

Friday Night Lights, (2004)

Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 117 minutes

Release Date: October 8, 2004

Budget: \$30,000,000

Studio: Universal Pictures

Director: Peter Berg

Screenwriters: David Aaron Cohen, Peter Berg

Novel by H.G. Bissinger *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*

Cast:

Coach Gary Gaines
Mike Winchell
Don Billingsley
Boobie Miles
Brian Chavez
Ivory Christian
Chris Comer
Charles Billingsley
L.V. Miles
Sharon Graines
Mrs. Winchell
Flippy
Melissa
Maria
Jennifer Gaines
Comer's Girlfriend
Trapper
Skip Baldwin
Dr. Rogers
Odessa Doctor
John Aubrey
Nancy Aubrey
Brian
Buddy's Burger Manager
Coach Miller
Coach McCutcheon
Coach Belew
Coach James
Coach Harper
Coach Vonner
Coach Smith
Coach Plunk
Coach Campbell
Coach Washburn
Coach Johnson

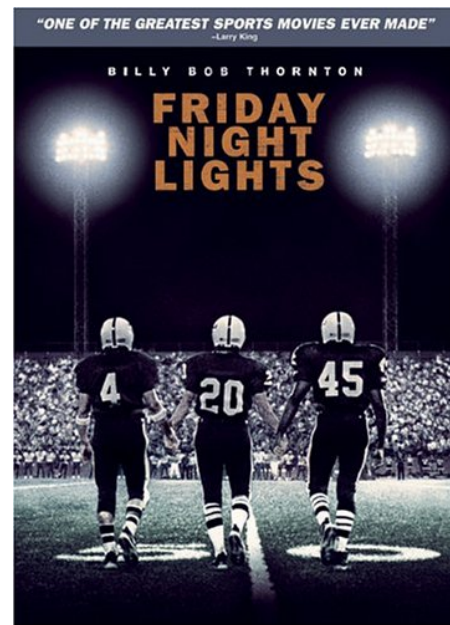
Billy Bob Thornton
Lucas Black
Garrett Hedlund
Derek Luke
Jay Hernandez
Lee Jackson
Lee Thompson Young
Tim McGraw
Grover Coulson
Connie Britton
Connie Cooper
Kasey Stevens
Ryenne Duzich
Amber Heard
Morgan Farris
Laine Kelly
Gavin Grazer
Turk Pipkin
Dr. Carey Windler
Tommy G. Kendrick
Brad Leland
Lillian Langford
Christian Kane
Charles Sanders
Wade L. Johnston
Rick Herod
Paul Wright
Julius Tennon
Dennis Hill
Timothy Walter
Robert Scott Smith
Kenneth Plunk
Josh Berry
Branson Washburn
David Johnson

Crew:

Associate Producer
Executive Producer
Co-Producer
Producer
Original Music by
Cinematography by
Film Editing by

Production design by
Art Direction by
Set Decoration by
Costume Design
Second Unit Director
Stunt Coordinator
Stunts

Sarah Aubrey
John Cameron, James Whitaker
Robert Graf
Brian Grazer
Brian Reitzell, Explosions in the Sky and David Torn
Tobias A. Schliessler
Gabrielle Fasulo (documentary segment)
Colby Parker Jr. & David Rosenbloom
Sharon Seymour
Peter Borck
Carla Curry
Susan Matheson
Allan Graf
Allan Graf
Derek Graf, Kevin Reid, Justin Riemer & Christie Sanders



Introduction of the story:

As darkness descends over the flatlands of West Texas every Friday from September through December, a dazzling, disorienting glow, visible on the stark horizon for miles around, ignites the blackened sky. Looming over the landscape, Ratliff Stadium, the country's biggest high school football field, overflows with 20,000 spectators, their voices raised in the trademark chant: "MO-JO! MO-JO! MO-JO!"

The crowd's jubilation rises to fever pitch as the Permian Panthers, Odessa's "boys in black," take to the field like warriors in an ancient coliseum. Once a week during the fall, this town and its dreams are carried on the padded shoulders of these young gridiron heroes, illuminated beneath the autumnal glare of those Friday night lights that serve as a beacon of hope to the townsfolk of this dusty West Texas town.

Since their first season in 1959, the Panthers established themselves as the most successful football program not only in Texas, but in the entire country. Now, in the last days of summer of 1988, the Permian High School Panthers of Odessa, Texas begin the season with one thing on their minds winning their fifth state championship in their 30-year history.

For their coach, Gary Gaines (Oscar® winner BILLY BOB THORNTON), it all comes down to his definition of perfection: "Being perfect is about being able to look your friends in the eye and know that you didn't let them down. I want you to put each other in your hearts forever because forever is about to happen. Can you live in that moment as best you can, with clear eyes, with love and joy in your heart? If you can do that, then you're perfect."

Friday Night Lights is the true American story of a group of young athletes, their town and their dreams.

Chapter 1: Football Time in Texas (2:58)

The following is based on a true story which took place in west Texas, 1988.

H.G. Bissinger wrote the book, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*. H.G. (Buzz) Bissinger and Peter Berg the director are cousins in real life

West Texas in Odessa gets a bad rap aesthetically they say it's not the most beautiful place in the world to live. But they have the most beautiful sunrises and sunsets in the world.

This is how Odessa looked in the 1988. It's haunting in its desolation, it's since of space and it's since of being out there.

The sign in the yard is a real reference to the book. In the novel the Pepettes (Permian Booster Club) are assigned a player to care for, part of their routine is to make a yard sign for the player's home. Some of the girls would spend hundreds of dollars of their own money making yard signs for the players. They were also responsible for bring home made treats for the players, not to mention six packs of beer.

That is Lucas Black from *Sling Blade*, he's all grown up. A lot of actors say they really know how to play football, most actors lie. This kid can really play football; both Lucas Black and Lee Jackson were football players in high school.

Biography for Lucas Black (II) (Mike Winchell the Quarterback for the team.)
Date of birth: November 29, 1982: Speake, Alabama, Birth name Lucas York Black, Height 5' 10"

Mini biography Lucas York Black was born to Larry and Jan Black on November 29, 1982 in Decatur, Alabama. Without any formal acting lessons, Lucas made his film debut with a small part in the Kevin Costner film *The War* (1994) at the age of 11. The small role helped him land his next job in the series "American Gothic" (1995). When the series came to North Carolina to cast its primary roles, the casting people in Wilmington remembered Lucas, and suggested him for the role of Caleb Temple. Although the series didn't last too long, Lucas' film career did. He was next seen in the sleeper-hit *Sling Blade* (1996) and then in another dark film *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996).

A bit of Calvin Klein modeling and mainly school and sports occupied the rest of his spare time. He scored another summer hit with *The X Files* (1998) and finally got a lead role in the independent film *Crazy in Alabama* (1999). Selective about his film roles, Lucas turned down an opportunity to star in the movie adaptation of *The Horse Whisperer* (1998) due to the request of having his accent altered. In 2000, he was seen with Matt Damon in *All the Pretty Horses* (2000).

A good student, Lucas graduated from Speake High School, class of 2001, where he played football, basketball and a little bit of golf. He plans on studying fish biology, which would be probable since he is a highly active bass fisherman. After a small break, he will next be seen alongside Hollywood stars Jude Law and Natalie Portman in the drama *Cold Mountain* (2003).

Actor - filmography

Jarhead (2005) Kuhn
Coldwater (2005) Brad Lunders
Deepwater (2005) Nat Banyon
Friday Night Lights (2004) Mike Winchell
Killer Diller (2004) Vernon
Cold Mountain (2003) Oakley
All the Pretty Horses (2000) Jimmy Blevins
The Miracle Worker (2000) (TV) James Keller

Crazy in Alabama (1999) Peter Joseph 'Peejoe' Bullis
Our Friend, Martin (1999) (V) (voice) Randy
The X Files (1998) Stevie
Flash (1997) (TV) Connor Strong
Ghosts of Mississippi (1996) Burt DeLaughter
Sling Blade (1996) Frank Wheatley
"American Gothic" (1995) TV Series Caleb Temple
The War (1994) Ebb Lipnicki



This is Derek Luke, who plays Boobie Miles. In this shot he looks very attractive and athletically inclined; Boobie Miles looked just the same. Boobie Miles was a great blue chip running back, one of the top 10 in the state of Texas. He just had all the right moves, fast, mean and tough. His jersey number is 45 and you will notice the kids idolizing after their hero, riding bikes behind him as he works out.

As he crosses the tracks here they are attempting to give you a visual metaphor, as Boobie is from across the tracks, he lives in the poorer section of town and lives with his extended family, his uncle.



Biography for Derek Luke (Boobie Miles)
Date of birth: April 24, 1974: Jersey City, New Jersey, Birth name Derek Luke, Height 5' 11"

Actor - filmography

Glory Road (2006)
Friday Night Lights (2004) Boobie Miles
Spartan (2004) Curtis

Biker Boyz (2003) Kid
Pieces of April (2003) Bobby
Antwone Fisher (2002) Antwone 'Fish' Fisher

Rack Focus, the shifting of focus from the character in the foreground to the area in the background. Great job here with Winchell and his mother at the table. No need for a second camera shot as we are able to achieve it with the rack focus.

Nobody knows exactly what Mike Winchell's relationship with his mother was, because nobody was allowed in the house. Mike was very protective of his mother; it was as side of his life that he didn't want anyone to see. There is some assumptions made in the book regarding the health of Mike's mother, which could give rise to his need to protect her.

Chapter 2: Pre-Season (4:21)

August 6, 1988 – Pre-Season – Day One

Three Filming Locations for the movie:

1. Astrodome, Houston, Texas, USA (football game)
 2. Odessa, Texas, USA
 3. Westlake High School, Austin, Texas, USA
- Manhattan, Kansas, USA (Opening Shot of Trailer)

That is Ratliff Stadium, the biggest high school football-stadium in America in 1988. Built in 1982, this was the only bond issue the community of Odessa ever passed. Build at a cost of 5.6 million dollars, seating of 19 thousand, artificial surface field, two story press box, the only thing the skimped on, they were going to build an elevator for the press box but they decided it was a little bit gaudy so the elected not to.

Everything you are seeing is real. This sign "HOME OF THE PERMIAN PANTHERS" can be likened to an analogy of what the Empire State Building is for New Yorkers, this is what it meant for those living in Odessa.

Here is an example of an unaccredited *Nike* commercial here. In the book, Boobie talks about the sneaker being Nike. Pete Berg thought it would be a good monologue for Boobie.

That is the real Chris Commer, being watched on the football game tapes by Billy Bob Thornton. In the film he is played by Lee Thompson Young

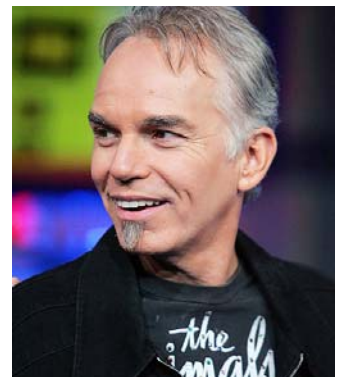
Biography for Billy Bob Thornton, (Coach Gaines)

Date of birth: August 4, 1955: Hot Springs, Arkansas, Birth name Billy Bob Thornton, Height 6' 0"

Mini biography Billy Bob Thornton was born in Hot Springs, Arkansas on August 4, 1955 to Billy Ray (educator, coach; deceased) and Virginia (psychic). He has two younger brothers, Jimmy Don, born in 1958 and now deceased, and John David, born in 1969. He has been married 5 times and has 5 children: daughter Amanda (with Gatlin); sons William and Harry (both with Cherniak); son Maddox with Angelina Jolie; and daughter Bella with Connie Angland.

Billy Bob began his artistic career as a musician, playing drums and singing in a band called Tres Hombres, which once opened for 'Hank Williams Jr'. In 1981, he moved to Los Angeles with childhood friend Tom Epperson to pursue an acting and writing career.

On the side, Billy Bob also sought work as a singer and drummer. He and Epperson tried for years to sell their scripts but no one was buying. During those rough times, Billy Bob neglected his health and subsequently landed in the hospital with heart problems due to malnutrition. In 1992, Billy Bob starred in *One False Move* (1992), a movie he co-wrote with Epperson. Billy



Literature to Film lecture on Friday Night Lights (2004)

Compiled by Jay Seller

received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame [October 7, 2004]. The team finally received attention because of this work, which was very well received in Hollywood. Suffice it to say that the rest is...

