

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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Though from vastly different backgrounds, Will Sampson and Charlie Fields find a common ground in **Fish Hawk** (photo: John Williamson)

discomforted audiences, but frequently indicated unusual talent. Shebib freely admits that **Fish Hawk** is an assignment film, and that he appreciates the opportunity to work on, rather than promote his own project *ad frustrating infinitum*. Perhaps he made **Fish Hawk** to prove to the industry that he no longer wanted to be considered an outsider. One can't condemn a filmmaker for wanting to make a living, but if a **Fish Hawk** is the price for coming in out of the cold.....it's a hell of a price.

If **Fish Hawk** is not a director's picture, it is a producer's picture. Producer Jon Slan has aimed for a family audience — and with Indian actor Will Sampson (**One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**), for a U.S. television sale. Slan starts with a good central idea, but the Blanche Hanalis script is terrible. (The script is based on a novel by Mitchell Jayne.) The screenwriter has set out to write a simple, warm-hearted story but has fallen into the usual traps. Simple-mindedness, instead of simplicity surrounds the characters. They speak too much, the message conveyed in dialogue instead of action. The dialogue itself is cute, easy: you know, the sort of lingo that supposedly makes Andy Hardy sophisticated. The drama produces stereotyped opposites pitted against one another. A well-intentioned script be-

comes simplicity run amok. Unfortunately the other elements of the film don't rise above the level set by the script. I've read numerous comments about the stylish photography in **Fish Hawk**, its beauty, its evocation of rural Ontario eighty years ago. Bunk! The film has no period feel about it. It looks like the Caledon Hills in the fall of 1979. There isn't even seasonal variation, reminding us that this film was shot on a tight production schedule. Whether this is the result of cost-cutting production priorities, or simply a lack of creative art

direction, the film exhibits the producer's hand. There *have* been other evocative period films made in Canada: **Mon Oncle Antoine**, **Kamouraska**, **The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**, all considerably cheaper to produce than **Fish Hawk**. There's a problem when a period film has no period. But back to the direction for a moment: it's no more than competent. The film has a professional veneer. The action sequences are reasonably well-staged, the actors performing their tasks adequately, but only Geoffrey Bowes as the town half-wit moves us. None of the other actors are pushed to project that sub-text of life going on behind their words and actions. In this, the director has failed to animate interaction between the characters. What you see is what you get. Except that Will Sampson, as Fish Hawk, *does* have a sense of presence. He projects an elusive larger-than-life quality, and his charisma helps the film. But what has happened to Don Shebib? **Fish Hawk** is a mediocre representation from the new wave of big-budget, Canadian filmmaking. The film won a Peace Prize at the Moscow Film Festival this year, a decision as adventurous as the experience of the film.

Ken Dancyger

George Mendeluk's Stone Cold Dead

d. George Mendeluk sc. George Mendeluk ph. Dennis Miller ed. Martin Pepler sd. Donald Cohen m. Paul Zaza l.p. Richard Crenna, Paul Williams, Linda Sorensen, Belinda J. Mont-

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