



Redford: movies for money and fun

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Robert Redford may be a star on the ascendant. He has that elusive, magical "Star quality." He said, "I've been about to be a star for 10 years." Why hasn't he made it? He doesn't like to work, and so he doesn't. But when you're an actor, you have to keep your face known in order to stay on top. And that Redford won't do.

Right now he's riding high after playing the Sundance Kid. His new film, *Downhill Racer*, opened last Friday. You might remember him as the lead in *Barefoot in the Park*, or the convict on the dodge in *The Chase*. To boot, he has made two more films to be released next spring.

We interviewed him on the occasion of the release of *Downhill Racer*, while the film's producer, Richard Gregson sat quietly listening, as did Mrs. Gregson, Natalie Wood. The interview is not exactly cohesive: we were distracted.

EXCALIBUR: I understand that you have been trying to make *Downhill Racer* for a long time now.

REDFORD: Two years.

EXCALIBUR: Why? The psychology of the champion has been tackled well before.

REDFORD: Where?

EXCALIBUR: *Champion* (a 1950 film starring Kirk Douglas as a boxer who abandons his family on his way to the top).

REDFORD: It's close to being the best, but it suffered from being done in Hollywood.

EXCALIBUR: I'll grant you that you had fantastic racing footage, that ought to be put before an audience, and that people don't go to documentaries. I can see that. But what was your motivation?

REDFORD: As a character?

EXCALIBUR: No, to make the movie.

REDFORD: In America, I don't know Canada, there is a syndrome around athletics, the success syndrome, the need to win, the pressure exerted to win. I grew up in it. I was an athlete. I experienced it. I see it happening — it's part of our society.

This whole thing about the need for success, the need to win, is so intense that there really is no such thing as second place. No one remembers who places second. And that's an American phenomenon. It really doesn't exist in Europe to the extent that it does in the U.S. I don't know about Canada.

It produces a certain kind of guy. It was a way out for a lot of guys who were poor, the poverty stricken. A person learned that if he had some ability to run faster than the next guy, threw farther, jump higher, then he could come up out of the miasma and so there was a whole kind of drive that stemmed from being deprived.

Then there was the thing about your position in life being enhanced. If you were an athlete, you were exploitable. There are all the people who exploited. They begin going younger and younger, trying to develop winners. They're getting down to eight and seven years old. That's pretty grim. Stop and think what happens inside to a seven year old kid. They begin to train to win from that age. What happens when that kid stops winning? He's discarded like old rubbish.

So that started to interest me. The cruelty of sport in America. Well, most everywhere but in America especially because the cruelty stems from the pressure to win. If he doesn't win he gets shuffled right out and the pressure becomes so intense that it has psychological effects on the athlete. The unsophisticated guy that comes from a small town in Colorado that enters this situation is really going to get his head chopped off. That was the way I looked at it.

It was a question of just taking somebody and preferably somebody who was inexperienced, unsophisticated who just had one thing going for him, his speed on skis, and to try to show what it was like from two points of view, his own, and someone else's, and that you first of all say that the guy is a son of a bitch because he's behaving this way and then you begin to learn about him — why he might behave the way he does — until you begin (you might still think he is a son of a bitch), but you understand. And while you're beginning to understand, you see the pressure that is exerted on him to make him behave this way. You come out of Colorado Springs, and you have an ego about your ability, which he had, because he had ability, then you get defensive when you get put into a situation in which you might look bad. That happens to him constantly. He comes to Europe. He has never been in an international situation. He is hit with a foreign language. He is called in late for the team, and he is not embraced with a hell of a lot of warmth, so he's defensive about it.

He thinks he's good. Why shouldn't he be treated well? And then he wins. And he starts to have an arrogance about that winning. But it's so amateurish, and so naive. And people use it, kick him around pretty good. He doesn't know he is being used or kicked around. That's the kind of dual thing that goes along.

And the other thing is that athletes, according to Hollywood, are always interpreted with a woman behind the man, which always depressed me as a kid because I never saw it that way. Supposedly there was some woman that made you home runs. There was some woman that made you run faster. There was the wife back home. *Champion* was a good film. But it had the Hollywood look to it. For the time it was great, the closest ever to reality. He had a flashier character (than Redford's Chapplett). He was a heel, but he was flashier.

A lot of athletes in America are really not the most exciting guys in the world. It's a one dimensional life for them. They go into the locker room, they train. They eat special diet things. They travel with their guys. They go from this town to that.

I lived with the skiers on the U.S. and the Canadian teams. They don't get to talk to anybody. They go up to one village and they ski, ski, ski during the day. They come back, they eat, they have a sauna, they exercise, they have a sauna, they have dinner, and they're into bed at nine o'clock.

Next morning, they're up early, out on the slopes, ski, ski, ski. Then the day of the event, win, win, win — lose — and they're

on to the next town. Where do they learn French? Where do they learn German? Where do they learn anything?