Spouse

Angelina Jolie (5 May 2000 - 27 May 2003) (divorced) 1 child
Pietra Dawn Cherniak (18 February 1993 - April 1997) (divorced) 2 children
Cynda Williams (1990 - 1992) (divorced)
Toni Lawrence (1986 - 1988) (divorced)
Melissa Lee Gatlin (1978 - 1980) (divorced) 1 child

Actor - filmography

The Swedish Job (2005)
Fade Out (2005)
Mr. Woodcock (2006) Mr. Woodcock
The Bad News Bears (2005) Buttermaker
Ice Harvest (2005) Vic
Friday Night Lights (2004) Coach Gary Gaines
The Alamo (2004) Davy Crockett
Chrystal (2004) Joe
Bad Santa (2003) Willie
Love Actually (2003) The US President
Intolerable Cruelty (2003) Howard D. Doyle
Levity (2003) Manuel Jordan
Waking Up in Reno (2002) Lonnie Earl Dodd
The Badge (2002) Sheriff Darl Hardwick
Monster's Ball (2001) Hank Grotowski
Bandits (2001) Terry Lee Collins
Daddy and Them (2001) Claude Montgomery
The Man Who Wasn't There (2001) Ed Crane
CatDog: The Great Parent Mystery (2001) (TV) (voice) Hound Dog
McDog/CatDog's Step-father
The Last Real Cowboys (2000) Tar
South of Heaven, West of Hell (2000) Brig. Smalls
Pushing Tin (1999) Russell Bell
A Simple Plan (1998) Jacob Mitchell
Armageddon (1998) Dan Truman, NASA Administrator
Homegrown (1998) Jack Marsden
Primary Colors (1998) Richard Jemmons
The Apostle (1997) Troublemaker
U Turn (1997) Darrell
Mononoke-hime (1997) (voice: English version) Jigo
A Gun, a Car, a Blonde (1997) Syd/Monk
The Winner (1996) Jack
Sling Blade (1996) Karl Childers
Don't Look Back (1996) (TV) Marshall

Director - filmography

Daddy and Them (2001)
All the Pretty Horses (2000)

Out There (1995) (TV) Jailbird
The Stars Fell on Henrietta (1995) Roy
Dead Man (1995) Big George Drakoulous
On Deadly Ground (1994) Homer Carlton
Some Folks Call It a Sling Blade (1994) Karl Childers
Floundering (1994) Gun Clerk
Tombstone (1993) Johnny Tyler (faro dealer at Oriental Saloon)
Bound by Honor (1993) Lightning
Indecent Proposal (1993) Day Tripper
Trouble Bound (1993) Coldface
The Killing Box (1993) Langston
Living and Working in Space: The Countdown Has Begun (1993) (V)
Rowdy Udall
"Hearts Afire" (1992) TV Series Billy Bob Davis
One False Move (1992) Ray Malcolm
For the Boys (1991) Marine Sergeant, Korea
"The Outsiders" (1990) TV Series Buck Merrill
Chopper Chicks in Zombietown (1989) Tommy
Going Overboard (1989) Dave
Circus (1988) (TV)
South of Reno (1988) Counterman
The Man Who Broke 1,000 Chains (1987) (TV)
Hunter's Blood (1987) Billy Bob

Writer - filmography

Daddy and Them (2001) (written by)
Camouflage (2001/I)
The Gift (2000) (written by)
Sling Blade (1996) (play) (screenplay)
Don't Look Back (1996) (TV) (story) (teleplay)
A Family Thing (1996) (written by)
Some Folks Call It a Sling Blade (1994)
One False Move (1992) (written by)

Sling Blade (1996)

Producer - filmography

All the Pretty Horses (2000) (producer)

You can get the since pretty quickly, that Peter Berg elected to shoot the film in a documentary style, which is apparent in the 95% of the film that is shot hand held. The shot of the players lining up on the field is one of the few that isn't shot hand held. The documentary style captures the book, it captures authenticity, grit, and reality, which is really, really needed for a film like this.

What a lot of people don't realize and it's hard to convey on film is how hot it is. These kids are practicing in August. Usually they start the first week in August, and the average of 95 degrees. They generally practice twice a day, the morning practices usually are around 90 degrees by 6 A.M., and by the afternoon practice is 110 degrees. Its smoldering, it's hot, kids are heaving on the sidelines. They would have trashcans set up so they could heave, do it neatly and get back to work. It's all about work.

Chapter 3: The Legend's Son (4:14)

This is basically Tim McGraw's first movie role. Tim McGraw's agent called Peter Berg, and said that Tim wanted to be an actor, and wanted to be in the film. The second he walked in the audition room, he had the tough, sexy, white trash, kind of thing going on, and therefore was cast.

There is some additional dramatization, know as artistic license going on here. Charlie Billingsley was a man who certainly had issues, he had a drinking problem. He and Don Billingsley had their differences. The point is Charlie has cleaned up considerably since then. He is now assistant coach in Houston, and has his act together; at times it was a pretentious relationship.

Biography for Garrett Hedlund (Don Billingsley)

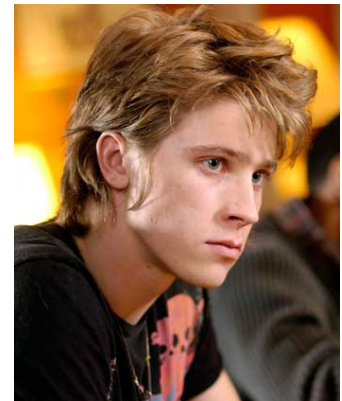
Date of birth: 1985 Roseau, Minnesota, Birth name Garrett Hedlund, Height 6' 1"

Actor - filmography
Four Brothers (2005)

Friday Night Lights (2004) Don Billingsley
Troy (2004) Patroclus

A confrontation between Boobie and Don Billingsley happened once, they have been friends ever since.

There were really television cameras out on the field after every practice, Permian was known as the best high school football program in the nation. These kids at this point in time, they were considered the "Dallas Cowboys" of west Texas. These kids had extreme exposure to the media and marketing by the colleges and universities.



This is called "Bull in the Ring". It has now been officially banned. The drill is conducted by having the player's form a circle around the chosen player and his job is to break out of the circle. He can break out by tackling another player or knocking them down. High school's across America do not allow this practice drill today. It's obviously a brutal drill, in which one guy is put in the middle and his team basically tries to destroy him. They never did it in Pro-Football or College football, it's mainly a high school drill and now it's banned. Coach Gaines didn't like to use it a lot, but he would do it because it does get the adrenalin pumping, and shows the players what they are in for during the season.

Insert Speech from the book here!

This speech comes directly from the book. This is a speech that sums up many of the things written about in the book, in terms of the team's position and role in this community. It was a nice way to set the stage, right from the get go in terms of the expectations placed upon these kids.

Chapter 4: The Next State Champion (2:50)

This scene was a re-shoot. It was an attempt to have a semblance of kids being kids.

Colby Parker Jr. is responsible for the look of the film. He is a younger editor. Because he is a younger editor the senior editor David Rosenbloom received sole credit on the movie posters. But Colby Parker Jr. received credit in the movie, but wasn't experienced enough to receive sole credit.

Christian Kane here playing Brian the "Odessa Like" football fan. Christian played football in Texas. The little girl and her mother are really mom and daughter in real life. They were hanging out on set one day while she was waiting for her boyfriend, and Peter Berg thought they would be great in the film and cast them.

The whole symbolism of the ring "Bring it home boys, get you one of these." Wearing a state championship ring on your finger in Odessa Texas was a really, really, really big deal. It was almost more important than a wedding ring. And showing that ring and wanting to translating that power down to these kids was very symbolic it was very much a part of the football culture.

Chapter 5: Party Time (3:25)

Elements not in the movie that are talked about extensively in the book include:

1. Statistics of the region
2. Influence of Religion on the community
3. Social Economic situation
4. Failing Educational system
5. Personal perspective of the players and their families
6. Importance of the oil economy on the region

Insert an example of each of these.

Historical films allow for the ability to have fun with the time periods, using the culture and the music. Here we have the opportunity to get to play with the 80's in terms of culture, music, fashion, hair, and make up. And to do it in a way that doesn't make fun of it. For a film like this you can play around with it but you also have to treat it seriously.

Notice how the woman sitting next to Coach Gaines how she is really flirting with him. Which allows her to get away with what she is about to say to him.

When a book is translated in to a film certain things are lost, the book dealt heavily with sociology and heavily with the issues of racism. Certain reviews of the film said that it didn't deal to heavily with the issue of race. But if you look at a scene, you have someone calling a kid a nigger. It seems that the issue of race in this film were defiantly not skirted. That's pretty heavy. This day in age, in Hollywood to have someone say that, that is a very compelling scene and you don't have to hammer the audience over the head to get the point across.

An interesting thing about the character Mike Winchell, which made him so much more unique then the stereotypical, conventional high school quarterback was his constant apparition his anxiety his reluctance to embrace his talent and we will see that throughout this film, and Lucas did a great job of capturing that about Mike Winchell.

The 1988 season was actually Coach Gains' third season, not his second.

Chapter 6: "Little Fumble" (2:43)

This is an intense scene and it sets a tone for the movie right away. It has been dramatized, use of artistic license, it didn't really happen to Charlie and Don. This was a fictitious creation of H.G. Bissinger's.

Garrett Hedlund is portraying Don Billingsley here, he has been in only one other film. He played Brad Pitts cousin in *Troy*. He is a hockey player from Minnesota.

These boys had to drink about 4 quarts of chocolate milk. And eat about 7 of those frozen 7/11 microwave burritos, during the shooting of this scene.

The man playing the Sheriff of Odessa Texas, it the real Sheriff of Odessa Texas.

Chapter 7: Smiling Mike (1:51)

That is the real Permian High School. This is the real weight room. Those are not real weights by the way, they are light weights. (Fake weights)

In the real story, the tragedy of Boobie Miles is he did have great difficulty reading, because no one ever cared about educating him. He was highly recruited by schools all over the country. He was convinced that he was going to a major college he was going to win the Heisman Trophy, go to the pros. No one cared a wit about educating him. As long as the dream lasted it was ok.

The Cosby moment is a way to lighten the film. Boobie was a big Cosby fan. Boobie did have this softer side of him. Derek was terrified to do the Bill Cosby impersonation.

Chapter 8: Football Country (4:27)

An incredible shot of the real Ratliff Stadium, in Odessa Texas.

The Boosters in Texas were very influential. The seat of power in Odessa, Texas. We see the unrelenting pressure placed upon the coach by the community of Odessa.

This is the reality for a lot of these kids. They aren't going to go on to play Pro. Most of them aren't going to play division one schools they aren't going to play at Oklahoma they're not going to go Texas. If they are lucky they will get a division three or four scholarship, and get out of Odessa and get an education.

In the 1980s Permian was not only the most successful high school football program in the country, but it was also the most successful high school sports program in the country. In 25 years never had a record worse than 7-2, in complete high school Texas football. Had won 4 state championships, but they were always undersized, they were always smaller than other schools, and what was so poignant was for a lot of these kids this was "it", and when they go to a division three program it was a real let down. Division three programs don't have huge stadiums

that seat 19 thousand. So for many of them if they got a small college scholarship, they ended up quitting.

STATE CHAMPIONS FOOTBALL 1965, 1972, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991

STATE FINALISTS FOOTBALL 1968, 1970, 1975, 1985, 1995

REGION I CHAMPIONS FOOTBALL 1965, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1988

1988		
Season (13-2) District (5-1)		
PERMIAN	VS	OPPONENT
49	El Paso Austin	0
12	Marshall	13
35	Amarillo	14
35	Odessa*	7
42	Midland*	0
49	Abilene*	0
48	Dallas Jesuit	2
56	Abilene Cooper*	14
21	Midland Lee*	22
41	San Angelo Central*	7
31	Amarillo Tascosa - BI DISTRICT	7
41	El Paso Address - AREA	13
48	Irving Nimitz - REGIONAL	7
21	Arlington Lamar - Q FINALS	7
9	Dallas Carter - SEMI-FINALS	14

Brian Chavez went out for the team at Harvard, and said that it was a complete joke. They were trying to teach him techniques that he knew more about than they did. He was at a freshman game and he said "I got bigger crowds when I was in junior high school." At Harvard he was playing in front of 50 to 200 people, he was used to playing in front of 15 or 20 thousand. He said "this was a joke." So he quit and played rugby instead.

This is the first time you can clearly hear the band that scored most the film. A band called Explosions in the Sky. They are actually from Midland Lee Texas. They grew up going to Midland High School, going to games at Ratliff Stadium. They are a tremendously emotional band, no vocals, all instruments, three guitars and a drum. The music was critical in establishing a tone and an emotional context for the behavior in the film.

What Ever It Takes

Chapter 9: Marshall Game (3:36)

September 2, 1988 – Odessa-Permian vs. Marshall

TRUE SCORE: 12 – 13 Marshall Win

This is the one set that was build for the film. Everything else was on location. This set was built in the basement of the old Austin Community Center in Austin Texas.

If you want the victory, be ready for the fight.

Here is a great example of the editing of Colby Parker Jr. Peter Berg's intent for the game scenes was to film it as war. It is such chaos the different sidelines, the screaming back and forth, the running, the fans.

The man yelling at Chris Comer is Scott Smith, he is the current head coach for the Odessa Permian Panthers.

Veteran stunt coordinator and second-unit director Allen Graf (*Any Given Sunday*, *The Waterboy*) coordinated the film's football action involving over 100 plays, spotlighting not only the principal cast, but a formidable team of 40 extras who complemented Permian's ranks and portrayed players on the story's opposing football teams.

