THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON: AN ACTOR'S STUDY

By

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Director: Frank Jacobson

The thesis consists of acting a challenging role, the Coach, in a critically acclaimed play, *That Championship Season* by Jason Miller. The choice of play was arrived at in conference between MFA candidates including myself, Acting: Paul Shapiro, Acting: Gordon Hayes, Directing and members of the Drama faculty at the University of Montana. Frank Jacobson, Chairman of Thesis Committees; Richard H. James, Chairman, Department of Drama; Roland Meinholtz, Head of Acting Division; Professors, Allan Cook, Glen Gauer, and Stephanie Schoezel. *That Championship Season* proved to be an acceptable play for all parties, due to the generally balanced characterizations which would provide challenging acting roles for all five people involved. Gordon Hayes as Director of the show would have the ultimate responsibility of casting, giving particular consideration to Paul Shapiro and myself as thesis candidates. All persons who auditioned for the show were informed of these irregular casting conditions. After readings and discussion, we came to a decision satisfactory to everyone. I would play the Coach and Paul the part of Phil Romano. Filling out the cast were David MacIntyre, John Keegan, and Kent Epler, all drama students.
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CHAPTER I

The thesis was carried out under highly favorable conditions. The ensemble was immediately formed, the director and five actors working in close proximity and all around cooperation. A daily journal was to be kept of work in progress, consisting of impressions, directions, personal feelings, and successes and failures.

The bulk of the thesis was the acting role itself, those moments on stage, in concert with other actors and audience. All preparation including direction and technical support was geared to this end. This written compendium should be viewed as background illumination and evaluation. It cannot in any way be separated from the practical phase of the project, the actual performance. It is hoped that this project will assist others attempting to undertake similar work.

Limitations

I experienced some limitations in the project. The first and most considerable limitation was myself. Actors are always willing to accept a challenge but are often incapable of totally meeting it. I was hampered by a physical stiffness I have had for many years. Through exercise and relaxation techniques, I was able to partially overcome this, but never to my full satisfaction. I envisioned my character's vocal quality as gruff and gutsy, two qualities that my own
voice is not. The problem was not in getting some semblance of these qualities, but in making them believable and unself-conscious. Progress was made in this area, but again, the personal limitation was evident to some degree right up to the end.

The time period given to rehearsal and character work never seem to be long enough. This was the case also with That Championship Season. We were all committed to the valuable use of time, but when it was all over, we wished we had had more.

Presenting the show in the Masquer Theater was a lesser limitation. In fact, the intimacy of the hall could be considered a definite plus factor for the type of show we had chosen. The closeness of the audience gives a great feeling of communication which usually breaks down somewhere in the twenty or thirty feet between actors and audience in a proscenium situation. However, the Masquer Theater does have significant shortcomings; lack of backstage space, a prohibitively low ceiling for correct lighting, which also dictates limitations for platforms and any kind of aerial effects; and a permanent post at dead center stage forcing blocking patterns away from a usually strong stage position in most theaters.

The final limitation I experienced was a lack of precedent having been established in this type of thesis. I would like to have had some indication of right and wrong directions to take. Unfortunately, this was the first such project
undertaken at the University of Montana.
CHAPTER II

That Championship Season by Jason Miller is a uniquely American play about a reunion in the home of the coach of a high school basketball team in the Lackawanna Valley town that twenty years earlier had captured the state championship. It is a play by and about men, which lends itself very nicely to cinematic ensemble type acting. Miller's play is timely, coming on the heels of Sartre's "age of anxiety" and moving into a depression of International proportions. It is essentially a search for values.

Miller himself writes:

The characters are what are important to me. They're people. I want to write about people. I'm writing in "Championship" about men going into their middle age with a sense of terror and defeat. They're desperately holding onto their youth. The only thing that holds them together is a memory of when they were together. The play is a rite of passage really, and I know that in this rite of passage I must love all my characters in order to write about them. They started out in my mind as archetypes, but then I brought them down to life size. I have my own critical canons but no backlog of theory. I want to tell a story. I'm not ashamed of entertainment. I think people are tired to the bone of abstractions, of a parade of genitalia across the stage, and of empty rhetoric. I don't want to hit an audience over the head with my opinions, but let them draw their own conclusions. Every man in my play is searching for his father. One never knew him when he died, at forty three; another tended his father like a baby and wanted a show of respect; another lost his illusions when his father was wiped out in the depression, threw his teeth across the living room floor, sat down in a chair and never talked again... They are all trapped.
They can't express their individuality, they can't get out of themselves; they start out the door but they come back in again. They'll be back next year for another reunion. They'll come back to live out their myths. Perhaps all we really do is live out our myths.¹

Jason Miller was born in 1939 and grew up in Scranton, Pennsylvania. After studying at the University of Scranton and Catholic University, he has pursued the dual career of actor and playwright. He was recently seen in the movie "The Exorcist." He is the author of three one act plays and Nobody Hears a Broken Drum, which was produced off-Broadway in 1970. Mr. Miller lives in New York City with his wife and three children.

Miller is relatively new on the theatrical scene. As an actor I approached my character almost totally from the script itself. There was very little consideration given to critical research. Very little has been published about these characters, and, as Miller says, the play speaks for itself.

CHAPTER III

Background

The beginning of any character analysis for me has always been a simple accounting of undeniable facts supplied by the playwright. This usually ends up looking like a job application as follows:

Name: Unknown
Age: 65
Sex: Male
Height: 6'2"
Weight: 185 lbs.
Occupation: Basketball Coach, Retired
Religion: Jesuit Catholic

Likes: Strength, athletics, men, pride, victory, booze, women, the old days, politics, expensive cars, television, America, guns, friends, trophies.

Dislikes: Weakness, opposition, Communism, Judaism, blacks, cynicism, reality, booze, women, television.


Physical Handicaps or Serious Illness: Healing pain from adhesions; heart trouble.

Miller writes:


Some additional keys to character:

Tom: "Hey, George, you know he keeps these guns loaded."2

2Jason Miller, That Championship Season, I. p. 5.
George: "The Coach loves to drive Phil's caddie."3

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George: "You haven't changed in twenty years."4
Coach: "I haven't changed in sixty years."

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Phil: "He didn't look good to me."
James: "All that dancing around. He gets like a boy. He overdid it."
Phil: "He looks yellow or something."
Tom: "He's sick."
James: "He overdid it."5

*****

James: "He doesn't believe in painkiller, no pills."6
Coach: "There's been nothing private between the people in this room for twenty years."7

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Coach: "I didn't rot and die in the hospital because I had you boys around me."8

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Coach: "I graduated in three years from the Jesuits. They all wanted me to become a Jesuit....Miss Morriss. We knew each other for years.

3 Ibid., p. 8.
4 Ibid., p. 10.
5 Ibid., p. 18.
6 Ibid., p. 19.
7 Ibid., II - p. 23.
8 Ibid., p. 25.
Biblically...Teaching the game was not just a profession, it was a vocation. Like a priest. Devoted my life to excellence...superiority."9

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Coach: "A communist came through here, 1930 maybe...We broke his legs. Broke his legs with a two by four and sent him packing."10

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Coach: "Find his weak spot and go after it. Punish him with it."11

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Coach: "Progress? Nothing changes but the date."12

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Coach: "Jews ruin a country."13

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James: "Let's let the Coach handle it."14

Tom: "Why not? He's handled everything else."

