



Photo by Dean Saito

Gary Busey (left) and director Richard Sarafian (right) confer on the sidelines while filming segments of "The Bear" during last year's Texas A&M vs. Texas football game.

And now ... a word with the director

By SHAWN BEHLEN
Staff Reviewer

Amid much regional interest and hoopla, the premiere of "The Bear" is finally here.

The film tells the life story of Paul "Bear" Bryant, America's winningest football coach. It follows Bryant's life from the age of 17 when he wrestled a black bear to earn his nickname to the day he notched his record 323rd victory at the 1983 Liberty Bowl.

The film was directed by Richard Sarafian. He has been responsible for more than a hundred hours of television, directing episodes of "Maverick," "Doctor Kildare" and "I Spy" among others. His feature films include "The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing" with Burt Rey-

nolds, "The Next Man" with Sean Connery and "Sunburn" with Farrah Fawcett. Lately, Sarafian has spent most of his time back in the world of television, directing William Shatner in "Terror on the Train" and Melissa Gilbert in "Splendor in the Grass."

At Ease talked with Sarafian on the phone Wednesday about directing "The Bear."

He said one of the main goals of the production team was to show more than just an event-by-event line-up of Bryant's life.

"We tried to show his drive, his dedication, his spirit, his contact with his football players and his contact with children and his family," Sarafian said. "As far as him being a hero, I

don't think there's any question. I also think he was a great human. He approached everything with sensitivity and a lot of compassion, as all the incidents in his life show."

Sarafian said he had to approach this film differently from others he had directed because it was a biography, not a western or a thriller.

"It was more difficult because I didn't want to get into the sentimental bullshit of 'Knut Rockne' with all the sentimental cliches," he said.

Sarafian said filming a football game in a new way was difficult.

"I wanted more than anybody's seen before," he said. "I wanted people to see it for its courage, for its pain.

"I tried to take the camera in deeper, to get where you normally can't get a camera. And I tried to film from Bryant's point of view, not up in the stands, but down close to the sidelines. It was a necessity to have the camera in the right place at the right time."

The first actual filming for the movie took place on the Texas A&M campus. Sarafian and his crew shot scenes at The Grove, the Texas A&M vs. Texas football game and bonfire. The last two events could not be controlled and that limited the film crews.

"It meant that we couldn't do it over and over and over again," Sarafian said. "What happened when we got down there is we didn't have much

time and got in and got out. We worked efficiently. I wish the rest of the movie could have been shot as efficiently as those scenes were.

"When we filmed the scenes on the sidelines, we had to shoot with long shots, focusing on Gary (Busey, who plays Bryant) and people around him in wardrobe to create the illusion of 1958."

The advance word on Busey is that he has done an excellent job. He has gained much praise from the film's producer, Larry Spangler.

"If you can find me somebody better than Busey, then bring him around," he said recently in a film promotion. "I'll

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