"While it may look choreograph, this is real football. You can't fake football," explains Graf, the seasoned veteran who designed and executed over 100 plays (photographed by multiple camera crews under the guidance of NFL Films' veteran Thom Owens) that spotlight not only the principal cast, but the formidable team of 40 extras Graf hand-picked from over 900 applicants, 260 of whom participated in a three-day tryout camp he supervised in Austin in late January.

"The process of putting the team together is pretty amazing," explains Graf, affectionately called "the Coach" by his team. "I have to start from scratch. And by scratch I mean I had to go to Austin, Texas, and start looking for football players, I put out a casting call through the media. I went on television. I did radio and newspaper interviews. We were looking for football players between the ages of 18 and 26 with a minimum of two years college experience, preferably guys from U.T. who had already graduated."

Over a three-day period in early December, 2003—a full two months before his training camp would begin at St. Stephens Academy—Graf personally interviewed over 900 potential applicants (he hoped for a tryout of 600), receiving their high school, college and , in some cases, semi-pro stats.

Like a Marine drill sergeant, Graf barked out his patented welcome speech, explaining how his system would work during his three-day tryout camp scheduled for the last week in January, 2004. If any of the candidates for the 40-man squad made the first cut, they then reported to Graf's camp for an actual NFL "combine," a grueling three-day test fro agility, speed and stamina, on which he worked with his assistant coach, Justin Reimer (whom he met on *The Replacements*).

"So they show up, 960 guys, not all football players mind you, but 960 guys, and I invited about 260 to try out for the combine," Graf relates. "And the combine is like trying out for pro football, this is no Hollywood audition. We put them through the agility drills, bag drills, the 40-

yard dash and all that. We put them through exactly what they would do if they were trying out for the pros. And that way, we find out if they were athletic or not.”

Once Graf recruited his 40-man squad (which included eight former U.T. players), “we then draw up the plays for the whole script and started teaching and training them. It took four weeks for them to learn the playbooks, going through the script and learning each play. In this movie, we had somewhere between 96 and 116 plays. That’s a lot of football for movie, especially to be shot in seven weeks. My work was cut out for me.”

During the six-week training session, Graf lost some of the players to injuries, or wound up cutting others from the squad even though they initially showed talent in the tryout camp.

Chapter 10: Boobie’s Knee (4:11)

There goes a life, in a split second. His life changed irrevocably in that split second. Since then Bobbie Miles has never been the same. Which is perhaps is the true lesson of sport that we should come away with.

You see the real Bobbie Miles on the sidelines, standing on the right of the screen.

Watch how Billy Bob Thornton runs through a gauntlet of emotion in the next couple of minutes here in the locker room. He has basically been told his season is over. Billy’s face as he marches back says everything.

In the book when Boobie got hurt they were driving back from Lubic Texas, and Coach Gains was sitting in the front of the bus and you could just see the season draining from them. They had no idea what they were going to do. Their ticket to state was just hurt and you know it is serious.

Football in Texas is really quite serious for coaches. These guys sign two-year contracts. If they lose they’re fired. If they’re fired they have to pickup move their family their children to other towns to other cities. It’s extremely stressful not only for the coaches but also for their families to have to keep picking up and moving like that.

Continuity Error: As we are driving through downtown Odessa, you can see a 2002 Dodge Durango.

This scene is incredibly moving because it’s not that Boobie didn’t understand what is happening. What the scene is getting at is struggling to deny the reality of it, of refusing to accept the evitable that he suffered a potentially season ending and maybe career ending injury.

Chapter 11: Losers (4:34)

September 9, 1988 – Odessa-Permian vs. Abilene

TRUE SCORE: 49 – 0 Odessa-Permian Win

In the book, the pressure was it was actually Coach Gaines' third season. He hadn't gotten to playoffs his first season, he had gotten to the semi-finals his second season. Had he not gotten to the playoffs, and gotten deep into the playoffs in this his third season he would have been fired. And he knew that, and so that creates an interesting set of issues for a coach. You love the kids you care about the kids all that stuff. But you have to win, because if you don't win you're going to get fired. It is about your lively hood. It's not just Odessa it's everywhere which makes coaching really, really complex at this level, there are a lot for difficult moral choice you have to make.

Notice when Coach Gaines returns home and his wife is sitting on the front steps, with the FOR SALE signs in the front lawn, this is how deep and intense the emotions got. When you lost a game no matter the circumstances if the town thought you were supposed to win, and you lost, this is what would happen.

Shooting rocks location.

Chapter 12: Get the Job Done (5:53)

When the book was published and released, Buzz received thousands of death threats from the people of Odessa, and other football towns in the U.S. He was actually supposed to return to Odessa for a series book signings, but he had to cancel because the bookstores were receiving phone calls that said "If that guy comes down here we're going to kick the snout out of him." Buzz took those threats seriously, and didn't return.

Odessa is a town of great character, and the people of Odessa are strong in their likes and dislikes.

In this scene we can see Mike Winchell playing with a toy car which gets at the heart of Winchell's character; so haunted so conflicted by who he is and who maybe what he can be although he thinks he will never be able to reach that.

It's important to remember why high school football is such an intense experience. It is that boy to man period in their young life where these players are still kids. If you go to their house and you will still be able to find the Hot Wheel toys, the G.I. Joes, and Tonka Trucks buried in the back of their closets, but they are still there. And you are looking at their life right there on the edge before they cross over.

They are boys and they're trying to figure how to come into manhood, but what is expected of them, they really are treated like men, like pro athletes. The expectations on them are phenomenal. It's very similar to watching soldiers go off to war.

The director of photography Tobias Schliessler shot this scene in a room real house in Austin Texas. It is about 10x10 and that's a pretty cramped space for filming, however Tobias was able to pull it off well. Here we are giving the audience a real feeling of intimacy (compassion and connection) between Coach Gaines and Mike Winchell.

Chapter 13: MoJo Working (3:50)

September 16, 1988 – Odessa-Permian vs. Cooper

TRUE SCORE: 56 – 14 Odessa-Permian Win

Again we have more football, filmed to look like war. All coached, coordinate, choreographed by Allan Graf.

Here just like in the book, Chris Commer comes out of nowhere! He was Boobie's back-up, back-up. (Third string) Because he was on third string no one knew if he was going to be any good. He came out of nowhere and as a junior became all state, and in many ways saved the Permian season.

When Buzz was in Odessa writing the book, he did take some pictures of the team, some of those pictures have been printed in some of the editions of the book. Here with the boys brushing their teeth and brushing their hair is one of those pictures from the book recreated for the film.

Chapter 14: MRI (2:57)

The man inspecting Boobies knee is Dr. Carey Windler. He is a real orthopedic surgeon from Austin Texas. Before this film he had never acted before. But when Peter Berg was doing research and talking with Dr. Cary Windler, he saw how well he fit the role.

Chapter 15: Midland Lee (3:34)

October 28, 1988 – Odessa-Permian vs. Midland Lee

TRUE SCORE 21 – 23 Midland Lee Win

Demonstrating the pressure on Coach Gaines about deciding whether or not to put Boobie in the game.

Chapter 16: The Last of Boobie Miles (2:40)

Boobie did try to come back.

Chapter 17: End of the Game (2:33)

Chapter 18: Cursed (4:48)

At the time of filming, it hadn't snowed in Austin Texas in 15 years. The night they were supposed to film this scene it snowed. So they moved in to a warehouse, and you can see standard movies lights rushing by in the background.

This scene is just raw. Watch the cadence of the scene, of the gentle taunting of his son and then BAM!

The subtext of the book is about fathers and sons. Fathers living vicariously through their sons, and wanting their sons to succeed, and you never know who they are really doing it for. Is it for

their sons, or for themselves. We got Charlie and Don, L.V. and Boobie, and Mike and his mother.

The song that Tim is singing is a song that Peter Berg's father used to sing.

Chapter 19: The Coin Toss (3:20)

This scene was straight out of the book. There was a three way tie, and only two teams would advance to the semi-finals. Odd man out.

The location was undisclosed because they were worried that as many as 5 thousand fans would show up, it was televised live.

In the book, one of the rules for the coin toss was the coins had to hit the ceiling, which they don't show here.

When Permain completed the 1988 season on the first Friday night in November, they had an identical district record (5-1) with two of their area rivals—Midland High Bulldogs and the Midland-Lee Rebels (who had beaten the Panthers earlier that season). The league's rules did not mandate playoff games to determine which two teams were headed into the state playoffs' the flip of three coins did. And it really happened at a truck stop diner called The Convoy on the outskirts of Odessa.

Chapter 20: The Only Fact of Life (2:17)

The book said that 10 kids signed on to go on to division one school. There were really 17 kids that signed on to go on to division one schools.

All the boys would dip. Kids that were 4 years old would be dipping.

This speech by Charlie Billingsley is by far is the point of why football is so important it's the only thing they have, and it gets to the heart. The opening shot of the film is a great example of that. There is nothing in Odessa, it's completely desolate. Football is all they have.

Chapter 21: Boobie Says Goodbye (3:31)

In the real story Boobie did try to come back, could not, the doctor was right. He had lost the magic gift of being able to cut, that great instinctive gift that all athletes have. So he did quit the team in the middle of the season. Boobie also knew intuitively they didn't need him anymore. He was expendable, he was a disposable commodity.

As you can see in this scene Boobie is working hard, working overtime to keep his head up high, to have that false patina of pride and arrogance.

Again the great costume design by Susan Matheson, Susan found a Public Enemy jacket and Boobie is doing this scene while wearing a really badass Public Enemy jacket, which Boobie really would wear.

Watch the juxtaposition here when Boobie gets out to the car. We have the arrogance in the locker room, go and win state, to this next scene, where you watch Boobie literally and physically melt down. Because he knows that every dream he has had, and they are bad dreams, because they can be crushed so easily. To play in the Pros, win the Hiseman, be rich, buy a home for L.V. because the live down on the south side of town with virtually nothing. And to see it all disintegrate and to see the hug and love shine through. It happened just like this in real life, it was this agenzizing.

Chapter 22: Playoff Time (3:15)

This scene is almost straight out of the book. It's a scene that gets to the underlining theme of racism, which is not skirted in the movie or in the book. You cannot just simply make a movie about racing where you have people using the N-Word constantly is ridiculous. It's handled appropriately and enough to get at it.

The context was Dallas Carter was undefeated was the best team out of the city Dallas in about 30 to 40 years. Their second best player was Jessie Armsted who went on to become an all Pro with the New York Giants. There was a player named Shay Masten who went on to be a Pro Player. They (Dallas Carter) were actually, during the playoffs kicked out of the playoffs for use of an ineligible player. They went back into court to get back into the playoffs in a trial that was completely absurd. So when you are seeing this scene you have Dallas Carter become a real lightning rod about race. They were an all black school, and you had blacks saying it was all these white schools that were trying to kick them out. And then you had Permian that was the embodiment of the white working class school. These two teams really went at it. There was a tremendous subtext of racism and racial issues going on between the two schools.

Chapter 23: Beat 'Em, or... (2:39)

Pressure on the coach

Chapter 24: Going to State (1:47)

This is slightly inaccurate, two things, first the Astrodome is 12 to 13 hours away from Odessa not 6. Second Permian would never take a bus to a playoff game they would charter a jet, because that's how it was done in Odessa.

The caravans are something that the people of Odessa did really do, and they were epic caravans.

Chapter 25: The Dallas Carter Game (1:49)

Houston Astrodome – Odessa-Permian vs. Dallas Carter

TRUE SCORE: 9 – 14 Dallas Carter Win

Level of intimidation

Before hitting the gridiron, the cast changed into their football jerseys in their own personal trailers while Graf's squad suited up in the home locker room at Ratliff, where nightly, veteran sports costumer Roric Ruegsegger (a longtime Graf ally) provided all the football uniforms (about 500, plus equipment) to the cast and the Coach's 40-man specialists; extras playing

opposing teams used the visitors' locker room. While Ruesegger concentrated only on the team uniforms, costume designer Susan Matheson handled all the non-sports wardrobe requirements, which included the recreation of Permian's handsome letter jackets from 1988.

Chapter 26: First Half (5:17)

Dallas Carter, Ruff group of kids, being cocky and talking trash
Armed robbery.

"The real game was played in Texas Stadium at the University of Texas in Austin," Bissinger confirms as he celebrated the film's early April wrap alongside his blood relative at the 'Dome—Berg had cast Bissinger as an extra in a brief sequence as the Odessa boosters cheer on their team from a private skybox. "I had never been in the Astrodome. But it's an appropriate setting because there was Texas high school championship games played in the Astrodome."

Chapter 27: Half-Time (4:28)

The halftime scenes are an attempt to humanize the two teams.

Can you be perfect?

Again you can see the real Boobie Miles standing next to Derek Luke in the locker room.

Chapter 28: Second Half (2:47)

Blown call. Score was 9-7 in Permian's favor. Then Carter did score and the score become 9-14.

Chapter 29: The MoJo Comeback (6:19)

You really do care about these kids at the end. Their nobility, really, really shines through. Their heart and it shows what you can do when you have heart.

This is a great high school football play when you flip your back to the quarterback. That is one of the great things about high school football games they still have some fun and some wild trick plays. Ask yourself when was the last time you saw a *quarterback* catch a 60 yard bomb in the NFL? It rarely happens, in high school it happens all the time. Permian ran this play all the time, Mike Winchell was a great athlete he was a great baseball player, great golfer, a really gifted skilled kid.