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(George's baby)
Phil: "He wanted to keep it. Wouldn't give it up until the Coach damn near ordered him to."15

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10Ibid., p. 28.
11Ibid., p. 29.
12Ibid., p. 30.
13Ibid., p. 30.
14Ibid., p. 31.
15Ibid., p. 37.
Coach: "And the next thing I know, I'm walking the streets at eight o'clock in the morning with nowhere to go...start listening to the radio...I watch more T.V. than any man alive."16

Coach: "You have to hate to win."17

Coach: "I chose my country, God forgive me. I made the supreme sacrifice and went to work in the mines for my country."18

Director's Notes

In the course of any play rehearsal, the Director will give many notes. These range from minor suggestions concerning movement adjustments and line interpretations to major questions of character interpretation. Gordon generally gave his notes verbally before or after rehearsal. Occasionally notes would be mimeographed and given to the actors. It was my practice to write down my notes as given. Some of these were not deemed important enough to include here. The following list of Director's Notes are only those of major importance. Additional notes will be found in the Journal.

   Establish contact with each man on a personal, individual basis.
   Make pain a part of yourself from beginning to

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16Ibid., III - p. 42.
17Ibid., p. 45.
18Ibid., p. 47.
end of show.
Try to overcome personal mannerisms of swinging arms and moving head around.
Find moments of senility that break the context of the character.
Play the contradictions of the character clearly; black and white.
The memory of Miss Morriss is tender and lyrical.
Try to overcome ponderous, heavy handed movement and speech. Don't dramatize.
Remember the intimacy of the Maquer Theater. Go for cinematic, low key performance.
Break up set speech patterns.
Cut out all physical gestures and the resulting residue will probably carry.
Do not try consciously to play age. Make it a part of the subconscious flow.
Get tension out of neck and shoulders.
The conclusion of the play runs the emotional gamut. Find the beats, the moments, the transitions.

Visualization

Words to an actor are not mere sound, they are designs of visual images...The best way to avoid mechanical acting, the mechanical rattling off of the text for a role...is to communicate to others what you see on the screen of your inner vision...This will not be a reflection of reality but images created by your imagination to suit the needs of the imaginary character you are playing....Each time you repeat the creative process of speaking the lines of your part, review in advance the series of prepared images on the screen of your inner vision.19

The following series of images are those subtextual visions which appeared on my inner screen throughout the play. This is a metaphorical, poetic process. It is difficult to make a direct correlation between these images

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and specific lines. Very often, the image is in opposition to a line. Sometimes the images caused a falling away from the other characters back into the labyrinths of memory. Also, the onstage process is constantly changing. An image of Monday may have metamorphosized into something entirely different by Tuesday. These stream of consciousness images were recollected long after the performance. They represent honest hindsight in a general sense of those images which were most consistently evoked in rehearsal and performance. They move from the beginning to the end of the play in sequential order.

The old gymnasium with its pervading smell of human sweat and dust...young men in their prime, agile, lean, muscular, slow motion forms and faces....the operating room of the hospital, a murmur of voices and faces all in white, nameless and sterile...a knot in the stomach....spinning lights, the flashing scoreboard, a crowd roaring up to its feet....young men ticking in cool precision like the scorekeeper's clock....Tom walking away not looking back....Philadelphia, '52, the jostling of the crowd, firm shoulders, supporting, the comfortable fit of trophy handles in hand, delirious joy...a smiling policeman remembering what none of us will ever forget...The man with a face like a rat...T.R. shining under the sun on Mount Rushmore blossoming out of the granite, a giant walking among men....my boys beaming, riding the palm of his hand, scrambling up his shoulders....James, sitting by his
father's bedside, quiet, compassionate, waiting....Tom at a typewriter composing words that ring with the smell of victory and success...George smiling, gritting teeth, trying, trying harder....giant factories filling the air with unfamiliar noises and clouds of noxious smoke and fumes...my Father's trees smothered and withering....a dead elephant surrounded by a crowd watchful and interested....George smiling and talking....naked bodies out of control, a blur of sexuality...a relief map of America, cracked and gaping open, swallowing up bright young men with business suits covering basketball jerseys....J.F.K. crumpling in a heap that day in Dallas, over and over again, slow motion...Joe McCarthy being torn away from his podium, kicked and beaten....Commies, niggers, Jews swarming over his dead body. Father Coughlin's voice on the radio, filling up the room with truth, the electricity of his words racing through the veins...These boys turned men standing on the steps of City Hall, smiling, victorious, a picture for the album....Darkness, pain, fear....death in a black coat with long fingers stretched out....

Act II

George, puffed up and distorted, surrounded by an arsenal of violence...Phil, blown apart and bleeding, unfleshed, quivering....the boys in a corner, heads together, whispering....Phil and Marion lusting in cartoon relief, rolling around the floor of a cheap motel room destroying every thing in sight, George tied and gagged in the corner...The
hospital, the white murmur...The Jesuits walking long corridors, quiet, peaceful...Miss Morriss on a Saturday afternoon reading a battered book of poetry, naked under the sheets, smiling enigmatically...cool hands stroking the face...Tom's face filling up the room with a leering grin...Phil slinking down the hall, smell of sex, blushing, ashamed...F.B.I. officer sitting in a grey room asking guarded questions, scribbling on a notepad...The hospital, James and George at bedside with papers, pictures...The Depression, soup and bread lines, hunger in the pit of the stomach, the rancid odor of horsemeat...A man at the door, hateful words and ideas, throwing him to the ground, rage, hitting, hurting, breaking bones....Beards, peace signs, burning buildings, an army of black killing and mutilating policemen...Tom, gaunt and white, twitching, crying for a bottle....Phil, smiling, prosperous surrounded by Jews....The game, cheers, a mass of ecstatic faces, the trophy shining, Jews and Arabs wallowing in pools of sweat and defecation, leering...Tom, twisted and broken, writhing in agony...George, in the gutter, covered with vomit.

Act III

Tom, smashing the trophy...James, down on his knees, crying, tugging at his Father's coattails....The retirement dinner, empty words, pain in the gut, gold watch ticking off years in minutes....A nameless boy giving the finger, a race across the room, fist smashing into his face...A maze of streets, nowhere to go....An endless procession of meaningless
words and pictures on the T.V. screen...Marion, fucking a never ending stream of men, black, white, yellow....James, face shining, immaculate, reciting glorious words, a murmur of approval from the audience, the silence of awe....Greek athletes, naked and glorious perfection....The man in the arena, sweat, blood....Martin, angry face, words like knives twisting, an image etched in the mind, hateful, unforgiving....Tom dead....Picnic in the park, graceful women, iron men at play. The bank's facade glittering with gold and marble....Beautiful music filling up the house....my Father in his chair with Shakespeare in his lap, the steady, masculine voice reciting still remembered words...a boy upon his massive back, the ecstatic feel of cold, clear water....erase....a garbage dump....buckets of ice cream, colored kites, silver pails of beer....my Father, a man like a bird, cutting through the air, slow motion....The Depression...false teeth flying across the room, shattering against the wall....Death taking over the room, the house, life....The mines, light eclipsing in narrow, dark tunnels....McCarthy, Kennedy, Patton, dead....The boys covered with sweat, bloody socks, tears of fatigue, clock work, the game, the trophy....Another victory for Fillmore, a hundred times over, a thousand, tradition of victory, the song we all wrote that Championship Season....A flash of pictures for the album....next year.

