

a shot at the big time

Eager to produce films with entertaining and international appeal, the same creative triumvirate that gave us **Three Card Monte** is at it again. This time producers Rob Iveson and Richard Gabourie and director Les Rose aim for the major leagues with their new film **Title Shot**.



Executive producer-actor Richard Gabourie discusses his role as Blake with director Les Rose

by Larry Moore

"Give me a good chase scene and a happy ending and I'm in heaven"

Les Rose

It's a bitterly cold January morning, as a young man walks anxiously toward the Toronto Trust and Deposit on the corner of Dundas and Spadina Streets. He nervously enters the bank and demands all the money from one of the tellers. Over at police headquarters an alarm goes off and officers Black and Dunlop are dispatched to the scene. In the ensuing chase the suspect is cornered in a lane behind city hall. Detective Blake tries to reason with him, but the kid panics and turns to fire. Just then a matte box falls from a camera overhead and narrowly grazes the performer. "Cut... cut... let's do that again." Later the fake blood to be used on the matching close-ups has frozen solid in its cup. "This directing is not all it's cracked up to be," muses director Les Rose.

The picture is **Title Shot**, the latest from Regenthall Productions. The film is produced by Rob Iveson, Richard Gabouris and directed by Les Rose, the triumvirate that gave us **Three Card Monte** last year. The next day on location at a pinball arcade on Yonge Street, Les comments on that first day of shooting. "It's a lot like football," he says wearing his ever present football jersey, "You have to hit someone to know that you are in the game. Now that our hands are dirty everything seems a little less fragile." **Title Shot**, Les Rose's second feature film as a director, is a story about the heavyweight boxing championship of the world. The idea for **Title Shot** came to Richard Gabouries, who stars as Blake opposite Tony Curtis, and is also the film's executive producer, as he was watching the fights at home.

"I've always loved boxing and was sitting on the couch and though I'd like to write something about a shot at the title. It started as that simple idea. I've also always been fascinated by the Kennedy assassinations," so **Title Shot** has a unique twist that adds an interesting element of suspense to the plot.

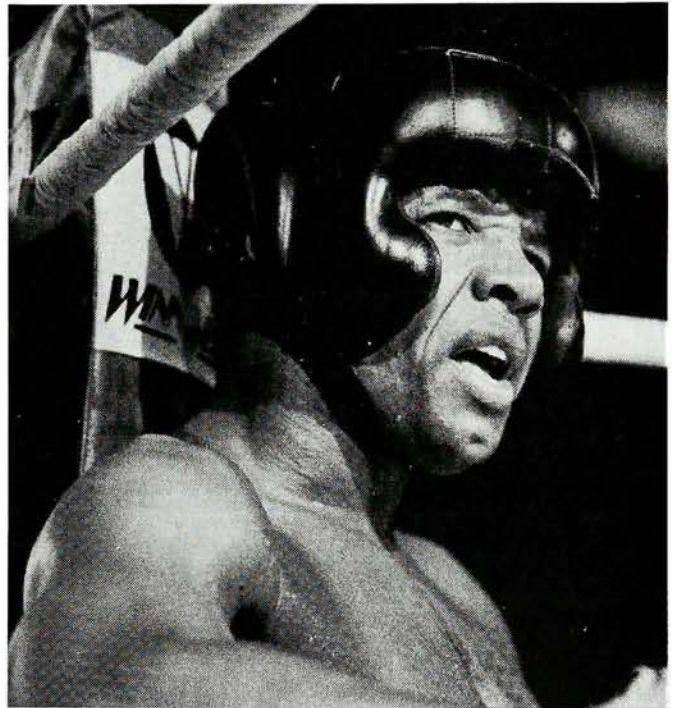
The picture was made possible by a 1.4 million dollar budget that came from private sources, the Royal Bank of Canada and the Canadian Film Development Corp. **Three Card Monte** has been made on a budget of \$300,000, so it was quite a step up for those concerned. A healthy chunk of that money went to Tony Curtis for his role of Renzetti, a fight promoter who uses his mafia connections and extensive computer network to weight the betting on the championship. Richard Gabourie bargained for over eight months with Curtis' manager Swifty Lazar before a contract was finally secured. For his two and half week stint as Renzetti, Curtis received over half the entire **Three Card Monte** budget. Both Les and the producers seemed very happy with the results.

