebrity plastic surgery on VH1, and features for the USA Network's coverage of the 2003 US Open. I produced a feature on Sean "P. Diddy" Combs' New York City Marathon adventure for NBC's coverage of the 2003 New York City Marathon.

I've also produced a series of features for Sports Illustrated's "Sportsmen of the Year Award Show" which aired on FOX in December 2002, and segments for "I Love the 80's," an irreverent look back at that decade which at the time achieved the highest rating ever on VH1 in 2002.

GTM: That's amazing...and it's such a wide-range of material.

Craig Shapiro: There's more.

I wrote the open and teases for NBC's coverage of the 2002 New York Marathon; plus produced and directed features for the launch of the YES Network, the New York Yankees flagship station, which included player profiles, exposes, and news style features. In 2000/2001 I was a segment producer on ESPN's series "The Life," producing documentary style segments on athletes' lives off of the field, Subjects included Tracy McGrady, Joey Galloway, Roy Jones Jr., Tim Hardaway, Troy Vincent, and an inside look at the Tampa Bay Buccaneers training camp. The show was nominated for a Sports Emmy in 2000.

GTM: Congratulations! So how did you get involved in the production of "Ice Kings," being it's such a local, Rhode Island story?

Craig Shapiro: I grew up going to tons of hockey games and watched Mount St Charles I went to one of the schools that is featured in the film

GTM: Makes sense. How long did it take to produce the film and what obstacles, if any, did you encounter?

Craig Shapiro: We began production in Dec 2004, finished in June 2006. I put 4 "COUNTDOWN" shows on HBO during that time, so we had some pretty significant breaks in our schedule.

GTM: What format did you use to shoot this film and why?

Craig Shapiro: We shot the Panasonic DVX 100 A ... the 24P looks great and the camera was an absolute workhorse for us. Amazing bang for the buck.

GTM: What are your goals for "Ice Kings?"

Craig Shapiro: We hope to have a distribution deal in place before the end of the year.

GTM: How was this experience different from other productions you've been involved with professionally?

Craig Shapiro: Generally speaking, I had never really interviewed people that for the most part had not been on camera before. So the approach was different, in the way I conducted the interviews. Also, I had partially lived the story, so there was I knew quite a few of the people in the film. Also, the spirit of cooperation in regards to acquiring photos and footage was unprecedented.

GTM: Tell us about the process that went into creating the film you were involved with from concept to execution.

Craig Shapiro: I really had a pretty clear format in my mind ... and pretty much knew who I wanted to interview so we didn't have to spend any time researching the story, which was tremendous. We shot over 40 interviews in 7 states, hunted and gathered photos, newspaper articles and footage ... and locked into an edit room for close to 7 months ... yikes! Voiced with HBO Sports' Jim Lampley at Postworks NYC, mixed at Wonderland Sound in NYC...

GTM: What were the pros and cons of promoting the film through the film festival circuit?

Craig Shapiro: Once we have a deal in place I'll let you know.

GTM: OK...

GTM: Did you learn anything about yourself from participation in this project?

Craig Shapiro: Once we have a deal in place I'll let you know.

GTM: Hmm...

GTM: What did it feel like watching the audience reaction to your film after its first major screening?

Craig Shapiro: We had a tremendous crowd at the Rhode Island International Film Festival. 700 people in a very cool old theater ... including friends and family that I've known since I was an infant. That was pretty sweet.

GTM: What advice would you give to other filmmakers about undertaking such a commitment?

Craig Shapiro: Go with your gut and tell the story that YOU want to tell.

If you'd like to learn more about "Ice Kings," you can check out their online trailer at the following URL:

<http://www.icekingsthemovie.com/trailer.html>

To learn more about Craig Shapiro, and to see his online demo reel, go to this URL:

<http://www.craigshapiro.net/craigshapiroreel.html>

About the Author:

George T. Marshall is the Producing Director of the Rhode Island-based Flickers Arts Collaborative, the creators of the annual Rhode Island International Film Festival for which he also serves as Executive Director. He teaches film and communications at Rhode Island College and speech communications and documentary filmmaking at Roger Williams University. He is a director, writer, producer of commercials and industrials for numerous business clients in the region. He can be reached at <flicksart@aol.com>