Make Up

Several factors influenced our choice of make up for the
Coach. Miller's phrase "Old Testament" immediately supplied us with a vision of Moses on the Mountain, a mass of stark white hair tossed by the wind, a determined jaw of granite. The pictures that we had seen of Richard Dysart, the Coach in Joseph Papp's original production definitely reinforced this direction. To turn an essentially youthful face into a sixty-five year old man was largely left in the hands of Gordon, an accomplished makeup artist. We decided to totally whiten the hair, apply latex for wrinkles and texturing and line the face for age and pain. We would also attempt to retain a hint of the Coach's past health and vigor. A detailed explanation of the makeup technique may be found in the Journal. The following picture is the end result in our efforts.

Costume

The major considerations for the Coach's costume were to establish an old-fashioned quality in his dress habits, and to have a costume change to make him more comfortable. The faded blue suit seemed to work just right as a parallel of the man himself. We had much trouble finding a large enough sweatshirt, but when we settled on this it felt right. Tennis shoes were chosen to complete the "athletic" effect.
Preshow Discussion of Character

The character of the "Coach" in That Championship Season as described by the author, Jason Miller is, "A huge man of Old Testament temperament, a superb actor, a man of immense and powerful contradictions."

We sat around in a circle very informally and tossed out all kinds of ideas concerning the play and the characters. David MacIntyre and I had previously discussed the similarity of this play to Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?, at least structurally. Both plays occur in the late evening and early morning hours, are established in social encounters and progressively turn into bitter purges of pent up emotion. Most importantly, both plays revolve around myths which have held lives together and are beginning to disintegrate under pressure. That Championship Season may also be compared structurally to The Boys in the Band.

In this initial discussion many questions were asked for further consideration. What is the nature of the physical environment of the Coach's home and what does it tell us about his character? What is the central myth of the play? What is the central myth of the play? Why is the title a reference to the past? What is the spiritual bond between
the characters? Which characters embody security and which insecurity? Who in the play represents power, money, success? Are these qualities interrelated? Does the play have a moral? Are any of the characters moral men? How does this particular reunion differ from others? Is the resolution satisfactory? How do women contribute to a work essentially about men? How does the Jesuit background of the Coach affect the characters and the play?

Answers to these and other questions were numerous and varied. There was very little commitment toward pinning these issues down so early in the project. We realized, even as we were talking, that this intellectual approach to the play was nothing more than a starting point.

October 4, 1974

We are taking one line and trying three different interpretations of that line. My attempt was first. The things I did were: (1) gruff, heavy, shoulders slouched, head down; (2) erect, straightforward, reasonant voice; and (3) head and shoulders back, soft voice, arms crossed.

We all agreed that the range of this character should and could span all three interpretations. Shoulders tight and heavy seems to work. Voice is going to be a major problem; it must come from within and it probably should be considerably removed from my own natural speaking voice.

During tonight's read through we are going to move around and experiment with physical gestures, postures, walks.
Paul mentioned he wants to adopt an Italian rhythm for the part of Phil. Perhaps I can find something along these lines. I think the Coach is Irish. Last night Gordon said that he wants to consider whether or not the Coach is senile and to what degree.

October 5, 1974

We did not rehearse today. Gordon spent this time working on an action line for the script.

October 7, 1974

Today we are running experimental blocking of Act I. We are approaching blocking fairly casually. Gordon is making general suggestions which we use insofar as possible and then adjust to our own early instincts. Kent and David open the show with a nostalgic tour of the set. The dialogue here is light and friendly. Movements are loose and comfortable and laughter comes easily. Phil and James enter just prior to myself. My very first line is a good indication of the type of energy I must bring on with me, "All right, line it up, shape it up, twenty laps around the room." This line will be delivered at up center just inside the door giving me full focus at that point. Subsequently, I will take in the whole room and all the boys with athletically stereotyped back slapping and joking. One of my very first activities is the pouring of drinks. Perhaps some vigorous activity like push-ups will be used to show the audience and the "boys"
that I can still keep up with the best of them. The memory of that all important championship game is fast in coming. We will attempt an emotional recreation of the final moments of that game. Gordon has suggested that we assume the positions that we would have had on the basketball court at that time. We will work for great intensity here. The reference to the missing Martin will cut short the exuberance of victory memories. Drinking is going to be an important aspect of this show. We are trying to figure out who drinks what and how much when. Tom is the only character Miller specifically draws as alcoholic, but each of us must decide how alcoholic our own character is. I think the Coach probably drinks least of all these men, perhaps only on special occasions such as this reunion.

The section of the play dealing with George's mayoral race will take most of us to relaxed, sitting positions, toning down the activity of the game recreation. It looks like I am going to have a special chair that I spend most of my time in, probably close to the television set. As the Coach senses dissension popping up, he admonishes the "boys" for not sticking together. A definite new beat is evident here. I am trying to get at it by rising energetically from the chair and trying to pull the group together both physically and emotionally. I am wondering about the Coach's hero worship of two such different political figures as John Kennedy and Joe McCarthy. I will probably be drinking very
rapidly here to motivate the joyful drunkenness of dancing with George to "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." This will instantaneously aggravate the "adhesions." I must find a key to this intense physical pain. Gordon feels that the pain must be present throughout most of the show. I am off-stage for the rest of the Act until the final moments when I enter and discover George in the act of wanting to kill Phil. This must come as a real surprise and shock for me. I will be bringing in an old recording of the championship game. All of us are wondering why Miller chose to end Act I as this particular point.

October 8, 1974

Blocking Act II

We are still puzzling over the break between Act I and Act II. I suppose the audience is left to wonder whether Phil is killed during intermission. From an actor's standpoint it is going to be difficult to sustain the intensity of this moment over a ten or fifteen minute break. It is going to be up to the Coach to stave off the crisis. I am thinking of logical ways to calm down George and prevent him from using the gun. One way to play this scene will be for me to be the understanding "father" and George a sobbing, hysterical child. Again, this type of poignancy may be difficult to achieve so early into the Act. In the scene which follows, the Coach must play both anger and compassion with the boys in instant transitions. A long speech on the evils
of booze and women is a side of the Coach unseen until now. To me it has almost a lyrical quality about it, warm memories of a long lost love. A question to be dealt with soon is whether the Coach has any ulterior motives for giving this speech. Seemingly unable to elicit an apology from Phil for cuckolding George and badgered by Tom, the Coach once again appeals to the spirit of teamwork. A measure of how blind to modern politics the Coach is, is the Communist accusation made at George's opponent, Sharmen. This entire section is like a nervous stalking, movement-wise. There must be a hint of desperation in these attempts to weed out jealousies and grievances among the "boys." It is obvious that the Coach has the greatest problem communicating with Tom. So far, the blocking has seemed to enhance the distance between these two men. Also, the Coach's racial slurs are really coming fast and free in the Act. I must decide if any of these references should be played for humor or with real conviction of hatred. When Phil calls Sharmen ostensibly to offer support, I feel that I should drop out of the scene in shock and disbelief. Gordon agrees. This is followed by another ploy to jovially bring Phil back into the fold. I am reading this very affectionately and it feels right. When Tom returns from the bathroom and collapses there is another odd situation. Miller has the Coach authoritatively tell George and Phil not to touch him for fear of broken bones and then gets angry at Tom's inability to hold his liquor.
The lengthy contradictions of his character are incredible.