In the real story it was pretty much this close, Permian was driving at the end of the game. They didn't get to the one yard line, but they got to the 11 yard line, until there was a holding call, it was a really close game.

Chapter 30: The Last Yard (5:56)

Don Billingsley really didn't get hurt to the point that they had to pop his shoulder back in place, but trust me it happened all the time to other players, kids constantly playing in pain.

Winchell did say "I love all you'll." It a really touching moment, they all did really love each other.

There really was a holding call when they got to the 11 yard line, which put them back around the 25.

Friday Night Lights commenced production on February 2, 2004, in Austin, Texas, and concluded filming on April 8, 2004, at Texas' famous Houston Astrodome. The 45-day schedule shot entirely on location in Texas, including three weeks at Odessa's Ratliff Stadium.

The book was real and authentic, and controversial; it was both uplifting and dark. And Buzz worried if Pete was going to clown it up, Mick it up, and more importantly was he going to change the ending. Was he going to create a Hollywood ending, and have these guys win?

There were scripts floating around that ended up with Permian winning. And Buzz asks that it not be called Friday Night Lights in that case, because you would miss the point of what it was all about.

It is so touching, because they are still a team, in the way they come together the way they console one another, at the end.

Here we have the passing of the ring, the passing of one generation to another, the passing from father to son.

Chapter 31: Epilogue (3:56)

This is probably the most memorable moment from the book, of Coach Gaines removing the names from the roster and putting them in a box, and putting the names of the new players up.

When Mike Winchell passes the football to the kids, is symbolic of the passing of the baton (the football) from one generation to another. Life will go on, and now it's these kids turn to see what they do.

Three things that the author discovered in doing this story that he hadn't anticipated was;

1. The most ugly racism he had ever encountered
2. Utterly misplaced educational priorities
3. A town that wasn't bad or evil but had lost any ability to judge itself. Page 363

The book became a wakeup call to the town and a bit of medicine.

Chapter 32: End Titles (6:21)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Background

Produced by Imagine Entertainment's Academy Award®-winning producer BRIAN GRAZER (*8 Mile, A Beautiful Mind, Apollo 13*) for Universal Pictures, *Friday Night Lights* is the big-screen adaptation of H.G. Bissinger's acclaimed book *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team and a Dream*, has vivid account of this small West Texas town and its devotion to its high school

football team. The story has been hailed by *Sports Illustrated* as one of the top five greatest sports stories of all time.

Friday Night Lights is directed by PETER BERG (*The Rundown*, *Very Bad Things*) and stars Oscar® winner BILLY BOB THORNTON (*Sling Blade*, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, *Bad Santa*), who heads the film's dynamic cast as Gary Gaines, the school's dedicated coach under intense pressure by school officials and Odessa's townsfolk to capture Permian's fifth state championship after failing to do so his first two seasons as coach.

Grammy-winning recording artist TIM MCGRAW, in his first Hollywood starring role, joins the cast as Charlie Billingsley, the former all-state Panther player who attempts to help his son avoid the life mistakes he himself made... but struggles with how.

Thornton's gridiron squad includes a group of dedicated players embodied by a cast of Hollywood's upcoming young stars, including DEREK LUKE (*Antwone Fisher*, *Pieces of April*) as Bobbie Miles, the Panther's powerful running back whose dream of stardom on the college circuit is jeopardized by a serious knee injury; JAY HERNANDEZ (*The Rookie*, *crazy/beautiful*) as Harvard; LUCAS BLACK (*Sling Blade*, *Cold Mountain*) as Mike Winchell, the uncertain, insecure quarterback cheered on by his chronically ill mother; GARRETT HEDLUND (*Troy*) as Don Billingsley, the cocky, self-destructive tailback at odds with his disheartened, overbearing father Charlie; and LEE THOMPSON YOUNG (*Disney Channel's The Famous Jett Jackson*) as Chris Comer, the scrappy third-string running back who is granted a chance to join Gaines' starting lineup. Rounding out the team is film newcomer LEE JACKSON, a Texas native and former linebacker with the University of Texas Longhorns, who makes his professional acting debut as Ivory Christian, the gifted middle linebacker and the Panthers' spiritual leader whose cathartic pre-game rituals rouses his fellow teammates.

Marking his third motion picture assignment in the director's chair, filmmaker Peter Berg directs from the screenplay by DAVID AARON COHEN (*The Devil's Own*) and Berg, based on Bissinger's 1990 book. Imagine's JAMES WHITAKER (*8 Mile*) and JOHN CAMERON (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) serve as executive producers.

Berg's creative squad behind the cameras includes director of photography TOBIAS SCHLIESSLER (*The Rundown*, *Bait*), production designer SHARON SEYMOUR (*Bad Santa*, *The Cable Guy*), editor DAVID ROSENBLOOM (*The Insider*, *Primal Fear*) and costume designer SUSAN MATHESON (*Blue Crush*, *Honey*).

Veteran stunt coordinator and second-unit director ALLEN GRAF (*Any Given Sunday*, *The Waterboy*) coordinated the film's football action involving over 100 plays, spotlighting not only the principal cast, but a formidable team of 40 extras who complemented Permian's ranks and portrayed players on the story's opposing football teams.

The Dream

"The Book *Friday Night Lights* was something I had read very early on," remembers Oscar®-winning producer Brian Grazer. "The late, great director, Alan Pakula, introduced me to the book. Alan was going to direct the movie; since his death, I've stuck with the project for 14

years, waiting for the right timing and combination of talent to bring it to the screen, being respectful and mindful of what Alan would have brought to the film. I've been in love with the story since the beginning and committed to the turning it into the kind of film it deserves to be."

Originally published in 1990, H.G. 'Buzz' Bissinger's book *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team and A Dream*, his chronicle of the 1988 Permian High School football season in Odessa, Texas, remained on *The New York Time* Best-seller List for 15 weeks, has since gone through several reprinting (currently in its 40th printing) and was named by *Sports Illustrated* as one of the greatest sports stories of all time and the best ever to be centered in the world of football.

Today, 14 years after publication, the book still sells at the rate of nearly 50,000 copies a year. *Friday Night Lights* has proven popular not only in high school football locker rooms, but also in hundreds of college classrooms, particularly studies in sociology.

"There are a handful of really great sports stories in this century, and I think this is one of them," comments Grazer. "But what's even more compelling than the sports element, I feel, is the revelation of the presence of the localized cultural phenomenon, this subculture, all across America, in small towns and in some pretty big ones as well. Attendance around these Friday night high school games takes on a religious aspect, a spiritual side—basically people going every Friday to church. And these young athletes are like rock stars in these towns and they have to carry all of the burdens that come with being famous role models who are looked to for that all-important win."

"In the mid-80s, I remember driving out west, going through little towns in Alabama, Louisiana and Texas and seeing their high school football stadiums," author Bissinger recounts. "They were always beautiful, always painted, and the fields were always being watered even if there was a drought. These places really are shrines, like temples, and my dream was to write this book. It wouldn't leave my head until I found this town called Odessa. So, I quit my job and decided to go there."

In depicting the 1988 season, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author, then an editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, uprooted his young family and spent a full year in Odessa after hearing about the locals' allegiance to the Permian Panthers, long considered one of the greatest high school football programs in Texas.

"I wanted to recount the highs and lows of what it meant to be a high school football player in a town such as this," Bissinger writes. "The idea of high school sports keeping a town together, keeping it alive, and the inevitable danger of adults living vicariously through their young, fascinated me. These kids held the town on their shoulders in a place where high school football went to the very core of life."

"I heard about the legacy of Permian and Odessa," the author reflects back during a visit to the set in Austin. "It was then the winningest team in Texas football history. Twenty-thousand people every Friday night! I had never seen anything like that, and I was a huge sports fan! As I wrote in the book, those lights became an addiction, a Friday night fix, if you live in a place like Odessa."

“I had been to NFL and AFL championships,” Bissinger continues, “but you get into the Ratliff, that rocket ship of a stadium, on a Friday night and those lights go up with those crowds of people. It is so intoxicating and magnificent and intense. I have never seen a sporting event as exciting as that, because those kids playing in the way we believe sports should be played. They played for their own honor, for their team and for their town, and it was really intoxicating.”

Bissinger spent one full year in Odessa, which encompassed the entire 1988 football season, from the initial summer training camp through the season finale in December and beyond, “becoming part of the community.” He then took the next six months “sorting out the book’s structure and the narrative—whom I was writing about and what games to really look at, what sociological themes to explore.”

“I decided early on there were six kids that I really wanted to write about in depth,” he says. “I already had my narrative core, which was the season, a year full of unexpected surprises. I had no idea what kind of stories would unfold. If I was writing fiction, I could not have made up many of the things that happened. I don’t have the imagination. This was, professionally, the most exciting and memorable year of my life.”

The book struck a nerve in place as varied as Midwestern locker rooms and in conference rooms in Hollywood; when Grazer, working with Universal Pictures, acquired the movie rights to Bissinger’s tome, his goal was to create a film that “shows an America where values like pride, community and dedication are still cornerstones.

“We wanted to show that there are still places, entire towns, where people turn off their televisions, get out of their cars and come together for a common purpose,” Grazer stresses. “And that these communal rituals and rites are compelling and dramatic subjects to explore within a major motion picture. I’ve always been interested in different cultures and this film dramatizes this subculture as it did in the book. This subject grabbed me just as the hip-hop music culture did in *8 Mile*.”

The Team

“The film, like the book, tells the story of the 1988 Permian Panthers football team,” director Berg relates. “It focuses on six different players and their coach, Gary Gaines. We begin with the first day of full dress practice in August and end at the state championship game in December at the Houston Astrodome.”

During his many weekend trips to Odessa and Austin to observe and absorb the mood of this unique sports culture, Berg, like author Bissinger 15 years before, insinuated himself into the lives of the town and its citizens, “becoming a sideline regular, going into the locker room after games, wearing the school colors and riding the team bus with all these guys...a pretty surreal experience,” the filmmaker recalls.

The Towns

“Any time the surrounding represent the real story, it’s going to help you as an actor,” Thornton states about filming on the actual location where Bissinger’s story is set. “It puts you in a

different frame of mind. In the case of *Friday Night Lights*, we shot part of the movie where the story actually took place, out in Odessa, Texas. When you're around the people who were actually there when that's happened, it gives you a certain sense of nostalgia and an emotion that maybe you wouldn't have if you were shooting someplace else.

Adds director Berg, "It was really important for us to come shoot in Odessa. It made production a bit more challenging, but it's so unique. It's so wide open and, I think, really quite beautiful. It was very important for us to get that look of the town on camera. I knew we had to film at Ratliff once I came down and watched my first Permian game. There was magic in the air."

Before Berg led his production team to the flatlands and oil fields of West Texas, Austin, Texas' capital city, figured prominently in the first of the films shooting schedule. *Friday Night Lights* shot in a variety of locales around Austin (including interiors at William B. Travis High School, doubling for the halls of Permian High, and Burger Stadium, Briefly standing in for Ratliff) during the first five weeks of production before heading out to the windswept landscape of the Permian basin.

While much of the production filmed on actual, practical locations in each of the three Texas cities (Austin, Odessa, Houston) chosen for the project, seasoned production designer Sharon Seymour did construct on key set for the movie—the Permian locker room, which Seymour designed and build inside the basement of the Palmer Auditorium, Austin's shuttered downtown concert arena.

Seymour also collaborated with western set decorator Carla Curry to dress another locker room in Midland (Odessa's twin city, 20 miles east on Rt. 20) to double for locker rooms in the Houston Astrodome, where Berg staged the film's climatic state championship game (the 'Dome's locker rooms were deemed unsuitable for filming).

Allan Graf, one of Hollywood's premier second-unit directors and stunt coordinators, set up shop in yet another locker room in Austin (St. Stephen's Academy) to begin his football training program for Berg's sports drama. In addition to designing the football plays for the film, the former U.S.C. offensive lineman was also responsible for drafting the 40-man squad to fill out the ranks of Permian's team (beyond Berg's principal cast), as well as those of the rival schools in the script.

Graft is one of U.S.C. gridiron grates from their phenomenal 1972 NCAA national title teams, which enjoyed an undefeated season culminating in their climactic win over Ohio State in the Rose Bowl. He is also one of Hollywood's best know pigskin "choreographers," designing and staging the football action for such films as Oliver Stones' *Any Given Sunday*, Howard Deutch's *The Replacements*, *The Program*, *The Waterboy*, *Necessary Roughness*, the recent *Cheer Up* and Cameron Crow's Oscar®-nominated *Jerry Maguire*.

"While it may look choreograph, this is real football. You can't fake football," explains Graf, the seasoned veteran who designed and executed over 100 plays (photographed by multiple camera crews under the guidance of NFL Films' veteran Thom Owens) that spotlight not only the principal cast, but the formidable team of 40 extras Graf hand-picked from over 900

applicants, 260 of whom participated in a three-day tryout camp he supervised in Austin in late January.

