

Shooting Stars score

review by Ann Lynagh

Remember the Edmonton Grads, the team that was women's basketball for twenty five years? Their success story is now recorded in *Shooting Stars*, a historical docu-drama written by Allan Stein and Mairi MacLean, and directed by Stein. This great local story was produced here in Edmonton by Stein/MacLean Productions in cooperation with the National Film Board, and it showcases local talent.

For those unfamiliar with basketball history, the Edmonton Commercial Graduates were an incredibly successful women's sports club. They were the North American Champions from 1923 to 1940, and the Alberta Champions for twenty three consecutive years. They won 502 games out of a total 522. Dr. James Naismith, the Canadian who invented basketball, called them "the finest basketball team that ever stepped out on a floor." Although the Grads played only exhibition games at four Olympic Games (women's basketball was not made an official event until 1976), they were amazingly successful and popular abroad as well as at home. The Grads went a long way in dispelling myths about women's physical frailties.

Shooting Stars presents the Grads' story by combining old newspaper clippings, photographs, movies footage with reflective commentary by the original Grads, with a recreation of an exciting basketball game against their arch enemies, the Tulsa Stenos of Oklahoma. The film does justice to this inspiring story.

Late last summer while playing with the Summer Basketball League, Shelaine Kozakavich and several others were approached to audition for *Shooting Stars*. Several weeks later, Kozakavich, a recent U of A graduate and a five year veteran of the Pandas, found herself playing a lead role in the movie. She plays the shy, reserved Margaret McBurney, who once sunk sixty-one consecutive foul shots during a halftime break.

For her role, Kozakavich had to learn how basketball was played over fifty years ago! The rules behind basketball have not changed much, but the skills and strategy have evolved immensely. Hours were spent pouring over old film footage, including one reel found in the Library of Congress that revealed several plays, such as the funny sequence of backhand passes seen in the film. More hours were spent scrimmaging with some of the Grads watching and offering their criticisms.

"The original Edmonton Grads showed me how they held the ball back then. Then, there I was all alone on the basketball court, with the cameras, shooting foul shots with both hands parallel on the ball. It was incredible... the ball kept going through the hoop... I began wondering if I should shoot this way more often." These were Shelaine Kozakavich's own thoughts about the opening moments in *Shooting Stars*.

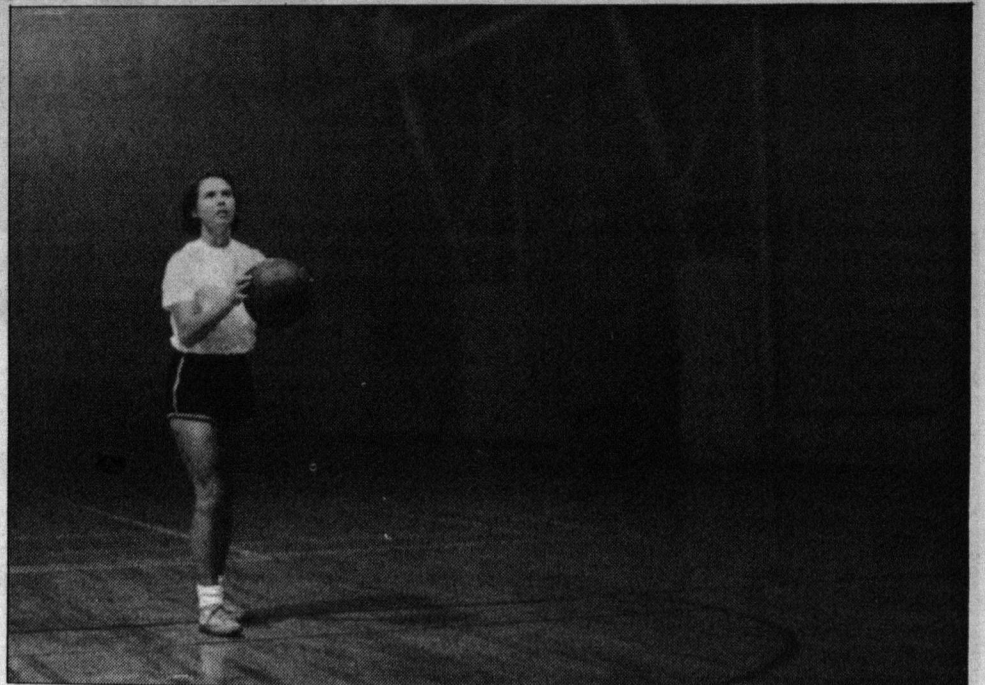
"Possibly the biggest change, though," commented Kozakavich, "is that two-hand shots and passes have been almost completely replaced by a more consistent and bio-mechanically correct one-hand throw." Kozakavich remarked that in the film you

would see little or no dribbling, little inside driving to the hoop, and none of the great rebounding plays that modern basketball is renowned for. The Grads possessed great passing and shooting skills, and they played a "fast pass — fast break" game.

Never having been involved with film before, Kozakavich was excited and impressed with what she saw. "The crowd scene at the basketball game (held in the transformed Prince of Wales Armoury) was great... not enough people actually came, so Allan had to keep moving them all over the stands." To director Stein's credit, the crowd scene complete with a breathless radio announcer is wonderful, and all the extras that showed up, some with authentic Grad paraphenilia, must be commended.

About halfway through the film, I began to wonder if there was going to be some good Hollywood dirt, as surely these women on screen being interviewed and playing basketball could not have been that squeaky-clean. Rest assured, they were! As one Grad said: "Percy Page, our coach, had us playing like men on the court and ladies off it."

The film is a lovely tribute to a great group of athletes, Edmonton's own women's basketball team. The movie is unabashedly



Shelaine Kozakavich as Margaret McBurney lines up for the shot

Photo E. Ellis

local, Canadian — and good. In the same vein as *The Grey Fox* and *Loyalties*, it is a marvelous look at ourselves through our own eyes. In about an hour, *Shooting Stars* succeeds in bringing the life and times of this amazing team together on screen. Treat

yourself to a bit of the past and a great basketball game!

Shooting Stars premieres Thursday, September 10 at 8:00 p.m. in the Jubilee Auditorium. Admission is free. It will also be aired on TV September 16 on CBC.

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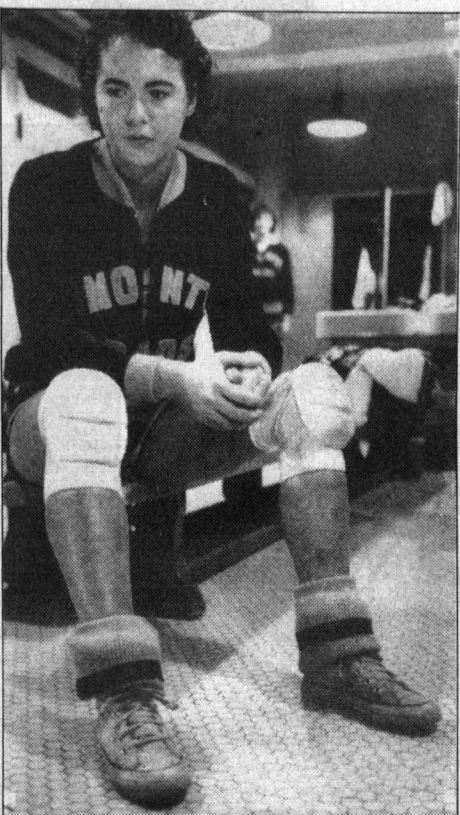


Photo E. Ellis