This has been a good rehearsal. We hope to finish blocking tomorrow and start reviewing blocking.

October 9, 1974

I am sitting watching the rehearsal more right now due to the fact that I am again offstage for a big chunk of time. Three critical conversations on the front porch to get George elected mayor. We are wondering whether to cut the Act break between II and III. Gordon feels that this section is very contrived. I tend to like it as is in the script, but do not really care one way or another.

The act of George puking in the trophy is of course a very traumatic moment for the Coach. I think the symbolism here is quite obvious. If anything, we should underplay the moment.

The Coach returns to the stage after cleaning George up. This begins the final push to "unite" the boys under the championship banner, the ultimate myth for all these men. Tom has known it all along. I must continue in the progressive alienation from Tom while at the same time solidify the real believers, George and James. But there are faltering moments. The Coach admits the mediocrity of his present life following retirement. "And the next thing I know I'm walking the streets at eight o'clock in the morning with nowhere to go...start listening to the radio...I watch more T.V. than any man alive." There continues to be amazing contradictions
in this character on a moment to moment basis. Harsh references to what each man has lost since high school are interspersed with warm memories and encouraging comraderie. A reminder from Tom of the missing Martin freezes the stage in silence. Real pain should be experienced by everyone, especially the Coach, as the group delusion is exposed. Even now though, the truth cannot be admitted. The Coach's final long speeches articulate not only the fall from glory of the ancient basketball team but a change in the quality of life from an imagined past to a hollow present. The final tableau of these heroes around the trophy is a giant stride backward. Life cannot be faced without the sustaining myth. The men will be back next year and thereafter until death or disease ends the cycle.

October 10, 1974

We are finishing up preliminary blocking now. All concerned with this project seem to be fired up with ideas and working hard for solutions. I'm glad that this is the first production of the year. Personally, I feel my energy level to be much higher in this pleasant autumn weather. In fact, the walk to rehearsal each evening through dying leaves is a perfect preparation for this particular play.

I'm trying to fight a tendency that I have always had of locking into a preconceived interpretation early in rehearsal. While a great deal of the coach is obvious and exaggerated, there are many subliminal tangents to be explored.
I am well aware of my physical limitations for playing the coach. My appearance is youthful and my voice, though strong and resonant, tends to fall in upper nasal register. I feel these are totally wrong for the part. Gordon and I have already discussed make up possibilities. The close proximity of the Maquer audience, however, precludes exaggeration of make up artistry. In general, we are working for cinematic subtlety in this production. Vocally, I am experimenting with a lower pitched, gravelly delivery. Also, I am playing with the idea of giving the Coach a touch of emphysema. This would seem to partially solve the problem of age. We have decided the Coach is somewhere in his mid sixties.

Rehearsal today was primarily devoted to a review of blocking and trying to solve some of these internal problems.

October 11, 1974

Tonight we are working through Act I starting and stopping to create specific moments. Gordon feels that all of us are slipping into a rather heavy handed approach to the show, sitting down hard on "highly dramatic" sections of dialogue. This is bound to become tedious for both actors and audience, so we are doing our best to lighten up the show.

My first entrance is beginning to work nicely. I am playing it as powerfully as possible, a real burst of energy to introduce the character. The moment is warm and intimate. I am making close physical contact with each of the boys;
a big bear hug for Phil, squeezing the shoulders of James and a loving pat on the backside for George. This is truly an enjoyable moment for all concerned. There is very little hint of the progressive tension and distrust that will soon take over.

Gordon and I agree that it is important for the Coach to display his unfaltering physical prowess for the "boys" right away. Also, we must show the audience that this is false. Pain and physical deterioration are definitely present. I will do ten quick push-ups facing downstage toward the post. The audience will be able to see clearly straining neck muscles, a rush of blood and gritting teeth. A quick recovery will mask this from the fellow actors.

Subsequently, I make a great issue of how out of shape all the "boys" are. There is no malice intended, but the prolonged tirade about the shape of Jame's teeth causes real humiliation to him. This points up an important character consideration. I am fully capable of causing hurt to others unthinkingly. This is also true of Phil, I think, though his digs are usually more premeditated.

The recognition of Tom's return is a strained moment. Inwardly, I resent his absence from the group for so long. Outwardly, I make a show of gladness at his return. Tom is the cynic, the non-believer. He poses a threat to my sense of well being and I'm somewhat guarded in all interaction with him.
My heroes, as I have previously stated, are an odd gallery of public figures. I harbor great respect for Teddy Roosevelt. Like old Teddy Roosevelt said, "Never settle for less than success." This was a credo used on the basketball court and the intervening years. The irony the audience should find in this statement must never be readily apparent to me.

The praise of Joe McCarthy and his infamous witch hunt is another matter. I see a counter conspiracy of hateful men destroying someone who was trying to protect the American way of life. This is a key to the hidden fears of my character. There is an unwillingness to deal with phenomena which cannot be easily explained and categorized in accordance with my own lifestyle and beliefs. These speeches must have full conviction. The rhetoric of hero worship is self-convincing.

My love of Kennedy is a blind show of loyalty for a Catholic boy who made good and became a martyr to boot. I am totally oblivious to the liberal, Eastern intellectual side of the Kennedy aura.

Yet, in each case, I am asking the boys to remember these great figures of the past and try to become more like them. It is an emotional appeal to honor and glory that is conspicuously absent in our own mediocre lives. James sees himself as a creature of "low excellence." This is, of course, true for all of us.
Today we are filming the final moments of that championship season game. The edited film will be used in conjunction with the record in the final moments of the show.

We are a motley crew when it comes to basketball. Shapiro is a pretty fair ball handler and MacIntyre has some nice shots, but Epler and Keegan look like grade school bench warmers. I'm thankful to be coaching, since the last time I played was sometime in junior high. Vince Swan from KGVO and Gordon are setting up the shots. Greg DeHoogh is filling in as Martin and J. Lee Cook is playing the entire opposing team. Maybe we can mask the charade with tight shots and a good job of editing. I think everyone is having a good time. There is a conspicuous lack of cheering fans and beserk cheerleaders, but they say this will not be a problem.

We've finished filming and a few publicity shots. Now we'll rehearse Act II.

It looks like the only solution to this difficult act break is going to be maintaining concentration during the intermission. We can not allow ourselves to lose the moment we have built to at the end of Act I. We are going to assume positions during the blackout and give ourselves a few extra moments to set the tableau.