Although there were some minor communication problems between the star and head office, the performance he turned in was exceptional. When producer Rob Iveson was questioned about dealing with the slightly temperamental star he simply replied, "Look at the rushes. They speak for themselves." After all, Curtis has been in show business for thirty years and has made over a hundred films in that time. He made his first picture when director Rose was only one year old. Les said that "working with Tony was a valuable learning experience. It was a give and take situation. We developed a rapport that took us through the whole picture. It was a fifty-fifty proposition." He also stressed the importance of getting off to a good start with a performer of Curtis' calibre, "You have to get off on the right foot; a fish stinks from the head. You have to have the ability to make decisions. My margin of error is 80 percent correct, 10 percent correctable, 5 percent workable, 2 percent changeable and 3 percent no way. If I'm good it's because I know when to shut up. Tony is a lot like a fine sports car. If you treat it well it will perform better than anything in the field."

Rob Iveson, who defines his job as "the person who can fire the director," has a tremendous amount of respect for Les. "He's a blue collar cowboy and the performances reflect the character of the director." Les himself says that he puts a lot of his personality into his work. "I like to be unpredictable, pull a punch here when you expect it there. If you don't like the picture, you probably wouldn't like me. I've tried to do something a little different with the pacing. The action scenes has been kept short and plentiful, while the character scenes are longer and a bit drawn out. That way the action will keep you interested, while you get to know the people in the story. The plot of **Title Shot** is a little bit implausible, so I've made the characters a lot more realistic to compensate. I think that ninety percent of directing is casting. This director yelling and screaming thing is bullshit. You typecast and then you tell your actors when they are going off. You have to trust the actors' instinct."

Les was particularly happy with the performance of Robert (Bo) Delbert, an actor from New York, who was chosen to

play Rufus Taylor, the aging heavyweight champion. "Out of the seventeen people that we auditioned in New York, Bo was the one who came across most like a champion. When I saw his rushes I was very happy. Anyone could make him look good in the editing room, but I was concerned with whether or not he could act." Delbert's role wasn't very easy either. He had to do extensive boxing training in order to do the fight sequences with his challenger, who was played by Damiano Pellegrino, a trained Toronto boxer. After the fight was filmed Delbert was left with a few healthy bruises — souvenirs from his stay in Canada. Les feels that this was the best cast he had ever had to work with. Besides Tony Curtis and Robert Delbert, Canadians Allan Royal, Sean McCann, Richard Gabourie, Natsuko Ohama, Tabby Johnson, Susan Hogan, Jack Duffy and Vince Marino has principal roles.



Taylor ready to come out fighting

Title Shot was a new stage for Iveson, Gabourie and Rose. Richard Gabourie says that he mickey-moused both pictures and that **Three Card Monte** couldn't be made today. Rob Iveson feels that dealing with the bank posed one of the most interesting problems. The Royal Bank gambled on investing its own money for the first time on a major motion picture. The bank executives apparently didn't understand the necessity to be firm and speedy with their financial commitment. Consequently there were a few tense moments when it became apparent that the producers might lose Curtis because some of his guarantee wasn't available when it was needed. Iveson says that new ground was being broken every day at the bank during that time, until they finally released the money that was needed. Mr. Curtis, much to everyone's relief, arrived only a few days later than scheduled.