While Graf is highly respected in the business for his football acumen and ability to “make football look better on-screen than I’d seen it in past movies,” he also had a huge fan in director Berg, whom he directed in all the second-unit football action in the 1994 HBO movie *Rise and Walk; The Dennis Byrd Story*, the inspirational sage of the former New York Jets player who sustained and crippling neck injury on the playing field and overcome his paralysis to walk again.

“The process of putting the team together is pretty amazing,” explains Graf, affectionately called “the Coach” by his team. “I have to start from scratch. And by scratch I mean I had to go to Austin, Texas, and start looking for football players, I put out a casting call through the media. I went on television. I did radio and newspaper interviews. We were looking for football players between the ages of 18 and 26 with a minimum of two years college experience, preferably guys from U.T. who had already graduated.”

Over a three-day period in early December, 2003—a full two months before his training camp would begin at St. Stephens Academy—Graf personally interviewed over 900 potential applicants (he hoped for a tryout of 600), receiving their high school, college and , in some cases, semi-pro stats.

Like a Marine drill sergeant, Graf barked out his patented welcome speech, explaining how his system would work during his three-day tryout camp scheduled for the last week in January, 2004. If any of the candidates for the 40-man squad made the first cut, they then reported to Graf’s camp for an actual NFL “combine,” a grueling three-day test for agility, speed and stamina, on which he worked with his assistant coach, Justin Reimer (whom he met on *The Replacements*).

“So they show up, 960 guys, not all football players mind you, but 960 guys, and I invited about 260 to try out for the combine,” Graf relates. “And the combine is like trying out for pro football, this is no Hollywood audition. We put them through the agility drills, bag drills, the 40-yard dash and all that. We put them through exactly what they would do if they were trying out for the pros. And that way, we find out if they were athletic or not.”

Once Graf recruited his 40-man squad (which included eight former U.T. players), “we then draw up the plays for the whole script and started teaching and training them. It took four weeks for them to learn the playbooks, going through the script and learning each play. In this movie, we had somewhere between 96 and 116 plays. That’s a lot of football for movie, especially to be shot in seven weeks. My work was cut out for me.”

During the six-week training session, Graf lost some of the players to injuries, or wound up cutting others from the squad even though they initially showed talent in the tryout camp. One Texan (among a disparate group of gridiron hopefuls) who made it through the entire shoot was a Houston teacher named Ryan Jacobs, a Hollywood-handsome, 26-year-old former college player who quit his teaching job because, “I’d never done anything like this. I hope one day to coach high school football, so this experience is invaluable.”

Another key player who enrolled on Graf's squad was his 23-year-old son, Derek, who, like his dad, played for the U.S.C. Trojans (at center, he finished his college career in the 2003 Orange Bowl); like father, like son, Derek is also eyeing a career in front of the cameras as a stuntman.

In addition to training the Graf squad, the Coach also devoted plenty of time to conditioning four of the six actors who portrayed the story's key players. Aside from actor Black ("I had to throw a little bit when I heard I was playing quarterback to make sure I kept up the spirals") and former U.T. safety Jackson ("The coaches told everybody, 'Don't hit the actors...unless it's Lee Jackson, you could hit him 'cause he's a football player'"), the other four had no formal (or informal) football experience prior to joining Berg's team.

"It was pretty intense. I'd never played any football, so I had a lot to learn," actor Lee Thompson Young confesses about experiencing Coach Graf's drills. "In Austin, we were doing two practices a day, two three-hour practices a day. That's six hours of football. It was hard. My ankles started hurting, my knees started hurting. I gained a new respect for athletes and a new understanding of how physically you can be worn down. We trained like that for about a month."

Graf continued his training program in Austin while Berg filmed most of the production's characters-driven dramatic scenes during the first five weeks for the schedule. Then, the two units combined and it was off to Odessa for three weeks of hard-hitting football scenes at Ratliff Stadium, which encompassed most of the March calendar.

Odessa is the largest town and county set of Ector County. The Ector County school system's three high schools—Odessa, Permian and the Career Center—are located in Odessa. The county's football prowess is evident in the following statistics: Odessa High won the Texas state high school championship in 1946, and Permian High captured it six times between 1965 and 1991.

One Odessa native (by way of Iowa) who lived through the 1988 season was Tim 'Trapper' O'Connell, Permian's football trainer and a fixture on the local football scene since 1982 at Odessa, Permian and, briefly, Midland High.

"I was a student trainer at the University of Iowa when I arrived at Odessa High in 1982," O'Connell relates. "I went over to Permian in '85 when John Wilkins was the head coach. He moved up to athletic director when Gary Gaines became head coach in 1986. And I was with Gary for four seasons."

After leaving the football arena for eight years between 1991-99 (working for a local orthopedic doctor), O'Connell returned to Permian in 2001 after a few seasons at Midland, one of Permian's feared rivals on the gridiron. While not cast to play himself in the film, his recollections proved invaluable to director Berg and Graf in his role on the film as Graf's head trainer, who was charged with tending to the bruises and pulled muscles suffered by some on Graf's squad.

“Thousands of kids play high school football. It’s a life experience for them, something that really changes their lives. They meet some people be it coaches or other kids or families, that make differences in their lives. I would hope that’s what this movie teaches. I believe the film will have a positive spin for the community. It was exciting to have a movie made in your own backyard,” says O’Connell.

In Odessa, O’Connell was back home in his element—Ratliff stadium, where Berg and Graf directed their separate units, first over several days filming the pre-season practices and drills that Coach Gaines put his team through, then following with a solid two weeks of grueling nighttime football.

Before hitting the gridiron, the cast changed into their football jerseys in their own personal trailers while Graf’s squad suited up in the home locker room at Ratliff, where nightly, veteran sports costumer Roric Ruegsegger (a longtime Graf ally) provided all the football uniforms (about 500, plus equipment) to the cast and the Coach’s 40-man specialists; extras playing opposing teams used the visitors’ locker room. While Ruegsegger concentrated only on the team uniforms, costume designer Susan Matheson handled all the non-sports wardrobe requirements, which included the recreation of Permian’s handsome letter jackets from 1988.

On Friday Night Lights, cameraman Thom Owens, an NFL Films veteran since 1988, supervised all the Graf’s second-unit camerawork for the 100 plays he staged for the film. While maintaining the look established by the film’s director of photography, Tobias Schliessler (who re-teamed with Berg on the film after *The Rundown*), Owens cites his mandate as ‘capturing the action in the moment, which means not only covering the plays, but telling the story.

“The coaches draw up the plays, then the players spend weeks learning and perfecting them before they provide them to me,” Owens says about how he uses his computer to formulate his own game plan. “I then put them into a program in which I superimposed on the plays my camera positions, with notes to cameramen, that translate into the logistical aspects for executing the job—what lenses, what frame rates, what coverage styles, what camera support system, personnel, camera movement, et cetera—that need to be ready for shooting.”

Owens illustrates his contributions by citing one of the film’s key football and dramatic moments in the story when star running back Boobie Miles suffers his life-altering injury.

“Boobie is the hero up until this moment when he takes a pitch out, heads to his right, then changes direction and takes a brutal hit from two or three defenders at once,” Owens details. “And a knee is injured. So we as cameramen obviously needed to cover the play in its basic sense. But we also needed to tell that story of great expectations dashed and a whole team shocked at the possible loss of their number one guy. So it’s more than just covering the ball, making the highlight. It does tell the story of a tragic moment for the Permian Panthers and whether they can overcome this loss.”

When Permian completed the 1988 season on the first Friday night in November, they had an identical district record (5-1) with two of their area rivals—Midland High Bulldogs and the Midland-Lee Rebels (who had beaten the Panthers earlier that season). The league’s rules did

not mandate playoff games to determine which two teams were headed into the state playoffs' the flip of three coins did. And it really happened at a truck stop diner called The Convoy on the outskirts of Odessa.

After scouting more than 40 Odessa and Austin sites in which to stage the nail-biting sequence, Berg, with the help of veteran Texas location manager Robbie Friedmann, settled on a barbecue joint 20 miles south of the Texas capital called the Southside Market.

“It was a very odd scene, almost surreal,” Thornton recalls after recreating the most melodramatic moment of that season. “To have football coaches meet at a truck stop to toss a coin to determine who gets into the playoffs. That obsession with football in Texas all culminated right there in that diner.”

“There was a ton on the line for Gaines,” the author adds. “If he had not gotten into the playoffs with the type of team that he had, it would have been the second year out of three, and I think they would have fired him. Someone once said, ‘There was no job with less security than a Texas high school football coach.’ And I think that’s true.”

With the coin tipping his way, Gaines’ true test still laid ahead—the 1988 State Championship game against the Dallas Carter Cowboys, and all-black high school and always one of Texas’ most fearsome rivals. For dramatic purposes, Berg changed the actual semi-final game against Dallas Carter to the championship finals and moved the location in the script from Texas Stadium (home of the University of Texas Longhorns) to the Houston Astrodome, former home of the Houston Astros and the NFL’s defunct franchise, the Oilers.

While the 62,000-seat ‘Dome (which opened in 1965 as the Harris Domed Stadium) houses much history not only for the state of Texas, but also for American sports, it also harbored some poignant memories for the film’s stars.

“There was a lot of history in both places, Ratliff and the Astrodome,” McGraw observes. “When you went down on the Ratliff field and stated going through your lines and doing your part, it lent a lot of authenticity to your emotions. The astrodome held a certain set of emotions for me as well. As a kid, that’s the first place I saw my father play baseball. Houston was the first town where I ever met my father, when I was 11-years-old. And the first ‘pro’ anything I’d ever seen was town hours after I met my father for the first time, walking into the Astrodome, watching him play baseball. So that had a whole set of emotions for me that helped my character and helped me try to find the energy that I needed to play the character.

In addition to the reverence felt by many as they entered the “Dome every day for almost two weeks, there were also the emotions established by director Berg in the staging of the climatic championship game.

At the very end of the game,” co-star Lucas Black relates, “Mike Winchell stands there, realizing he gave it his all, played his hardest. He kind of grows up a lot right there in that moment. The coach taught him a lot about football and a lot about life, and it took Winchell the entire season to realize those things.”

“The real game was played in Texas Stadium at the University of Texas in Austin,” Bissinger confirms as he celebrated the film’s early April wrap alongside his blood relative at the ‘Dome—Berg had cast Bissinger as an extra in a brief sequence as the Odessa boosters cheer on their team from a private skybox. “I had never been in the Astrodome. But it’s an appropriate setting because there was Texas high school championship games played in the Astrodome.”

Author Bissinger first visited his cousin’s set back in Austin, where “it brought back goose bumps seeing those letter jackets.” (He chose not to return to Odessa to observe the football action: “I felt my presence would distract from the film.” The author later visited Odessa again and shared his observations, 16 years after the beginning of that infamous 1988 season, in *Sports Illustrated*.)

Friday Night Lights commenced production on February 2, 2004, in Austin, Texas, and concluded filming on April 8, 2004, at Texas’ famous Houston Astrodome. The 45-day schedule shot entirely on location in Texas, including three weeks at Odessa’s Ratliff Stadium.

When filming concluded in the early evening hours of April 8, Berg explained what he tried to achieve on-screen after first reading his cousin’s book some 14 years before: “The biggest pressure I felt was to all the families and coaches I got to know really well. I tried to make a movie that presents their world in a real and fair manner. There were a lot of masters that I had to please—first and foremost, my cousin, whom I respect very much. He’s going to be the first pair of eyes I have to face when those lights come up after the first screening. I’ve thought about that all the time. I just wanted to make a movie that Buzzy could be proud of.”

Trivia for *Friday Night Lights* (2004)

- To gather research, producers visited real high school football games in Texas during the fall of 2003.
- Frustrated with the authenticity of some actors playing assistant coaches, director Peter Berg turned to actual Permian High School coaches to deliver some lines during game sequences.
- Live-action game sequences from the 2003 Permian High School football season are interspersed throughout the film. Director Peter Berg matched the uniforms and on-field jersey numbers for acted sequences so that the live clips would blend. Game sequences were shot on location at Ratliff Stadium in Odessa and the Astrodome in Houston.
- Texan experimental post-rock band "Explosions in the Sky" scored the movie. The producer used small pieces of older songs by Explosions in the Sky as placeholders, but eventually grew so fond of the pieces that he licensed them along with the original score produced by the band.
- Buzz Bissinger, who wrote the book on which the movie is based, and director and co-writer Peter Berg are cousins.
- The real Boobie Miles can be seen standing next to Boobie Miles (Luke) several times throughout the film. He is wearing a black Permian jacket and hat.
- In reality, the 1988 Permian High School Panthers lost to Dallas-Carter in the state semi-finals, not the state finals. Carter did go on to win the state championship, but was later

- forced to forfeit its entire season when it was discovered that an academically ineligible player had been allowed to play after his grades were changed.
- Garrett Hedlund gained an additional 20 lbs for this movie on top of the 30 lbs that he had gained for "Troy". He was up to 200 lbs when he'd usually been 145.
 - Neither Derek Luke nor Lee Thompson Young had ever played football before.
 - Even though Dallas Carter won the title over Converse Judson High School (not Permian who lost to Carter in the semifinal in real life), controversy followed when it was discovered that Carter violated UIL rules when they fielded an ineligible player during their playoff run. Carter wound up forfeiting their title. Officially, Converse Judson is recognized as the state champions of 1988.
 - Derek Luke, whom played high school player Boobie Miles, was actually 30 years old during filming. In the movie, he is portrayed as a teenager.
 - There are only two title cards at the beginning of the movie. The first is "The following story is based on the 1988 West Texas football season." The second is the movie title. The cast and crew are not shown until the end of the movie.
 - Richard Linklater was attached to this project before 'Peter Berg' but it was scraped due to budget difficulties.
 - Alan J. Pakula was originally set to direct this film before his death.