To get the loaded rifle away from George, I am appealing to his sense of pride. "Don't lose your poise, boy, be a man and give me the gun." The potential for the gun to
discharge must always be present until I have safely retrieved it. It is only my influence over George that prevents a catastrophe. George's weeping breakdown is that of an enraged child. Accordingly, I must treat him as a child, firmly but gently. I enjoy the moment of cradling him in my arms on the steps. It is real and at the same time terribly pathetic. This is short-lived. With the immediate crisis past, I become very hard nosed in wanting to get all the facts. I forego compassion in favor of outrage at these petty, unmanly activities. George is sent out to the porch to calm down. I confront Phil with the shame and disgrace of his affair with George's wife. Phil is possibly my favorite of the "boys." This is due to the obvious favors he has shown me from his position of power and wealth. It is further founded in the role of surrogate father I have been to Phil in the absence of any meaningful relationship with his own father. We are both aware of this. Phil is the most independent of the boys, and his favors must be carefully garnered. But the basic coach-player relationship has not been seriously altered over the years. I enjoy all my scenes with Paul because we have had an opportunity to become good friends in our stint here at the University, yet we have never had such a find opportunity to work together on stage.

The monologue on booze and women is beginning to work for me. The speech almost takes me out of the play momentarily. It is rather like a dream sequence with romantic visions
from the past of Miss Morriss. My voice and physique are altered, becoming almost lyrical. Gordon agrees that this is a believable approach. We will continue to develop it unless another interpretation suggests itself.

My political tactics become evident as I try to get Phil's financial support for the mayoral campaign. The alleged communist leanings of Sharmen's uncle is an incredibly thin thread on which to base a mud slinging campaign. Phil and Tom know it. George and James will believe anything the Coach says.

My anti-communist, anti-semitic tirades in Act II become rather desperate. I think the "Yea, Israel" speech is absolutely comical. I have a feeling the audience is going to laugh here. In fact, I have trouble getting through the thing myself without breaking character.

It looks like all the pep talks on the front porch are going to be visible to the audience. I'd like to construct an actual speech to deliver out there, so we're not just killing time until we come back in.

October 14, 1974
Columbus Day

No school today. We had a morning rehearsal from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

I didn't get into much introspective work today. I tried to devote the time to feeling out the tempo-rhythms in the show. The commanding image I have found for my character is
a wind-up toy that gradually runs out of steam and then sud-
denly revives itself with a burst of energy. The kinesthetic
sense is very important. The mind realizes that the body is
not keeping up and sends out shots of adrenalin.

October 15, 1974

Lines are due for the entire show tonight. I am having
more trouble memorizing than I have ever had before. The big-
gest stumblin blocks are the final long speeches in Act III.
I realize that these are critical to the final effect of the
show. I can not get a handle on the builds and the phrasing.
Gordon wants to have a private rehearsal with me tomorrow to
orchestrate these speeches.

I make many references to the trophy in Act III. It be-
comes a source of energy, a recharging device. I am begin-
ning to get a real feeling of personal power from putting my
hands on it. The next step is to transfer those impulses to
the other characters. The electricity image works nicely for
me. I can deal in terms of open circuits, closed circuits
and short circuits. The real, deep felt fear here in Act III
is that a power failure of some kind will obliterate every-
thing.

I have that famous poem that Nixon loved so much to de-
liver in this Act about the man in the arena. At first I
wanted to really do a colorful oral interpretation with it.
Gordon thinks this is giving the Coach more credit for
poeticizing than he deserves. He wants me to try it almost
in a monotone, emphasizing those words and phrases that suit the Coach's immediate task of reconciliation. This makes sense. I'll try punching things like "man in the arena," "sweat and blood," "worthy cause," "triumph" and "victory."

October 16, 1974

We had intended to go over all my long speeches today and find the beats. Actually, all we managed to do was discuss the character in fairly general terms. We've finally committed ourselves to playing the Coach for a certain amount of senility. This will manifest itself in several ways. The most obvious one will be lapses of short term memory, forgetting what is being said in mid-sentence. I think this will work if it is not overdone. Another memory pattern will be shifting from present realities which are difficult to cope with into happier memories of the past. This is most readily apparent in the Miss Morriss speech and the recollections of my father in the final speeches.

We are wondering if the Coach might have some really bizarre vocal pattern at times, again, to underscore creeping senility. One such idea came to me spontaneously in rehearsal several days ago. During the Act I discussion of George's elephant fiasco I have the line, "The goddam thing drew more people dead than alive." This line is there ostensibly to stop George and Phil from petty bickering and to drop the subject. I tried doing the line at about three times normal volume, much, much louder than called for. The effect was
looks of astonishment from the "boys" and nervous laughter
to glass over this bizarre behavior. The gut level feeling
was great. We will look for other places in the script where
the Coach might slip into this. Two places where I am going
to try it are: in Act II talking to George after the gun
incident, "You've had too much to drink, can't hold it," and
after Tom falls down the steps, "Don't move him. Broken bones."

We know we must be quite selective in using devices such
as this.

October 17, 1974

Working run-through of Act I

The recreation of the championship game is being set up
almost like a yearly ritual. I have the cue line, "Ten sec­
onds left on that clock....we were down by one point....remem­
ber." This starts a chain reaction of everyone moving into
the positions that spearheaded the final basket. But in the
years since the game, much has been forgotten. There are
short circuits in the memory and the actions. Thus, we get
determination to remember the exact moves, but Tom and George
become vague as to precisely what happened. This momentary
faltering should be mildly disturbing. After the final win­
ing point is scored, the victory exuberance is recreated with
much cheering, hugging and back slapping.

The mention of Martin inspires a kind of reverie. We
speak fondly of him, each man realizing the significance of
his absence. We join hands for a moment of silent prayer. The
outward mood is reverant, but inside I have a feeling that seems to work differently. With my face completely composed, my stomach pulsates in anger that Martin deserted us, that his absence at this yearly reunion always torments me and keeps me from enjoying it to the fullness of my expectations. I am bitter in thinking that he always thought that he was better than the rest of us, a "moral" nuisance. This sets me up for the Act III references to Martin.

Tom cracks a few good jokes about George's mayoral race, then asks where the john is. This disturbs me, because I think his mind is going. He has been to the house many times and shouldn't forget where the john is. I don't want to believe that the youngest man present is a burnt out alcoholic, so I suggest putting him to work on the campaign, rehabilitating him.

The elephant speech approach is going to work. Reactions to it are getting better every time. This Act is beginning to feel solid.

October 18, 1974

We are again working on Act II and trying to get away from the heavy handedness. Pace is part of the problem. George and James, especially, have a tendency to attach more significance to lines than they warrant. Also, attempts at drunkeness are slowing things down. We are just about convinced that the progressive drunkeness of these characters must be approached as a convention. To play it realistically
would require much more time than we have available.

One section that is beginning to move very nicely is Phil's explanation of the affair with Marion. Starting with my line, "What happened from beginning to end?" it goes like wildfire for several pages of script. Concurrently, a nice build is happening as more and more facts are revealed.

Lines are in good shape. The ensemble is starting to come together. There is still a need to distinguish the difference between a selfish character and a selfish actor. There are still times that I feel someone is playing a scene for his own benefit and forgetting the importance of biplay. Real people in real life are more often than not motivated by a desire to say or do things to elicit a desired response from other people. This is the everyday phenomenon of acting that can work so well in making a play like That Championship Season very convincing. Virtually every word and action is somehow asking for something. Sometimes it is a general concept like respect or love. More often it is something like "look at me," or "listen to me." With the Coach, all roads lead to unity and lack of dissension. The subtext which keeps pounding my brain is, "Agree with me, let me lead you, stop quarreling!"