EXCALIBUR: You pretty much have to take it as a tragedy of situation.

REDFORD: I think so. People will feel different things when they see it. Some people feel nothing. Some people will feel he was just a son of a bitch. He came in as one and he ended up as one. Other people see certain things. It's hard to say. Audiences make up their own minds. But that's my feeling.

EXCALIBUR: You've made 10 films. Which did you like best?

REDFORD: That many? Butch Cassidy. It was the most fun. And I had the most fun with the character, and there was a lot of identification. I don't know why. There just was. I felt at home.

EXCALIBUR: It showed. Were any of the old tintype photos used in the credit and montage sequences real?

REDFORD: Oh yes.

EXCALIBUR: You walk differently in each film.

REDFORD: That's the character. Sooner or later, I've got to be getting into the area of acting.

EXCALIBUR: Well I mentioned it because of the various ways of disguising walks, an actor seldom kicks his knees out, as you did in *Downhill Racer*, which very effectively made you look younger. Is it premeditated, carefully thought out, or does it just happen when you get into the part?

REDFORD: I really don't like to talk about acting. Honest, I'm sorry, I just don't. If it happened for you it's tremendous. What happens to me happens from ... It's taking a basic attitude toward a guy, and what comes out of that just happens. I'm just glad you picked up all that.

EXCALIBUR: Do you prefer comedy or drama?

REDFORD: There is no difference. If the situation is funny, it's funny. If it's sad, it's sad. You're just there. *Barefoot in the Park* is obviously funnier. So is *Butch Cassidy*. There isn't too much that's funny about *Downhill*. I think the mistake is making the separation and saying we're now playing comedy. We will adopt a different attitude from when we are playing comedy. We will adopt a different attitude from when we are playing serious things. Some of the most tragic things in the world are tragic because of the humour involved, and vice versa.

EXCALIBUR: What do you go after in your acting? Is it basically ...

REDFORD: *The Money*.

EXCALIBUR: O.K. well, second then. Is it basically for fun? Do you just get a kick out of playing roles?

REDFORD: You hope that out of it will come some communication, that somebody will pick up the things, and the joy comes out of creating a role, doing things that are fresh and spontaneous. Because it's fun, you bet it's fun. When you're creating a role you're having fun. I enjoyed jumping on the train, running from train to train. I did that as a kid. Now I'm getting paid for it. That's terrific. But you hope that out of that comes other

added benefits. That you bring yourself to a role that communicates itself to somebody, adds an extra meaning to things.

EXCALIBUR: Neither. *Chaplett* (*Downhill Racer*), and to a certain extent, not the Sundance Kid either are terribly likeable personalities. How do you feel about that?

REDFORD: Well, if it gets too bad, I guess I won't be on the screen very long. But that has never bothered me. I don't think everyone is necessarily thoroughly likeable. I've played likeable guys. I would assume the guy in *Barefoot in the Park* was fairly likeable. There have been other roles. I'm a little bit more interested in flawed people, as an actor. They interest me more. It's that element in someone that makes him interesting to play, and I think, a little bit more interesting to watch.

EXCALIBUR: Both Richard Gregson and Michael Ritchie are newcomers to the movies. How did they get involved?

REDFORD: Richard Gregson was my agent, and he and I formed a partnership to bulldoze this through because there was a lot of opposition to the film. No one believed in it really.

Ritchie, because we never really had a go-ahead on the project. We spent a whole year on it trying to work it into a position where they would say yes, you have a go-ahead. They didn't give us the go-ahead until September of '68 and we had to start shooting in January of '69. They gave us a fat four months to get race officials together, releases, and all kinds of stuff. Not many directors wanted to get involved.

There were a lot of requirements that were necessary for a director. He had to be young to physically endure what we had to go through. We had seven weeks without one day off. We were on top of a mountain most of the time, in the snow for six hours, and there was no place to go, no warm hut. Very often it was snowing. You had to move camera equipment up and down hills and shoot fast and shoot natural light and have a lot of energy and have a lot of stamina and still have a sense of what the picture was about. He had those things.

EXCALIBUR: Do you want to go on beyond acting at all — directing or anything else?

REDFORD: Who knows? I don't know.

EXCALIBUR: You said Paul Newman was in on *Butch Cassidy* a year ahead of you. The Sundance Kid was the cool one of the two, and *Butch Cassidy* the buffoon. Most people would have expected that Newman would play the cool one. Did he play it like that because he was getting tired of playing cool?

REDFORD: I think so. It was a challenge for Paul, and it is to his credit. A lot of actors in his position would never risk it.

EXCALIBUR: I THINK Brando has been knocked around a lot for trying things.

REDFORD: I can only say that he's got terrific courage as an actor. What is he going to do? What was he going to do with *Mutiny on the Bounty*, play *Clark Gable*? It's really stupid, I think the people that knock Brando or anybody ... it's not fair.