Goofs for *Friday Night Lights* (2004)

- Anachronisms: During one shot of the scoreboards, an advertisement for Bank of America is shown. The logo featured was not in use in the 1980's.
- Anachronisms: The artificial turf used in the scenes at Permian high was not in use in 1988. Fieldturf, a surface which uses a mixture of sand and ground rubber, wasn't in use until 2001.
- Anachronisms: Toward the beginning of the movie, a Dodge Durango is seen parked on the street in Odessa. This movie is set in 1988; Dodge did not begin making the Durango until 1997.
- Anachronisms: Numerous players in the movie were seen wearing Under Armour accessories. Under Armour did not appear until 1997.
- Continuity: In the first half of the state championship game, quarterback Winchell is seen being tackled with a large bloodstain on his jersey, and in subsequent shots the stain is removed. He later gets the injury that results in the stain during the last play of the first half.
- Anachronisms: In one of the first games, a Permian opponent is seen wearing a Riddell Revolution football helmet, a design that was not introduced until 2002.
- Anachronisms: At the high school party, a bag of Lay's potato chips is clearly shown. The design of that bag and the Lay's logo is post-2000.
- Anachronisms: In the film the players are wearing Oakley visors for their helmets. These exact visors weren't around until the late-1990s.
- Anachronisms: The drums each high school's band used were what are called "free floating" drums. These keep the top head stretched over a separate metal hoop, away from the wood shell. They were designed when bands started using Kevlar drum heads which had to be stretched so tightly they were literally crushing the wood shells. These were not invented and used popularly until the mid-1990s.

- Continuity: When Boobie Miles is having his MRI explained to him, he angrily grabs it off the display. But it's back on there a few seconds later, and then it's gone yet again.
- Continuity: When Permian takes the field at the Astrodome, only a handful of the players' jerseys have names on the back. However, during the halftime locker room speech, all the players have their last names on the back of their jerseys.
- Anachronisms: The Dial-a-Down down markers used in the football games were not in use in 1988.
- Anachronisms: At the beginning of the film as Mike is going over plays with his mother a prescription bottle is briefly shown with a fill date of December, 2003 yet the movie is set in 1988.
- Miscellaneous: At one point, a player is seen wearing a Revolution model helmet. These did not debut until the early 2000s. It was not around in 1988.
- Errors made by characters (possibly deliberate errors by the filmmakers): In the State Championship game, when one of the Permian "Mojo" Panther players makes an interception the commentator says "He returns it inside the Mojo 5." The "Mojo 5" would have actually been the opposite side of the field. He should have said inside the Carter 5.
- Crew or equipment visible: As Boobie enters his Uncle's car, after saying goodbye to the team, you can see the transmitter and cable for his wireless microphone attached to his belt at his back.
- Audio/visual unsynchronized: During the Midland Lee game, the game announcer in the Peach seat (Jeffrey Gibbs) can be seen talking out of sequence with the audio.
- Continuity: When Booby Miles is cleaning out his locker, his knee brace is on his left leg in the first part of the scene, and then it is on his right leg in the middle of the scene, then switches back to his left leg at the end of the scene.

Opening Weekend: \$20,269,025, USA, 10 October 2004, 2,667 Screens

Focusing on the religion that is Texas high-school football, *Friday Night Lights* tells the story of the 1988 Odessa Permian High Panthers. The town of Odessa is in financial trouble, and its inhabitants live vicariously through their football team, led by their dynamic coach (Billy Bob Thornton).

Notes on the town's reaction to the Film and where the players are today.

October 30, 1998

Wounds still tender, Coaches: Author painted an inaccurate picture

By *Chris Turner Odessa American*

The sorrow still lingers in melancholy tones; the hurt still apparent.

It was supposed to be a joyous time in Odessa, one where all the virtues and morality of a town defined by its beliefs was laid out for the entire world to see. It was supposed to be a time when a big-time football team from small-town America became the "Hoosiers" of the gridiron.

It sounded like such a good idea at the time.

Ten years later, the fallout from the bestselling book "*Friday Night Lights*" by H.G. "Buzz" Bissinger still strikes a bitter tone for many of those involved. Time heals many wounds, they say, but the clock hasn't swept away the feelings of betrayal." It's just a cross we had to bear," said Gary Gaines, who coached the 1988 Permian High School Panthers and now is head coach at San Angelo Central. "I think (Bissinger) came under the pretense of doing something and then did something totally different.

Gaines said that Bissinger told him several times that he wanted the book to be like the movie "Hoosiers."

"We told him no initially, but he came down to visit and talked to several people, and I guess we just consented. We gave him the freedom to come and go as he wanted to, so I feel a sense of betrayal. It takes all kinds of people to make the world go 'round, but he's got to live with it."

Gaines said he has never read the book and has no interest to do so. "My wife read it, so I know the basics of what it entailed," he said.

The fallout from the book put Gaines in the middle of a firestorm of controversy 10 years ago. At the heart of the conflict were sweeping accusations of racial bias. It's those allegations that seem to have left the deepest scars on Gaines.

"The racial remarks he implied were the furthest thing from the truth," Gaines said. "It's just one of those deals where you can drag up dirt everywhere if that's what you choose to do. That's what he chose to do."

"I felt like the racial bias and racial prejudice that Buzz emphasized did exist in Odessa, but it didn't exist in the Permian Field house," said Permian head coach Randy Mayes, an assistant in 1988. "It exists in places like Boston and New York, too, but it didn't exist under the Gary Gaines regime or the Tam Hollingshead regime or my regime or John's (Wilkins) regime. Athletics is the way life should be as far as race is concerned."

"(Racism) would not have been allowed to exist under Gary or anyone on this staff," Mayes said. "With Tam coaching kids like Lloyd Hill and Robert Brown, me coaching Ivory Christian and Mike Belew coaching James Miles, heck, you can ask those kids. Danny Servance and Greg Anderson (former Permian greats from the mid-1980s, both of whom are black) were asked their opinion of the book, and you've seen that picture on Danny's desk."

In that picture, Servance and Anderson are standing in their practice uniforms at Baylor University's Floyd Casey Stadium. The two are holding a copy of the book with one hand and giving a thumbs-down with the other.

Although current and former coaches are still upset by the book-- it's hard to detect any ill will from the true stars of the book-- the players.

Bissinger shined the spotlight on six players in particular-- running back James "Boobie" Miles, quarterback Mike Winchell, middle linebacker Ivory Christian, tight end Brian Chavez, offensive

tackle Jerrod McDougal and running back Don Billingsley-- and none in that group harbors much, if any, resentment.

"I liked the book; I really enjoyed reading it," said Chavez, now a lawyer in Odessa. "I thought what Buzz wrote, as far as the aspects that involved me and my teammates, were as true to life as it could have been."

"I thought Buzz painted a pretty good picture of it all," said Christian. "He said a lot of things that people didn't want to get out or want other people to know. I thought he did a pretty good job."

Christian-- one of two black players, along with Miles, to be featured by Bissinger-- was somewhat reluctant to rehash the past. Having your vices highlighted in print tend to leave you gun shy, but the rest of Christian's former teammates were eager to relive, if not explain, the past.

"As far as I know, I never could see a lie in it," McDougal said. "But the thing is, Bissinger had access to places we didn't. He was with the coaches behind closed doors, so as far as a lot of the controversial stuff goes; (the players) were in no position to dispute it.

"I think (racism) was just out of the environment. (Bissinger) had seen Ivory and I or Boobie and I cut up with each other and use abusive language-- both ways. But we saw each other as equals, and that's the way we all felt. I think (Bissinger) thought there was real hostility there and there wasn't. We were all brothers, and there are things you can say to a brother that you can't say to people on the streets."

Perhaps the betrayal felt by those involved stems from more than false accusations. Perhaps the bitterness comes from the fact that a town's moment in the sun suddenly became a moment of constant justification.

"I thought it was real factual-- probably too much truth for most people in Odessa-- but I think the guy came in under false pretenses," said Billingsley, known as somewhat of a hellraiser in high school. "He said it would be another Hoosiers,' but he ended up focusing on things that sell books. I think he focused on the negative aspects and didn't focus much on the positives. I think there were much more positive things, especially in that program.

"Everyone has prejudices, and they express those when they don't think they'll be quoted. I don't think any people would have said the things they did if they weren't comfortable with Buzz when he was asking those questions. I don't know if there was real hostility. I think there were different expectations of different people-- black, white or otherwise. But on the field or in the locker room or in the streets, teammates were teammates. I had my share of quotes in there that I wish I could take back, but I loved every one of my teammates."

That is the main theme for most of the players 10 years later. Behind the layers of controversy and levels of contempt, a uniform blanket of admiration still covers the '88 Panthers. But that doesn't make it any easier to relive the past.

"Every now and then somebody will come up and say, I heard you went to Permian,' and you have to go through it all again," Winchell said. "It made Odessa look bad-- it really did. You can go to every town in the U.S. -- anywhere-- and find the things (Bissinger) found in Odessa. That's all over the place.

"I'm sure there was some of that stuff quoted by some people, but I wasn't always there, so I don't know. People always want to talk about the book, but I don't care. That was a long time ago."

October 30, 1999

ECISD academic performance rosier in 1998

By Susan Serrano, Odessa American

The picture of academic performance at Permian High School, as painted in H.G. "Buzz" Bissinger's book "*Friday Night Lights*," was not a rosy one in 1988.

In the book, teachers lamented that athletics, not academics, topped the list of school budget priorities, football players were allowed to drift through high school, taking the easiest courses, and student test scores lagged woefully behind national averages.

School officials offer differing opinions on Bissinger's account and the impact his book had on priorities of the Ector County Independent School District.

Some say the portrayal might have played a role in the development of programs designed to improve academic programs throughout the district. Others concede problems existed 10 years ago, but say Bissinger was wrong to finger football as the root of the school's academic woes. Others doubt things were ever as bad as they were portrayed.

All in the past

"We've changed an awful lot," said Chuck Hornung, ECISD's public information officer, who has worked for the district since 1986. "There's a lot more emphasis on academics. We're not the same district that's portrayed in that book."

Although Hornung said he doesn't think the book was "a definitive study of an era," he does believe the book alerted some people there was a need for improvement.

"I think for some people it was a wake-up call. I think the community kind of reassessed itself. I don't think the community of today would necessarily identify with the community then," he said.

"I think once you get beyond the initial condemnation I think we began to look at ourselves as others might see us," Hornung added. "I think you see a lot of what's happened in this town is because we looked at ourselves objectively."

In the 10 years since Bissinger came to Odessa to gather material for his popular book, the district has developed a stronger academic curriculum and better social services programs to

improve student test scores, increase the number of college-bound students and reduce the dropout rate, Hornung said.

School Board Member Floy Hinson was an ECISD administrator the year Bissinger spent in Odessa. He also was a teacher at Permian in 1972 when the school's football team won a state championship.

"I knew the teachers (quoted in *Friday Night Lights*) and there were many fine teachers there," Hinson recalled. "Did football reign? Absolutely. And it did with the whole-hearted cooperation of the community. For a long time (athletics) was the focal point."

Athletics, however, has spent and made a lot of money for ECISD, Hinson said. "The need, of course is balance."

When asked his opinion of the book, Hinson said: "I understand the hurt feelings of people here. I also saw what he was trying to say and point out."

Nobody's "whipping boy"

Others took a less generous view of *Friday Night Lights* and its author.

ECISD Board President Tommy Salmon visited with Bissinger while he was in Odessa. "I gave him the positive (information about Odessa and ECISD). That's the way I felt," said Salmon who was not quoted in the book.

Salmon said he's only "skipped through" Bissinger's 357-page book. "I don't have any proof, myself, that what he wrote was factual," he said.

Bissinger made the football team the "whipping boy" for Permian's academic woes, said Alyce Lambeth, a retired Permian teacher who said she was interviewed, but not quoted, by Bissinger. A variety of social and economic factors, as well as an overall lowering of academic standards, were "100 times" greater factors in the school's academic difficulties than football, Lambeth contended.

"I feel (*Friday Night Lights*) was slanted to the degree it gave a very inaccurate picture." Lambeth also disagreed with Bissinger's assessment of race relations. "I never agreed that Permian was racist not overtly so."

The former journalism teacher attracted media notice the year after Bissinger's book was published when her yearbook staff surveyed 200 Permian juniors regarding how often they heard the word "nigger." The controversial survey, which Lambeth said was only a small "featurette" in the school yearbook, concluded Permian wasn't racist, she added.