October 19, 1974

Tonight we did a full runthrough. This was our first shot at cementing together the continuity of the show. Thesis director Frank Jacobson was here and had some suggestions for
us. He thinks that the physical posture I am using looks too contrived. I have felt this might be a problem too. Frank mentioned a technique he had seen used before of running a rope around the back of the neck and cinching it down at the needed tension point. I may try this. It reminds me of John Barrymore's technique in the role of Richard III. He bound and twisted one of his legs into a grotesque position with a rope. After several days, he removed the rope and tried to maintain the position. Ultimately he made that deformed leg such a part of himself that he could forget it completely. The effect was that of a crippled man trying valiantly to overcome a handicap.

Frank and Godron agree that I must forget about overdoing age in my body. Whatever I come up with must not be a self-conscious as it is now. The fact remains, that regardless of age and pain, my character is a young, physically fit specimen in mind and spirit.

We are still having trouble getting away from the broad, proscenium acting style. I tell myself to tone down gestures and vocal inflections before each rehearsal, but it's not totally sinking in yet.

Frank says that I must be stronger and more forceful and convincing at the end of the show. I am still fighting lines at that point which is definitely part of the problem. But I am glad to get this note, because I have been thinking of those speeches in a completely different sense. I have
been playing these memories of the past for gut sentimentality. Perhaps this interpretation would work if the speeches were separated from the rest of the play as an oral interpretation. In context, however, this must be seen as a final, calculated ploy to bring the disparate elements of this reunion together. Rather than slipping into personal memories, I must direct these crucial words at specific people very pointedly.

October 20, 1974

Drunken improvisation at Gordon's house

The philosophy behind tonight's rehearsal was to get away from the theater, get away from the script per se, and free up our emotional facilities with the help of alcohol. This is something which we have tried at the Fort Peck Summer Theater with varying degrees of success. There is a fine line somewhere at which the value lapses. I wonder if we are just using an excuse to not rehearse and get plastered. Yet, I do feel that some things came clear for me tonight.

We started out the evening (John, Paul, and I) with a trip to the store for beer. This is true to the script in the opening scene of the play. We found ourselves gradually slipping into character as we were in the store buying the beer. On the way home, I stopped the car on the imaginary summons of a policeman.

From the time we returned to the house until the end of the night, we engaged in isolated, disjointed moments from the
play. Sometimes sections of the dialogue popped into place. Usually, the talk was paraphrased or fabricated though. The words became secondary to physical and emotional contact. We looked at and touched one another far beyond any previous time as cast. Unfortunately it was all very generalized and confusing. I made the mistake I was determined not to make; I drank too much and lost all clarity. A real challenge of Miller's play is that sense of fuzzing over the lines of communications while working with definite lines of script provided by the playwright. I did feel that I got one step closer to convincing the "boys" instead of myself.

Some "moments" from tonight:

1) Quick transition from laughter to sobbing.

2) Porch discussions with Phil, George and James carried out in the kitchen.

3) Actual physical abuse of Tom which is largely sublimated in the script.

4) Playing with nonsense "soap box" speeches. There is a sense in the play that the boys readily agree with things the Coach says without really understanding them.

5) Forming a sacred circle as in the final moments of the play. Tom is excluded until the last possible moment.

The true test will be the transference of these games back into the play itself.

October 21, 1974

We got back to Act I today. This will probably be our last chance to work intensively on this act. We started out
with Director's notes from Saturday. These were mostly technical details, slight adjustments in floor positions, problems with our pick-ups and internal phrasing.

I spent this rehearsal firming up my psychological beats.

1) Exuberance and good cheer at the reunion and its promise of reliving past glory once again.

2) Outward pride in sustaining physical prowess; inward pain from over exertion.

3) Pride in the team, the memory of the game and the trophy.

4) Concern over physical condition of the "boys." Take care of your heart.

5) Light-hearted banter. Everybody relax.

6) Interest in Jame's dental plates.

7) Pride in condition of my own teeth.

8) Guarded welcome of Tom.

9) Nostalgic recreation of the game.

10) Ecstasy of remembered victory.

11) Outward awe at remembrance of Martin; inward resentment of Martin.

12) Transference of basketball glory to present political situation.

13) Confidence in Phil's public integrity.

14) Self-satisfaction with Phil's connection with local police.

15) Flat dismissal of Sharman's campaign tactics.

16) Affirmation of Teddy Roosevelt's cliches for success.

17) Pride in the "Boys'" "professions."

18) Joking reprimand of Phil for Little League baseball losses.

19) Agreement that Jame's son is bright.

20) Request another drink from George.

21) Concern that Jame's son is masturbating.

22) Contention that self sacrifice and discipline are being lost.

23) Relaxing, letting the "boys" fight it out.

24) Concern for Tom's failing memory.

25) Determination to speak to Tom, to get him on the right track.

26) Admonition of George for over confidence.

27) Facile agreement with Jame's praise of George's administration.

28) Disgust for Sharmen's presumed policies.

29) Snappish outburst supporting George's elephant.

30) Relaxing, letting the boys fight it out.

31) Interest at rape discussion.

32) Confusion over sexual terminology of James.

33) Major transition: getting the "boys" back to the subject, teamwork.

34) Anger at Kennedy's death.

35) Anger at public treatment of Joe McCarthy.

36) Disgust with Jewish race.

37) Affirmation of team spirit.

38) Joy at George's projected victory.

39) Enthusiastic singing and dancing with George.

40) Extreme pain at stirring up injury.
41) Outward reassurance, nothing to be concerned about.

42) Half desperate request for aid; desire to be alone and collect self.

43) Exit smiling, masking pain.

44) Enter in good spirits, fully recovered.

45) Alarm at George pointing gun at Phil.

46) Appeal for information. "What's happened, boys?"

October 22, 1974

Work through of Act II

Gordon and I worked out the manipulations of the Coach moment to moment. I will incorporate this with a continuation of psychological transitions.

1) Warning George of potential danger with gun.

2) Careful attempt to disarm George; speaking gently, soothingly.

3) Assurance to George that everything will be worked out.

4) Disgust at George's drunkeness.

5) Demand information from George.

6) Resentment that something private might be going on.

7) Interest in details of situation.

8) Anger and disgust with Phil.

9) Humiliation of Phil.

10) Alarm that George is getting too loud on the porch.