The jump in budget (\$300,000 to \$1.4 million) allowed the producers and director a little more latitude than they had had on **Three Card Monte**. Besides being able to hire an internationally recognizable star, they were able to use a wider range of locations, including the Kitchener Memorial Arena where

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the championship bout was fought. In order to give the fight a realistic flair, over two thousand extras were brought in to see the action and fill the stands.

Les was also pleased with the kind and number of special effects that the budget allowed him to incorporate. These included the rolling and subsequent destruction of a police car and numerous bullet hits and gunshot wounds that were excellently executed by special effect whiz, Martin Malivoire. It wasn't always simple. A number of times during the shoot, scenes has to be carried in order to avoid costly overtime. This, unfortunately, would break the flow of an action or a scene. Once when Les was cautioned for using too many blanks to get his opening and title sequences, he quipped "I forgot. Just put one bullet in the gun. This is a Canadian production." The tight production schedule also presented its problems to Director of Photography, Henry Fiks and cameraman Fred Guthe. On numerous occasions they were forced to make the best of a poor or newly chosen location on very short notice. Shooting in the Canadian winter certainly has its disadvantages, when it came to trying to match scenes. When the picture changed from union to non-union status due to a disagreement with IATSE, they lost half the crew that they had been accustomed to working with. It all made for a rather tenuous beginning. However, you couldn't tell by the final product. Fred Guthe was so proficient with his hand held camera work that he was nicknamed Freddy Cam. Some of the camera work, particularly in a hockey sequence and during the fight, is superb. One of the crew members commented after the first screening that the rushes were the best that he had ever seen. The comment wasn't an empty one.



Tony Curtis stars as Renzetti, a fight promoter

Each scene has some particular quirk that makes the characters extremely realistic and believable. Les likes to have his people stumble, stutter, miss-pronounce, make mistakes or not be able to express themselves at all. He is very quick to change dialogue and would rather have a performer say something that he is comfortable with. Consequently, much of the script was reworked or tightened in the rehearsals prior to each scene. This is one of the reasons why Rick Gabourie enjoys working with Les and has had him direct both his pictures. Part of the freedom comes from Rose's early experience as a scriptwriter.

Les Rose co-wrote **Paperback Hero** with Barry Perason and recently has completed the first draft of a new script **The Circumcision of Issac Littlefeather**. **Paperback Hero** was where Rob Iveson, who was the second assistant director, and Les originally met. On Iveson's recommendation, Les directed Gabourie's first project **Three Card Monte**. As a result, Gabourie walked away from the Canadian Film Awards with the best actor and achievement awards last year. Small wonder that Richard appreciates Rose's ability and style of directing.