"(Bissinger) tried to lure me into criticizing the school," Lambeth said, recalling her visits with the author. Lambeth said she warned others that the author's "antennae are always out."

School Board Member Phil Fouche said that when he travels, he often encounters people who identify Odessa and his high school alma mater with "Friday Night Lights."

"I guess I get defensive," Fouche said. "I love this community. I tell them education is No. 1-- not athletics."

What's the score?

Bissinger's book described a school where students-- particularly girls-- performed poorly, compared to their national counterparts, on national college entrance exams.

Today's test scores indicate mixed results.

Permian produced only one National Merit semifinalist in the 1988-1989 school year, according to Bissinger's book.

Students qualify for National Merit recognition based on their PSAT scores.

One Permian student earned National Merit finalist status during the 1997-98 school year. The school also produced one Hispanic National Merit scholar and seven commended scholars this past year.

The PSAT scores of National Merit finalists are generally among the top 1 percent in the nation. Test scores of other recognized scholars typically rank in the top 5 percent nationwide.

In 1988-89, Permian boys who took the SAT test received a combined score that was 19 points below the national average for boys.

In 1997, the SAT math scores of Permian boys was even with the national for all test-takers. Their verbal test scores lagged seven points behind the national average.

Bissinger's book also said the Permian girls scored 35 points below the national average for girls. In 1997, the SAT math scores for Permian girls were 33 points behind the national average for all test-takers. Their verbal score lagged 8 points behind the national average.

The student's verbal test results are an improvement compared to the Permian test-takers of 1992, when campus scores on the verbal test were 26 points below the national average. Campuswide, in 1997, Permian High schoolers scored eight points below the national average on the verbal SAT.

Campuswide SAT math scores, however, lagged 19 points below the national average in 1997, compared to only 12 points in 1992.

The school district has increased the number of female test-takers since the 1988-89 school year when, according to "Friday Night Lights," only 132 ECISD girls took the test. In 1997, female test-takers out-numbered males-- the district reported 224 took the SAT in 1997, compared to 176 boys.

Permian students are performing above average on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test, said Permian Principal Brian Rosson. "Our TAAS scores are above the state average in all three areas."

The football team also is performing well academically, with an 88 percent grade average last year.

"A great number of these students are in the National Honor Society and taking academically challenging courses," Rosson added.

Rosson, who was a Bowie Junior High School history teacher when Bissinger researched the school, said he waited until he came to Permian as an assistant principal in 1995 before he read the book.

"What really got me about the book is he made it sound like kids who are in football could basically leave class at will and skip class ... and still come out with a passing grade," Rosson said.

Rosson said he doubts such things would have been allowed. "If any of that did happen, it was blown out of proportion," he said. "We don't worry about it (today), because it's not a problem. I see good teaching and I see learning taking place."

Find the money

The school district's budgeting priorities also were scrutinized by Bissinger's account. In 1988-89, according to the book, the district spent \$6,750 on boy's medical supplies at Permian. The district budgeted only \$5,040 for English department teaching materials at the school that year.

This year's budget is slightly different. The school district will spend \$7,000 for English teaching materials, compared to \$6,550 for medical supplies for Permian boy's athletics.

However, the dramatic differences in pay for teachers and coaches Bissinger described still exist.

Head football coaches make \$69,000 per year and are furnished a car valued at about \$300 per month.

A classroom teacher with 20 years of experience and a master's degree makes \$37,820 per year.

Bissinger also made frequent mention in his book of the football team's chartering jet planes to games.

ECISD still pays the expenses of these chartered flights. In 1997, the Odessa High School Bronchos flew to Dallas for its state football quarterfinals playoff game at a cost of \$17,700, according to school records.

The district's share of ticket sales at the game, however, totaled \$26,067, said Bill Goodman, ECISD Deputy Superintendent for Business Operations. "Athletics kind of pays its way." (Thus ticket sales do pay for the flights.)

Goodman said he can understand coaches' desire to charter flights.

"When you (consider) the whole thing that maybe this would happen to us once every four years it's not a lot in the long run. Why not give the players a chance to arrive fresh (and) not miss school?"

The district has made a financial commitment to improving instruction, school officials say. "We're spending an awful lot on instruction," Goodman said, pointing out the district spent a combined total of \$5 million at Odessa and Permian high schools last year to implement technology upgrades.

The district has also hired consultants to develop changes in its math, English and science instructional programs, and a curriculum enrichment specialist has been hired at each school campus, Goodman said.

These changes were implemented following a curriculum audit report, issued last spring, which criticized the district for an overemphasis on the TAAS test, curriculum inconsistencies linked to site-based management and poor curriculum planning.

ECISD hired an outside firm to conduct the study last year. At the time, the district was one of only 13 school districts in the state to have such a comprehensive study of their curriculum. At the last board meeting, the school board approved a new policy that will require students in advanced and honors courses to meet the same "no-pass, no-play" academic standards for participation in extra-curricular activities as students in regular classes. Previously, students could receive waivers for honors and advanced classes if their grades in these classes affected extra-curricular eligibility.

The policy serves as an example that the district is "really meaning what we've been saying," Hornung prior to the board's Aug. 18 vote. "We want academics first."

There also has been "a movement to be fairer in girls and women's athletics," Hinson said, explaining the district has made recent changes as part of Title IX, a federal law mandating equal athletic programs for girls and boys.

The recently constructed Ratliff Stadium softball and soccer complex cost the district \$1.1 million. Three junior high school gyms have been built during the past four years-- each at a cost of \$1 million-- to meet Title IX requirements.

"Our No. 1 concern is to educate everybody," Fouche said.

1997 SAT I Report for Permian High

Verbal Math Natl. Avg.

Males 498 511 511 for

Female 497 478 all students

October 30, 1998

Book's impact remains part of a community

By Ken Brodnax, *Odessa American*

As difficult as it may seem to grasp, it's been 10 years since the book "Friday Night Lights" turned Odessa on its ear.

And in that decade, it could be argued that the community and at least some of the people have gained a little insight.

Oh sure, a lot of folks still feel that Buzz Bissinger rode into town on a mountain of promises and proceeded to stab a lot of people in the back. The book that he promised, some say, was nothing like the bestseller that cast Odessa in a less-than-positive light.

But such critics are looking at this from a non-professional viewpoint. Bissinger is a reporter who could not in any stretch of the imagination promise to chronicle only the positive aspects and overlook the many warts that were right there for all to see.

If he did commit a moral crime, it would have been the pre-conceived notions that he brought to town. But that's only natural. You're a product of your environment and the author was entering an entirely different climate.

So he probably misjudged a few political and social winds. And he very likely didn't understand the forthright and honest (to the point of being brutal and sometimes embarrassing) views of the Odessa people.

And so the result was a not-so-flattering volume that gave Odessans and West Texans a peek at how outsiders view them.

The book also held a mirror in front of the Permian football fans and gave many of them quite a shock.

To say that Mojo boosters tend to twist their Friday night escapism into a sort of manic fanaticism is an understatement. Permian supporters are nothing if not rabid.

And so Bissinger displayed the excesses for all to see. When it showed up in print, it looked worse than it did in mere practice.

What's more, the author happened upon a situation on the Panther team that was unfortunate. The focus of the book became Booby Miles, a star running back who got shoved into the background when he suffered an injury.

Bissinger seized upon Miles as a victim of racism. But he didn't have the historical perspective to understand that the Permian team was trained to operate as an army. If one soldier goes down,

others are expected to step in place. And the injured troop takes a spot in the support ranks. It's happened hundreds of times through the years, but the forgotten man had never become the focus of a book. And Miles sulked instead of joining the support forces.

But the years have a way of adding perspective to the whole experience.

Bissinger's book changed the way things are done in the world of Permian football, but not in largely measurable ways.

While football players always will be accorded some status for their exploits, they aren't treated as "godly" as they were a decade ago. Bissinger may have laid on the role of Pepettes as indentured servants to the players at little thick, but that whole scene has changed considerably, .likely because of the way the whole arrangement was portrayed.

Around the city, high school football remains an obsession, but perhaps with a little more perspective than when Bissinger came to town. Last season's reversal of roles-- in which Permian suffered the setbacks and Odessa High reveled in the spoils of victory-- likely would have been a lot more tumultous and traumatic if it had happened in the pre-Bissinger era.

This is not to say that "Friday Night Lights" is a reason for nostalgia. Nor is it to say that it somehow placed a shadow on the community that never will vanish.

The book was a bit like medicine. Perhaps it was a bit bitter to the taste, and it probably had some bad side effects that were hard to shake. But the dose also healed a few ills.

In short, "Friday Night Lights" caused at least some Odessans to look inward and decide to explore ways to correct some of the impressions, whether they were false or merely a result of not being familiar with the local landscape.

The true impact, of course, is measured by the fact that people are still talking about the book 10 years after the fact.

October 30, 1998

Communtiy Reactions -- 10 years later

Odessa American

The Rev. J. W. Hanson

"Race relations haven't changed in Odessa and the reason the book caught so much flak was because people didn't want to own up to the fact that that is how they feel. Maybe if there had been some acknowledgements, maybe there would have been a chance for change."

As for the book, Hanson said "I spoke what I felt. I didn't say anything I didn't want printed."

Vern Foreman

"People write books to sell and he wrote a book and it sold. The book didn't mean diddley squat to me. He came to town to write a book and he wrote what he wanted."

Foreman said he still hasn't read the whole book because "that kind of junk doesn't appeal to me."

"I'm not sure if it was accurate to begin with, so it's hard to comment on the book."

Vickie Gomez

"Buzz revealed parts of the community that some people didn't want to hear and that made people uncomfortable, but the fact remains that it was true to life."

"I think sometimes negative things happen to make us become a little better and I think we learned from this experience," Gomez said.

"I think the same thing could have been written about Midland and Midland Lee, but unfortunately, Midland had Jessica McClure and we had Friday Night Lights," Gomez said. "It was two ends of the spectrum."

Gomez said she thinks people have "mellowed" over the years and are making attempts to get along. The fact Mike Wallace from 60 Minutes showed up in Odessa "jolted the community." Gomez said last year's OHS win over PHS also proved some things.

"It proved Odessa High winning a game wasn't going to be the end of Odessa," Gomez said. "It didn't tear up the city. It was beautiful to see that people were happy to see Odessa High actually win."

LaRue Moore

"He quoted me accurately and most of the people with whom I spoke about my part in the book had nice things to say."

"I enjoyed reading the book and I thought that if there was something to learn from it, than let's take it and improve," Moore said. "I thought of the book as a comment on our culture."

"One of the nice results from the book was hearing from former students from all over the United States," Moore said. "It was nice to be connected to students I hadn't spoken to in some time."

"I have no idea what went on in the field house, but I always found the coaches to be supportive and genuinely concerned about the students," Moore said. "I had no problems with them personally, but I had a problem with the disparity in salaries, but it will probably always be that way."

Moore took an early retirement in 1994.

Bob Rutherford

"I never did read the book, I was of the opinion that there wasn't anything in it that I would be interested in."

"I never saw the (racial discrimination) situations that Bissinger talked about," Rutherford said.

Rutherford said that he's the guy who found Bissinger a house to lease during his stay in Odessa and he also introduced him to residents.

"I was quoted accurately," Rutherford said. "(But), if I knew then, what I know now, I wouldn't have been as outgoing toward him. He just didn't treat the Permian football program appropriately."

"The whole book really had a negative slant toward the Permian program," Rutherford said.

Dr. Daniel Justis

"I talked to him for four or five hours and he misquoted everything I said."

"The book put such a bad light on Odessa, I don't care to bring it back up," Justis said. "I'd rather forget the whole thing, personally."

Justis on race relations-- "I don't think it was bad back then, it just got blown out of proportion. I told him it was the inner person that counts, but he chose not to write it that way."

"I think Odessa and Permian are on better footing now, there are athletes on both sides of town now, so I'm happy for the town," Justis said. "Permian's not centered on football anymore and that's a good thing."

The Rev. Jerry Thorpe

"I read the parts of the book that were about me and it was nowhere close to being accurate. If that was an example of his work, I didn't want to read the rest of it because I couldn't trust it to be accurate."

"I thought he was writing a Hoosiers--type book and it didn't turn out that way."

"He didn't quote me accurately so I assumed he didn't quote the others accurately either."

Odessa today differs from book

By Keely Coghlan, Odessa American

Odessa was in the depths of the oil slump, abandoned rigs and pipe rusting in the yards of shuttered companies.

Not much was bright. Not the price of oil or the price of a home. The once hectic pace of the early 80s, when oil seemed destined to hit the \$40-a-barrel mark before the end of the decade, was gone.

Against it all, the lights of Ratliff Stadium shone with a brilliance that enabled much of the town to forget its work-day woes every Friday night. Much of this was chronicled in the book "Friday Night Lights."

Ten years later, the economy is brighter, although the current oil slump still makes businessmen uneasy.

Recent layoffs, including those at an regional phone service office, are based 'totally on corporate decisions based on market changes unrelated to the oil industry," said Chamber of Commerce CEO Mike George. "Their closing is not a factor of a weak local economy."

The local business community "is running much leaner with less debt than the 1970s or early 80s," George said. "Even in the slowdowns, the entrepreneurs are leaner and know how to operate more efficiently."