11) Tell George to stay out of discussion.
12) Request more specific information from Phil.
13) Progressive disgust with Phil and George.
14) Appeal to togetherness.
15) Remembrance of hospital; boys pulled me through.
16) Support George's decision about retarded child.
17) Disgust with George for sexual preoccupation.
18) Manipulation of booze/women theme to teamwork, unity.
19) Recollection of Jesuits.
20) Sentimental remembrance of Miss Morriss.
21) Sexual remembrance of Miss Morriss.
22) Affirmation of priest like devotion to basketball, the "boys;" manipulate.
23) Restatement of Roosevelt cliches.
24) Emotional appeal for pride, loyalty, teamwork.
25) Curt dismissal of Tom's flippancy.
26) Extreme disappointment with Tom.
27) Taking offensive with Phil.
28) Challenge Phil with "win" philosophy.
29) Uphold "pain principle" - manipulate.
30) Affectionate appeal to Phil - pleasant memories of past.
31) Flat statement of communist slur.
32) Indignation at being thought a liar.
33) Recount first experience with Sharmen's Communist association - manipulate.
34) No sympathy for Sharmen - on the other side now.
35) Sharp rebuke of Tom's disloyalty.
36) Affectionate reconciliation with Tom.
37) Offer Phil drink - try different tactics.
38) Recount early experience with communism - manipulate.
39) Dissmiss Phil's statement that "times have changed."
40) Angered slur of students, niggers.
41) Support Jame's appeal to Phil.
42) State "punish the other guy" philosophy.
43) Defend anti-Jewish policy.
44) Disappointment at Tom's condition.
45) Direct appeal to Phil for financial support.
46) Unbelieving hurt during Phil's phone call to Sharmen.
47) Elation at Phil's brushoff by Sharmen.
48) Excitement that Phil is swinging back to the team.
49) Dismissal of Phil's continued reluctance.
50) Appeal to championship game memory - manipulate.
51) Dismissal of "progress."
52) Bitter resentment of Jews in general.
53) Determined castigation of Jews, Arabs, etc. - "the only good ones were athletes."
54) Distrust of Jewish race.
55) Alarm at Tom's fall.
56) Heated command to "boys."
57) Disgust at general drunkenness, ineptitude of "boys."
58) Humiliation of "boys."

59) Go to porch with Phil for private talk.

60) Strategy conversations on the porch:

   a) Get Phil back to the fold
   b) Get George to accept Phil's support
   c) Dismiss James from campaign at Phil's request

61) Assuage James in front of the others; let him gently.

62) Hurt at Phil, James fighting.

63) Shock at George's vomiting in trophy.

64) Help George out of the room.

October 23, 1974

Frank attended tonight's runthrough. He thinks I am trying too hard to play the age. I have been bothered by my failure to get rid of the mechanical quality in my movements. There is a certain stiffness that is me and not necessarily the Coach. The other major problem is the end of the show. It is still not powerful enough for the other characters to capitulate as they must.

I guess I have been thinking and worrying over these things too much. Now is the time to start playing the show from start to finish as if for the first time. I will be devoting all my concentration to a natural, flowing interpretation and trying to overcome a stagnancy that has crept in.

Act II seems to be in the best shape at this point. Most of my personal problems have to do with getting into and out
We had a small audience in attendance tonight. This was good; we all have been feeling the need to try this out on somebody. The audience reaction was very positive. Laughter came in places that we did not really expect it. I had no idea that my racial slurs would be received humorously. I wonder if I'm doing something wrong with my delivery on the "Yea, Israel" speech. When I first read it I got chills up and down my spine from its all enveloping hatred. Of course it is very different to handle a line like "Arabs wash their hair in camel piss." I've never known anyone quite so disgustingly bigoted.

I felt good about the way the show went. Lines and cues were more solid than ever before. There was a nice relaxed, light atmosphere out there tonight. I haven't said too much about the ensemble, but it has certainly been enjoyable working with such a small cast. Everyone is giving a lot, as a result sharing scenes has not been much of a problem at all. Paul seems to have gone the farthest in demanding eye contact for bi-play. I always feel that scenes with him have a real electricity. David is constantly thinking on his feet, but sometimes has a tendency to go into himself so far that he has gotten rid of many personal mannerisms that were initially bothersome. He is still attaching what I think may be too
much significance to relatively unimportant lines. Kent has progressed from an early habit of playing everything on the same level. The bitter sarcasm wasn't working for him because there was too much of it all the time. He is coming up with physical and vocal variety, especially in the end of Act II with Phil.

Since the end of the show is still a stumbling block, Gordon and I are going to get together tomorrow and take it apart again. We really need to orchestrate those final, long speeches.

October 25, 1974

Private session with Gordon

From Tom's mention of Martin to the end of the show is my final attempt at reconciliation.

"That's not what Martin said...."

The gut feeling here is "How dare you mention that name!" It must be a chilling moment. There has always been a tacet agreement that there are skeletons in the closet that should never be exposed. Tom breaks this trust. The immediate effect on me is shock and disbelief. This proceeds to angry denials.

"You have to hate to win...."

This is an ugly admission. I am going to blurt it out, and subsequently try to justify it. The stage becomes a battleground with Tom on one side and myself on the other. The
other "boys" hanging somewhere between.

"You don't believe me boys?"

This is an emotional appeal. I know they will not let me down because if they do they will also be shattering the delusion that makes their own lives worth living.

For me, the most emotionally charged moment of the play is slapping Tom and ordering him out of the house. I am trying to play the build with both anger and hurt. Tears come easily at this point and we've decided I should not fight them back. Desertion is unthinkable, but the majority must be protected.

Tom leaves. An awkward silence ensues. I see a mythical past stretching out in one direction, a mythical future in the other. Now is the moment. I will outline the past glory of my father's world, show how much has vanished. I will paint a picture on the collective mind of this shabby gathering. I will reiterate the teachings of hate that have weakened the moral caliber of the country. Most importantly, I will become a father to these fatherless children. I will complete the transfer from boyhood to manhood, from the game of yesterday to the game of life. We will sing the song. Tom will be welcomed back as though nothing happened. We will place our hands on the trophy. We will cry a little. We will survive.

Technically, there is a gradually, accelerating build from the picnics of my father to the closing of the circle.
What I have been playing in general, I will now deliberately establish with every individual in the room. A gentle hand on the shoulder to George, "See the buckets of beer, and slabs of beef, George," "See the kites and the horseshoe games, James," "See the man glistening like a bird in the sunk Phil," "Remember my father's advice, Phil, Jews will ruin the country. Stay away from Sharmen. Support George."

Fire...Everyone is listening now. Don't lose your character. Stick together. Fight back. Now lead into the record. A deliberate, fever pitched reminder of the physical torture and joy of a winning team. "I made you winners." Put on the record. Lose yourselves in the memory. Believe in that game; believe in yourselves. Sustain the myth.

Reconciliation. Pictures for the album. The promise preserved for another year.

October 26, 1974

Yesterday's session was extremely valuable to me. Except for problems with the film, Act III came together, finally. The film disturbs me. Maybe it is the poor quality of the cinematography. At any rate, I don't think anything so alien to the rest of the show should be allowed to disrupt that particular moment. The film does not look like an old-fashioned sports reel. The projector is not operating correctly. It scares me a little.

The end of the show works. I'm relieved. I feel the
focus coming to me, and I feel that I am using it effectively. The emotionalism is very real viscerally and the song sounds just the right echo to the past. When Tom re-enters and all forgive and forget, the relief is audible.

I think we have a show on our hands here.

October 27, 1974

I'd like to talk about my make-up a little. I feel quite fortunate having Gordon around. He's a good make-up artist. I've never had such a painstaking make-up job for any show.

