

'Chariots' a big winner . . .

'Chariots of Fire'
Ian Charleson, Ben Cross
Cinema World

"Chariots of Fire" is *not* a "sports" movie. Although it tells the story of two Olympic runners, it deals with much more. Much, much more.

Ian Charleson is Eric Liddell, a Scottish missionary who devotes himself whole-heartedly to his beliefs. "God made me to be a missionary," he says, "but he also made me fast." So fast, in fact, that he becomes a member of the 1924 British Olympic team.

By doing the best he can on the track, Liddell feels, he gives glory to God. He gives every race his all, resulting in a dedication that makes him get up and continue a race after he falls, resulting in collapse after he wins. In spite of his worldly glories, he is more concerned with the race for the crown of glory in heaven, which he preaches about as he goes from meet to meet.

Ben Cross is Harold Abrahams, a Jew

who feels he has to excel on the track to prove his competence to class-conscious British society. His sense of personal worth depends on winning, and he becomes despondent and unconsolable after losses.

For Abrahams, competition is all-important, and victory becomes his god. He hires a professional coach (well-portrayed by Ian Holm) to help him achieve his goals, and he finds himself Liddell's competitor, and then his teammate.

"Chariots of Fire" is an extraordinary film, quite possibly the best of the year. Director Hugh Hudson, producer David Puttnam and screenwriter Colin Welland have managed to tell a story of such humanity and feeling that the audience is swept into the story without knowing it.

Rather than showing Liddell as a straight-laced saint, he is shown to be totally human, with human frailties, facing struggles of faith. Instead of

showing Abrahams as an unlikeable, arrogant S.O.B., he is portrayed as a man who is sure of himself, but needs the acknowledgement of the world to justify his life. He doesn't know what it means to be satisfied. He takes an overly great deal of pride in his victories, but he is still a child, desperately needing attention.

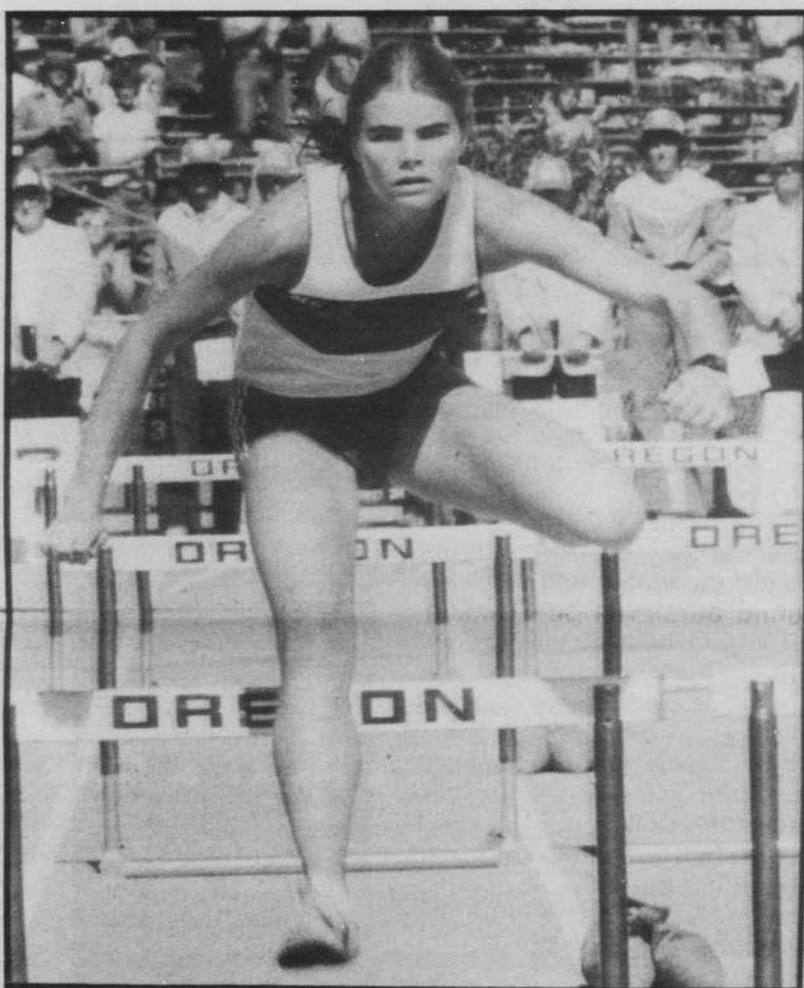
As a result, the audience finds itself unconsciously relating to the characters, but the movie does not become a parade or a pep rally. We are made to root for the characters, but not consciously.

At no point does this become more apparent than in the final scene, in which Liddell races for victory against a field of the best runners in the world. The audience runs each step of the race with him, feels the knives of pain when the runner can't get enough air, and feels the "joy of God" rushing through the athlete's body as he nears the tape.



