Burl Glenroy's
The Cabbagetown Kid

This well-made documentary opens on a vulnerable moment: a good-looking young man is talking about the bones in his nose - what's been broken, what hasn't. He is Shawn O'Sullivan, light middle-weight champion of the World Amateur Boxing Association, a teenager from the Cabbagetown area of Toronto. The Cabbagetown Kid is about his training and his devotion to his sport, culminating in his three-round bout with Cuban boxer Armanda Martinez for the World Cup in late 1981.

For viewers like me, who have a basic revolution to boxing, this film is an explanation of the sport's character-building aspects. We learn that, for many teenage boys, boxing is a way to stay out of trouble and learn to feel good about themselves. Saya O'Sullivan, indicating the warehouse surroundings in which he works out, young boxers "leave here happy and tired." We learn that boxing "is an art," "a thinking game" - "Marina, strength, agility and speed - boxing has them all," is what we're told. According to Michael O'Sullivan, Shawn's father, "A boxer has confidence; he's not a bully." Obviously, the filmmakers are aware that many people do not understand this sport. They stress its discipline and hard training.

The centerpiece for the film is the greasing World Cup Final match between O'Sullivan and Martinez fought in Montreal on November 18, 1981. The fight was filmed in a two-camera setup (covering shots and medium shots) and is included in its entirety in The Cabbagetown Kid. Consisting of three 3-minute rounds, the fight is nicely placed in the structure of the film. It comes after we have grown to like Shawn O'Sullivan and admire his intense workouts with coach Ken Hamilton and trainer Peter Wyfie. Also, we have gradually been prepared for the match through sparing sequences that lead up to it. This seems an important point because the Martinez-O'Sullivan fight for the 1981 World Cup is an extremely vicious match, in the sense that both fighters held nothing back and gave their all to win. During the breaks between rounds, we are with O'Sullivan in his corner, hearing the advice from his coach and seeing the toll this incredible bout is taking on the young fighter. The filmmakers have captured all the intensity of the fight and wisely show it in its entirety, thereby honoring the nuances of the sport, the prowess of both fighters, and under-scoring the hard-won victory of O'Sulli­van.

Ironically, this fight section contains the only moment of physical tenderness that we see in the film. Having just "teased the crap" out of one another (to put it bluntly), Martinez and O'Sullivan embrace with what is clearly sincere affection. It is a stunning moment in the film, one that suggests they have endured something together which has taken them beyond competition. As a notion- nal moment, it says more about boxing than all the preceding rhetoric combined.

The Cabbagetown Kid, though only 36 minutes long, has depth and subtlety, quietly including minor themes of working-class pride, communal solidarity, a father-son relationship, growing up Irish, even growing up male. It is a well-crafted production.

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THREE SHORTS

SHOTS

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RUNAWAY

A gritty, black & white documentary about young runaways on the Yonge Street "Strip" in Toronto. Members of the Juvenile Task Force of Metro Toronto Police stroll the side-walks in street clothes. The roving camera records encounters with kids, mostly using their own words. "The streets are rough, and survival is a constant nightmare - "I lived in a car for six months." Influenced by TV, and with a derivative style, but nevertheless quite promising.


A CHOICE OF HOME

A sentimental, middled tale of a grandmother living in her little rural house in Quebec. After a fall in the kitchen, her single-parent daughter brings her to the city apartment to convalesce. The grandmother is alone a lot and feels useless. The teenage granddaughter "explains" to her mother that "Memere" would be happy with familiar surroundings and people she knows, and gives information about agencies who will counsel them. Finally being almost self-sufficient. A little bit of fiction featuring a horren- dous young nagging girl driving into the next morning, the young man walks off, indulges in fantasies of nubile hitch-hikers, makes love, talks to Michael O'Sullivan fight for the 1981 World Cup is an extremely vicious match, in the sense that both fighters held nothing back and gave their all to win. During the breaks between rounds, we are with O'Sullivan in his corner, hearing the advice from his coach and seeing the toll this incredible bout is taking on the young fighter. The filmmakers have captured all the intensity of the fight and wisely show it in its entirety, thereby honoring the nuances of the sport, the prowess of both fighters, and under-scoring the hard-won victory of O'Sulli­van.

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