Liquid latex is selectively applied from hairline to collarline. My skin is stretched, the latex is applied, then dried with a hairdryer. When the skin is released, wrinkles fall into place. This technique is used for the forehead, the eyelid, under the eye, both cheeks, and the entire neck. A coat of mehron liquified with cod liver oil is next applied. The oil allows the makeup to uniformly cover the latex without caking or peeling off. Monochromatic color stippling gives the final touch for skin aging. Hands are stipled also. Powder and hair spray are used to set the make-up. This entire process runs to two hours or more.

I do not know what the make-up looks like in the Masquer Theater, but it feels very good. I can feel myself getting into character during the application. The latex tightens my skin and makes me feel age better than any mental or physical exercise I have tried so far.
A few spots started to peel towards the end of the show, but Gordon says that we can correct this.

October 28, 1974

Dress rehearsal. The show is together now. We are ready. Most of Gordon's notes had to do with minor timing problems. I continue to be pleased with the progress of the end of the show. It gets better all the time.

October 29, 1974

If the old maxim about a lousy dress rehearsal is true, we should have a hell of a show tomorrow. Most of our problems tonight were technical. An invited audience sat around getting restless while we waited for Paul's costume. The long delay in starting the show made the actors, myself included, rather nervous. It took us most of the first Act to get our bearings and find the rhythm of the show. The long awaited film has turned out to be unworkable. We collectively agreed that the hassles outweigh the value of the film. Getting the thing to run properly drops me out of the play at a critical moment. Besides that, the film is just not believable. It doesn't prompt nostalgic memories from us. It is unfortunately, too comical for the needed effect. We reblocked the end of the show sans film with no problems.

Notes on Performance

I did not keep this journal during the performance nights for several reasons. We had laid the groundwork for the show.
Preparation included the building of an ensemble, various improvisations, technical rehearsals on a moment to moment basis and finally, the introspective work of each individual actor. Hopefully, all this work would contribute to a pool of resources from which the actor could draw in the organic process of weaving a performance together. I cannot clearly articulate which pieces I put together on which performance nights. I do not think actors necessarily know a good night from a bad night. At any rate, it is a highly subjective business, given the intense personal involvement over an extended period of time. Not only on this show, but on many others I can recall backstage chatter ran from self chastisement to jubilant back slapping on different occasions. It was quite difficult to find two actors who agreed on the strong scenes and the weak scenes. A lousy night for one actor was the "best performance so far" for another. It seems to me that to steep oneself in the performance precludes note taking. This must be left to the Director, the critics and the audience.

I would like to say a few words about audiences; I like audiences. It is a rewarding feeling to know that several hundred people have assembled to be entertained and/or enlightened by your words and actions. No theatrical experience is really complete until this coming together has occurred. You harbor a hope that your soul searching through a character prompts some soul searching in your audience. When you laugh from the heart and hear laughter mingling with yours
a tangible joy fills you up.

In the Maquer Theater it is impossible to avoid catching a glimpse of your audience in your peripheral vision now and then. Sometimes this is unsettling. One night I sat facing an elderly woman in the audience reeling off a string of profanities while sucking on a beer bottle. I imagined that she was saying, "Don't talk to me like that young man."

Another night my line, "You kept it in your pants when you played for me," seemed to be the immediate stimulus for a young man in a letterman jacket and his female companion to leave the theater.

I would have to say that the variety of performance from night to night was mostly influenced by the difference in audience. Opening night in the Drama Department means an audience of friends and experts; people who seem to have both a greater appreciation and a greater critical facility than others. Actor energy was high opening night and the desire to please was a foregone conclusion. I cannot say, however, that this was our best show. Neither can I say that it was not. Our Sunday night audience was quietly appreciative, I felt, and subtleties in the show seemed to work better. I was not running a meter on successive audiences. Yet, after each show, our talk was more about the audience and their reactions than our own performances.
CHAPTER V

Director/Actor Relationship

Gordon Hayes was very much a "laissez faire" director. The notes that he gave me during rehearsal, and which I included earlier in the thesis, were the only major notes he gave me during the entire project. The working environment was geared towards letting the actor discover the major points of characterization for himself. Thesis director Frank Jacobson, who was present at several important rehearsals, gave many additional suggestions. Gordon's concept of the production was quite clearly articulated at the beginning of the project. Subsequently, he seemed unable to take too many fresh ideas and approaches. Lacking strong and specific direction, I was afforded the challenge and opportunity of much subjective, introspective work. Gordon's primary function in later rehearsals became that of a "technician." He was constantly working minor changes in blocking and vocal delivery, and stayed away from the larger questions of character. He remained, throughout the production, genial and encouraging. It was a great pleasure to rehearse in the warm environment which he helped to create.

Personal Evaluation

The most important carryover from this project will be what it did to further my progress as an actor. What did I learn by working on That Championship Season? What would I
do differently given the chance? Where do I stand at this stage of my training in terms of strengths and weaknesses?

The That Championship Season experience reinforced a feeling I have always had that a small show in an intimate theater is perhaps the most rewarding kind of experience that acting offers. The closeness to fellow actors and audience is truly exciting. I began to understand why small truths lead to great truths. The smallest word or gesture is the beginning of a flowering process. There is no need for physical and emotional histrionics. Each moment as it leads to the next, gradually and logically, creates a foundation of honesty. No detail is too small to be overlooked. We must observe and examine everything. I think I have always believed this intellectually. That Championship Season allowed me to really feel it working for the first time in my life.

In hindsight, I would do some things differently. First, I would demand greater feedback from fellow actors and director. We were all terribly concerned about ourselves, which is, I think, a legitimate concern. But at some point this highly personal awareness must transcend into an ensemble awareness. This was achieved in performance, but I think might have been more valuable had it occurred earlier.

Secondly, I would ask for more personal input in selecting makeup and costume. I allowed Gordon Hayes to design my makeup because he was a generally acknowledge craftsman in the field. But I was denied those valuable moments before
performing of consciously altering my physical appearance for the role. The psychological preparation of my character would have been greatly enhanced if I were allowed to do this for myself. The costume selection was an opened and closed affair. We took the easy way and settled on the first idea that was proposed. Again, I was denied the opportunity of trying to fit my character into clothes of his own choosing.

Thirdly, I would spend much more time working through potential beats and intentions. These things were set too early in rehearsal with too little experimentation and trial and error. I would not set anything until the final week of rehearsal.

At this stage of my "career" I continue to be plagued with some problems I have had for years. Yet, I have seen real definite progress in other areas. The stiffness in my neck and shoulders which I have always attributed to nervous tension remains to some degree to this day. I am seriously considering some form of physical therapy to try to correct the problem. The somewhat flat, nasal vocal quality which I acquired while working in radio and television lingers on, but extensive breathing and singing exercises are helping a great deal.

In That Championship Season I had several important "breakthroughs." I felt genuine empathy in my various interactions with the boys. I did not have to pretend to tears and joy. They were solidly there at the proper moment, the
outgrowth of the working process that had created them. It was a wonderful feeling to be there, sharing those moments with other actors.

I also experienced for the first time the tangible results of the "visualization" process outlined earlier in this paper. There is much talk about imagery in the theater. To find images that really work on the heart, the mind and the stomach, the actor's energy centers, is an ongoing and fascinating process. I was lucky in finding a great many that worked beautifully for me.