Ian Charleson is magnificent as a Scottish missionary who becomes an Olympic runner in "Chariots of Fire."

This thrill is made more intense by cinematographer David Watkin and Hudson's impeccable choice of camera shots and effects. Slow motion is used to show the runners' grace,
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...while 'Personal Best' trips over a few hurdles

'Personal Best'
Mariel Hemingway
Patrice Donnelly

"Personal Best" isn't a *totally* bad movie, but enough things go wrong that even the fact that some of it was filmed in Eugene can't save it.

Robert Towne wrote, directed and produced the film, a story of two women athletes who "become friends, lovers, and eventually competitors."

Mariel ("Manhattan") Hemingway plays Chris Cahill, the underdog hero of the film. Unfortunately, the film rests heavily on her performance, and she underplays her role so badly that her track shoe sometimes shows more emotion.

To counteract this, Towne did three things. One of them worked.

He cast Patrice Donnelly, a newcomer to the screen, oppo-

site Hemingway as her lover-competitor-roommate. Donnelly is superb, showing a sincerity and natural athletic grace that makes Hemingway's performance look even worse.

Towne then decided to throw in all sorts of nifty filmic devices in an attempt to inject some feeling back into the picture. Surprisingly enough, most of them work. A wide variety of camera angles are used, creating interesting and exciting visual images. Unfortunately, he and cinematographer Michael Chapman got carried away with slow motion, and the audience is subjected to shot after shot of slow motion everything. Although it gives the feeling of graceful movement Towne intended, it also makes for a tediously plodding film.

Lastly, Towne threw in lots of nudity to keep the audience's

attention. Although the explicit love scenes between Hemingway and Donnelly are surprisingly sensitive and effective, he adds shots of athlete's well-tuned bods as if they came cheaper in large quantities. The audience soon gets bored by shot after shot of the naked team in the steam bath and tightly-clad crotches flying over the high jump bar.

If that wasn't bad enough, the film got tripped up by a number of little nasties, which nailed down the lid on its coffin. "Personal Best" tells the story of athletes preparing for the 1980 Moscow Olympics, which the U.S. boycotted. This was a tragic turn of events for many athletes who, like the characters in the film, spent years of their lives preparing themselves

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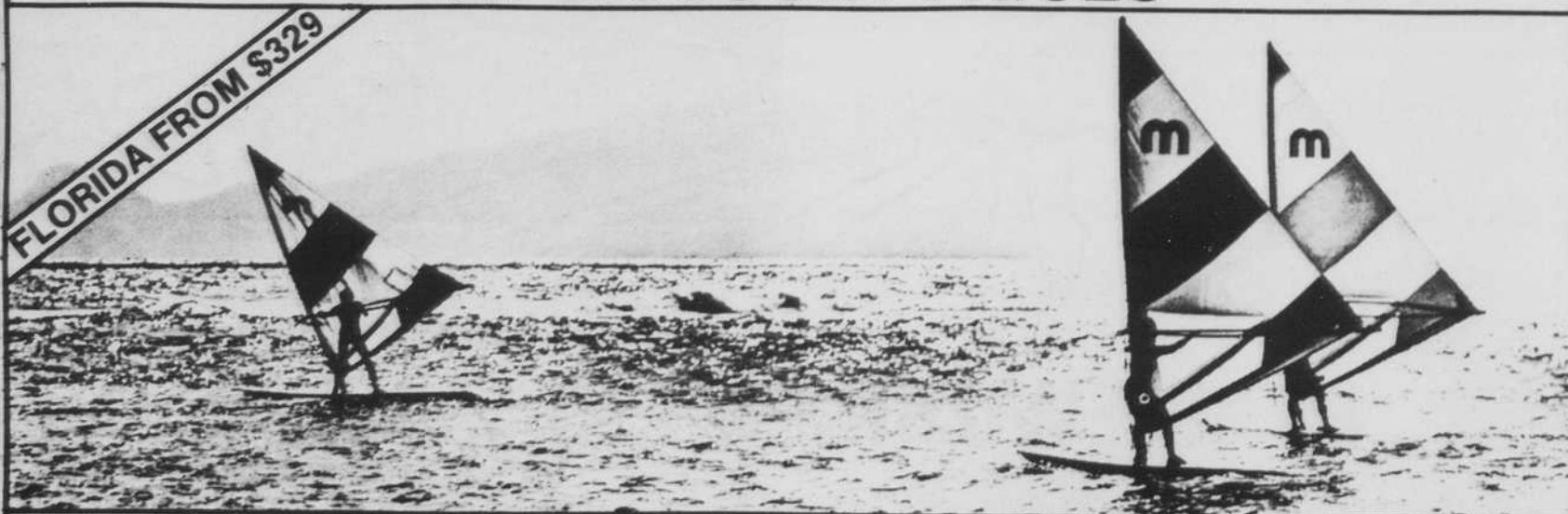
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