

The Game

The times beyond the tie

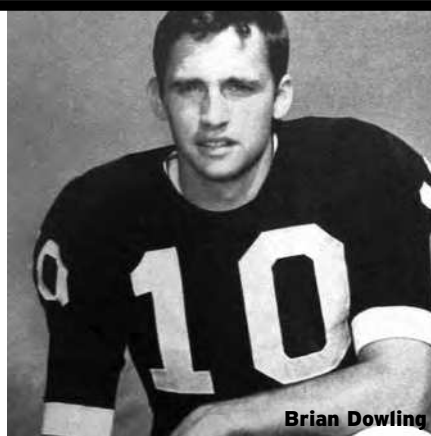
HARVARD BEATS YALE 29-29: Directed, produced, filmed and edited by Kevin Rafferty. With Tommy Lee Jones, Brian Dowling, Frank Champi and Mike Bouscaren. Kino, 2009. PG. 105 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

On November 23, 1968, a young Kevin Rafferty was in the stands for what would turn out to be a famous football game, a meeting between two undefeated teams that technically left them both undefeated but nonetheless had a clear victor. The *Harvard Crimson* announced as much the next day: "Harvard Beats Yale 29-29" read the headline. Rafferty, smartly, borrowed the line for his documentary, which is similarly both straightforward and complicated. It's a tie, but there's a winner; it's a sports story, but there's another side.

Rafferty starts out heavy on the sporting side, setting up an impossibly fraught scenario, a game to end all games, a battle in which some other force, the players say, seemed to tip the scales in favor of the underdog Harvard team. Yale had a star quarterback, Brian Dowling (the B.D. of fellow Yale student Gary Trudeau's *Doonesbury*); Harvard had future Oscar winner Tommy Lee Jones and a second-string quarterback, Frank Champi, whose thick accent proved a

touch confusing to his teammates.

Harvard Beats Yale is a thriller of a football film, and one that nicely demonstrates how knowing the end of a story is not at all the same as knowing exactly how it plays out. But Rafferty has a bigger scope in mind even as he limits his footage almost exclusively to the actual game and interviews with the players — interviews shot in kitchens and offices, each man simultaneously comfortably in his own world and entirely wrapped up in the past. After setting up the game and the rivalry, Rafferty sweeps his interviewees into a broader commentary on the era. The players don't just talk about blown plays and the bubble world of life on campus; they talk about having teammates jeer their anti-war demonstrations, or about going from the battlefield in Vietnam to the football field in Cambridge, or about the effect the arrival of birth control had on their social universe. Mike Bouscaren, the story's unexpected villain — at least on the field — talks about palling around with George W. Bush, while Tommy Lee Jones, pressed to explain why his then-roommate Al Gore was funny, offers a story about Gore learning to play "Dixie" on a pushbutton phone. Jones, the film's most familiar face (apart from



Brian Dowling

a quick glimpse of Meryl Streep, a Yale player's girlfriend at the time), is a strange character here, his commentary an odd blend of clichés and lengthy pauses. Not all the players stand out like Yale's Bouscaren or Harvard's Champi, but each has his moment, be it a story to tell or a play that was vital to the game's outcome.

And what an outcome it was. As the game plays out, play by tense play, Rafferty slows down time, slipping interview snippets in between the time the ball leaves one player's hands and lands (or doesn't) in another's. And we're not the only ones wrapped up in it: The way the players talk, it seems impossible that this game happened more than 40 years ago. For 1968, one football game was a very small thing. For these guys — and in Rafferty's hands — it was clearly part of something much bigger. **EW**

Harvard Beats Yale 29-29 opens Friday, May 1, at the Bijou.

movie clips

OPENING OR RETURNING:

Battle for Terra: Animated flick involves a peaceful civilization invaded by humans fleeing a war and environmental catastrophe. Can the Terrans and humanity learn to live together? With the voices of Evan Rachel Wood and Luke Wilson. PG. 85 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Bombies: PBS documentary screens following a presentation on "Our Unexploded Bombs: Laos' Modern Crisis," about the many "bombies" that remain in Laos, injuring or killing people, frequently children. 7 pm Sunday, May 3, Spencer Creek Grange. Free.

Dalai Lama Renaissance: Harrison Ford narrates this documentary, in which 40 Western thinkers travel to meet the Dalai Lama in hopes of solving the problem of world peace. Screenings will be followed by a Q&A with Amit Goswami, who is featured in the film. Noon Saturday, May 2, and Sunday, May 3, Bijou.

Directed by Steven Spielberg: The UO film series continues with *The Goonies* (April 30) and *Koi Mil Gaya* (May 7). Both are preceded by a short talk from a UO grad student. 6 pm Thursdays, 110 Willamette, UO. Free.

Ghosts of Girlfriends Past: Bit odd to use the *Christmas Carol* gimmick in the middle of spring, but anyway: At his brother's wedding, perpetual bachelor Connor (Matthew McConaughey) finds himself visited by the ghost of his uncle (Michael Douglas), who sends the ghosts of the title to keep Connor from screwing up with his childhood love (Jennifer Garner). PG13. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Harvard Beats Yale 29-29: Kevin Rafferty's lively documentary focuses tightly on the famous 1968 game between rivals Harvard and Yale, and the men who played it, but manages to look beyond the campus boundaries as the former football players reflect on the era in which their unforgettable game played out. PG. 105 min. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Hunger: English video artist Steve McQueen (as opposed to the other one) directs this visceral film about imprisoned IRA members in the early 1980s. Reviewers note, almost without fail, the difficulty of watching McQueen's harrowing film, but most find it ultimately worthwhile: "I've seen *Hunger* three times, and with each screening, the spectacle of violence, suffering, and pain becomes more awful and more awe-inspiring." J. Hoberman wrote in *The Village Voice*. Not rated. 96 min. Bijou. **See review this issue.**

Heckler's Night: Mock loudly and cheerfully as the Goat screens *Death Race 2000*. Awesome. 7 pm Wednesday, April 29, Wandering Goat. Free.

Lives of Artists, The: New film series featuring documentaries about contemporary visual artists begins with the short film "Conversations With Jean-Michel Basquiat" and the feature doc *Universe of Keith Haring*. 5 pm and 7:20 pm Thursday, May 7. Screenings continue through May 9; see next week's paper for details.

Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted Animation: The latest version of the adults-only festival makes its way to town. Bijou.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine: If I chant, "This will not suck. This will not suck" to myself repeatedly, will that make it true? Hugh Jackman returns as Wolverine in the (an?) origin story involving Sabretooth (Liev Schreiber), Deadpool (Ryan Reynolds), Gambit (Taylor Kitsch) and former hobbit Dominic Monaghan as Bolt. PG13. 107 min. Cinemark. VRC Stadium 15.

Twelve Rounds: When a detective (John Cena) stops a thief, the thief's girlfriend is killed. After escaping from prison, the "criminal mastermind" sets 12 tasks that the cop must complete lest his fiancée meet the same fate. Directed by Renny Harlin. PG13. Movies 12.

Films open the Friday following EW publication date unless otherwise noted. See archived reviews at www.eugeneweekly.com

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