Together, Gabourie, Iveson and Rose are creating new chap-

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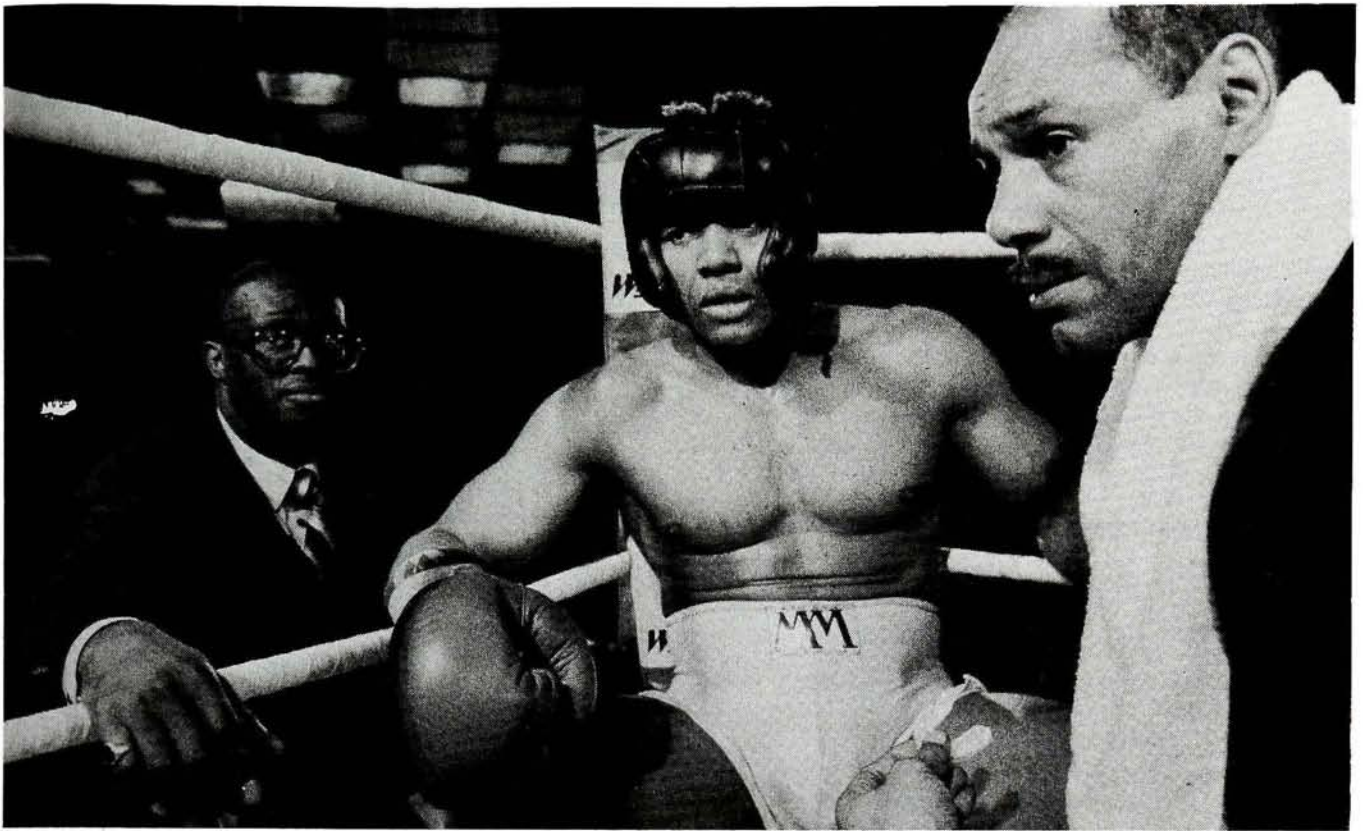
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Henri Fiks takes a light reading



Rufus Taylor (Robert Bo Delbert) resting on the ropes

ters in Canadian film history. **Title Shot** is an important venture for all of them and represents their own individual shot at the big time. None of them have a specific kind of picture they want to work on, but all appear eager to progress and produce good entertaining stories that have an international appeal. Les likes the type of film where you can experience a wide emotional range and come out uplifted. The **King of Hearts** and **Small Change** are two of his favourites. **Rocky** is also up there somewhere close. He confesses to having a "motherlode of cornyness" that is reflected in the personalities of the characters he puts on film. "Give me a good chase scene and a happy ending," he laughs, "and I'm in heaven." Up until the completion of principal photography, editor Ron Lizman had been responsible for cutting those performances into a cohesive feature film. Recently though, Lizman left for another project and was replaced by Ron Sanders. Rose wants to keep the pace moving through the 140 scenes. "In Europe the pace is a little slower, but here the television generation is used to an image change every fifteen seconds. The cutting should reflect the phrenetic pace of our everyday life." He jokingly admits that "you want to have people in and out of the cinema, before they know that they have seen a bad picture." He doesn't have to worry about that with **Title Shot**. Although only his second feature, the wide variety of talent and expertise have combined to make it a fine motion picture. All those involved, are being pushed a little closer to the goals that they are all striving for. Rose in particular seems a bit like a newborn colt. The legs are a little shaky, but confidence is growing with every stride. That he has the potential to run with the best of them is more than apparent.



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