Odessa's economy-- and that of most of the Permian Basin-- is still tied to oil, though not as much as before, said Mayor Mike Atkins.

All parts of the community are enjoying the better economy, said former ECISD school board member Vickie Gomez.

"No one ethnic group has a monopoly on excellence. All members of the community are raising their standards of living," Gomez said. "We have made a lot of progress. It's got to get better. It's not getting worse."

The racial divide has eased-- but has not been erased, say community members.

Atkins, who called the book "an enjoyable read" that nonetheless gave "a distorted view of the community," said the racial issues in Odessa are no different than elsewhere in the nation. But he's proud of the local reaction to a recent demonstration at the courthouse by the Ku Klux Klan.

"Not that many people bothered to go out there," Atkins said. "Those that did told them they weren't wanted here."

Others saw the book as a necessary "wake-up call."

"As unpleasant and as much as people were in denial, the book did do some good," said Gomez. The issue of desegregation is important because of the end goal, Gomez said. "You have to maintain high standards for every school and child."

"Our priorities are still mixed up," Gomez said, referring to the emphasis on sports over academics.

A previous report on the required TAAS test showed abysmal results for minority students-- "and that's when people should be up in arms," Gomez said. "The education of students, that's our business."

Public attitudes have changed, said Odessa City Councilman Javier Joven, who said he recommends "the book" to anyone who wants to know about Odessa and football.

"I tell people that you want to understand Odessa and Odessa football, read the book. We do put an overemphasis on football. I think that book made people look at themselves and want to change.

"But I don't think that version of Odessa is there anymore. For one thing, the streak ended last year," Joven said, referring to Odessa High School's victory over Permian.

He's heard racial remarks made in his presence. And from where he stood in 1988, an outsider looking in, the book was true. "I think that if it weren't true, people would have sued for slander," he said.

But for the most part, "I don't think there is a racial problem anymore," Joven said. Joven said he thinks racial issues, particularly in football, are better.

"My little boy will be playing football in seventh grade," Joven said. "I hope it's better." St. John's Episcopal school coach Regina Woods sees "Friday Night Lights" as a mirror that was uncomfortable for many people.

Chapter five, which discusses racial issues, starts out with a single slang word, offensive to African-Americans.

The chapter is required reading for Woods' three kids.

"From my experience going to Ector High School, I think it was pretty accurate," she said. "I've never been subjected to the racial slurs. Most of those things are done in confidence, surrounded by friends. It's more or less a speech pattern for some people in like surroundings."

The racial slurs Bissinger wrote about are nothing new, Woods said. But other parts of the book "broke my heart."

"It felt like as parents we had let our children down. We had not stood up for their rights. This scared me," she said.

"But to see the statistics about African-Americans in honors classes and football-- our kids were being used as a commodity," she said.

"That was the driving force for me, to see that my children were learning. I do not depend on their report card. I have spent many hours with my kids making sure they learn. These are my kids and I love them. The greatest gift I have is that I have stressed education to my kids." Her three children include a Permian senior who is president of the National Honor Society, a 15-year-old who is in the Advanced Academic Program and a 10-year-old at St. John's.

But desegregation-- at least the way it was implemented in Odessa-- "has hurt African-American students much more than it's helped," Woods said.

"A lot of people don't realize our kids made all the adjustments. We were the ones being bused. We had to learn skills (to fit in). Some kids were ostracized. Imagine being a kid and having to adapt to two different cultures."

She is upset that African-American students don't show up on the graphs on the state's mastery tests.

"Everybody can learn. I refuse to believe African-Americans are inferior mentally to any other race. Because desegregation was done one-way (with minority students being bused to majority-Anglo schools rather than the other way) there has not been better understanding.

"The real test will show up with a new project at Ector Junior High, if they can undo the negative stereotype by bringing in kids from other areas of the city. I'm real excited about the prospect of Ector being made into a magnet school," Woods said.

She hopes the new program will change the stereotypes about south Odessa. "There was great pride in Ector High. I haven't seen that since (the high school) closed. I want to see that pride created again. I want to get the attitude of Mojo mania at Ector. It would make me very happy. Still, football remains the great leveler, Joven said.

"Look at the picture on the front of (Friday Night Lights)," he said. "It has three football players: black, white, Hispanic. But they have no race. You're not Mexican, black or white when you put on the uniform. After you take it off, that's when race comes into play."

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Players make mark despite book's glare

By Chris Turner, Odessa American

When last we heard from the 1988 Permian High School football team, tears flowed and dreams were deflated on the soggy Memorial Stadium turf in Austin.

A 14-9 state semifinal defeat at the hands of the Dallas Carter Cowboys-- a victory later overturned because of Carter's use of an ineligible player-- brought the end to a season of controversy and strife, joy and heartbreak.

Memories of that season remain vivid, if not tarnished-- perhaps due in part to H.G. "Buzz" Bissinger's best-selling book "Friday Night Lights."

Disharmony aside, the Class of '88 has proven its mettle. From the intellectual, bruising tight end; to the scrappy, hell raising running back; to the spirited, emotional offensive tackle; to the wavering, ridiculously talented middle linebacker; to the stoic, gifted quarterback, the Class of '88 has made its mark far away from the glare of the Friday night lights.

"It was a good bunch of kids," said Gary Gaines, the coach of the '88 Panthers. "We had good leadership, and we were real close to probably winning a state championship. That was a

dedicated bunch of guys that pulled together and played really well. I have nothing but good feelings for those guys.

"I always enjoy thinking of those kids, but I don't enjoy talking about the book."

Not many people do, but for the most part, the players have been able to put the past behind them. Some, in fact, harbor no ill will at all, instead content to remember the good times.

"That was one of the funniest times of my life, but it also was one of the scariest and saddest," said Jerrod McDougal, an anchor on an offensive line that paved the way for 4,292 rushing yards, the third-most in school history. "I wouldn't trade that time for anything. Some of those relationships are some of the best I've ever had."

McDougal-- who works for his father's oilfield company and is three semesters from college graduation-- is not unlike a lot of his former teammates, having juggled work and college since graduating from high school.

He also found that football away from Permian isn't quite the same.

"I had the same opportunities that Brian (Chavez) and those guys did," McDougal said. "If I wanted to play football, I could have. I had a little offer to Kilgore Junior College, but I couldn't leave at that time. My grandparents were not in very good shape and I just couldn't leave. I wouldn't have felt good about it. Plus, I was still pretty beat up. I don't think I could have gone through four more years.

"To not play in front of the crowds we played in front of in high school . . . I wouldn't have been happy in front of 50 people. I guess the thrill part of the chase was what was fun."

One by one, each of the '88 Panthers expressed similar sentiment, having discovered that the joy of athletic competition ended once the trip across the graduation stage was complete. Some even tried more than one sport.

"When I got (to Harvard) I was supposed to play football, but the football program was so bad and terrible that I got really discouraged with it," said Chavez.

Chavez was the 1988 PHS valedictorian and a tight end. He graduated cum laude in four years from Harvard and earned a law degree from Texas Tech three years later. "I was worried about getting grades, and the program was so bad that I quit."

Chavez played rugby for three years and was all-conference at the University of Texas during a sabbatical his junior year. "I also went to the Final Four at Harvard."

While Chavez found success and gratification in another sport, Don Billingsley wasn't as lucky. The second-leading rusher behind Chris Comer in '88, Billingsley has made maybe the biggest turnaround from his high school days. Highlighted in the book as a rebellious, combative free-spirit, Billingsley focused his wealth of energy toward his studies and earned a master's degree in counseling in 1995.

But gridiron glory faded upon arrival at the East Central University campus in Ada, Okla. "I played (football) for one year," Billingsley said. "I went out that fall and it was pitiful. It was like playing JV ball."

Billingsley said a knee injury from high school reoccurred when he tore cartilage during the first scrimmage. He sat out during the fall and went halfway through spring ball. "I wasn't having fun anymore. The crowds weren't crowds, and it was more work than anything."

He turned to baseball until he found out he was expected to play during spring break.

"After that I just cruised through school. I've been doing counseling work ever since. It's pretty cool. I like it."

Mike Winchell also found satisfaction in other endeavors, but his came years after his Permian days.

Winchell-- who holds seven Permian passing records, including most career yards, attempts, completions and touchdowns-- tried football for one year at Baylor, but soon discovered what most of his teammates did.

"I walked on for a year and I knew that was it," said Winchell, a land surveyor in Decatur. He said football at Baylor was nothing like it was at Permian. "The only thing they had better was their weight program. I guarantee you they didn't work as hard as we did."

"It was hard to go from Permian, and I'm sure most of the other guys would tell you the same thing. But I saw a lot of great athletes at Baylor. I got knocked on my butt several times by some future All-Pros."

Instead of football at Baylor, Winchell took care of business at Tarleton State in Stephenville. Five years later, he had a degree in marketing.

After making his way to Decatur and a brief stint as a waiter-- "I never would have dreamed that," he said. "I would have thought I'd be a brain surgeon before a waiter."-- Winchell took his talents to the links and the Iron Man Tour.

"The golf course out here is so cheap to join, I just started playing a lot of golf," Winchell said. Winchell said he now gets up early to avoid the heat while surveying and then heads to the golf course.

The only senior on the '88 Panthers to earn a Division I scholarship was Ivory Christian, a remarkable athlete who led the team in tackles.

The former middle linebacker now works for a commercial airline fueling company at the Midland International Airport. He is a semester away from college graduation.

Christian always had other things on his mind besides football. Like the ministry.

Both interests, however, ended soon after graduation and a short time after enrollment at Texas Christian University.

"Right after high school I lost interest in (becoming a minister)," Christian said. "Situations changed that drew me away. Then I lost interest in football and got some injuries I couldn't get over. They still wanted me to start and I couldn't."

A lot has changed since that cool, wet December day in Austin a decade ago, but the will of many of those highlighted in the book has not-- for many of them it has just gone in a different direction.

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Where are they now? *Odessa American*

DON BILLINGSLEY

Second-leading rusher on the team with 801 yards and nine touchdowns.

After graduating from Permian, Billingsley looked at five different colleges in Texas before settling on East Central University in Ada, Okla. He graduated from East Central in 1993 with a degree in public relations, then received his master's degree in counseling from East Central in 1995. He's presently a counselor, having done in-patient/out-patient and day treatment. He currently lives in Blanchard, Okla. and does employee assistance work.

Billingsley played football his freshman year in college but tore cartilage in his knee during the team's first scrimmage. He returned for spring practice but lost interest halfway through and quit. After trying baseball for a month and a half, Billingsley's athletic career ended.

Billingsley plans on getting engaged in the spring. He has never been married and has no children.

BRIAN CHAVEZ

Starting tight end, valedictorian of the senior class.

After graduating from Permian, Chavez went to Harvard University, where he graduated Cum Laude in four years with a bachelor's degree in government. During his junior year, he took a sabbatical to the University of Texas, where he focused on Chicano studies. After graduating from Harvard in 1993, Chavez accepted a full scholarship to the Texas Tech University Law School. He received a general degree in law after three years, passed the bar exam and returned to Odessa to practice law with his father, Tony, and brother, Adrian.

Chavez gave up football after high school, but he took up rugby and became an all-conference player while at UT. He also advanced to the Final Four with Harvard as a junior. He quit rugby as a senior to concentrate on his studies.

Chavez has never been married and has no children.

MIKE WINCHELL

Starting quarterback, threw for 1,938 yards and 24 touchdowns.

After graduating from Permian, Winchell went to Baylor for a year before transferring to Texas Tech. After a semester at Tech, Winchell transferred to Tarleton State University in Stephenville, where he majored in marketing and minored in accounting. He graduated in the spring of 1995 with a bachelor's degree in marketing.

Winchell moved back to Odessa after college and worked for Jones Motor Company. A year later he moved to Decatur to live with his sister and wait tables at Mattie's restaurant. He currently works for an independent surveyor in Decatur, surveying houses and building sites. He also plays golf on the Iron Man Golf Tour, which plays weekly in and around the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Winchell walked onto the Baylor football team as a freshman, but unfulfilled expectations and a lack of interest ended his football career.

Winchell has never been married and has no children.

JERROD McDOUGAL

Starting offensive tackle.

After graduating from Permian, McDougal started working for his father's oilfield company. He was offered a cheerleading scholarship to Odessa College, but he turned it down to work for his father. McDougal enrolled at OC during the second semester of the 1989-90 school year, then enrolled at various industrial schools following that semester. He currently is enrolled at Midland College, where he is three semesters away from graduating with a degree in environmental science with a focus on hydrology.

McDougal has continued to work for his father ever since high school graduation, concentrating on locating drilling sites, environmental safety and cleanup and working with aquifers. McDougal had one offer to play football after high school, but he turned down the offer from Kilgore Junior College. He never played football again.

McDougal has never been married and has no children.

IVORY CHRISTIAN

Starting middle linebacker, leading tackler on the team.

After graduating from Permian, Christian accepted a full scholarship to Texas Christian University. Christian played only a season and a half when injuries and a lack of interest ended his football career. After dropping out of TCU, Christian returned to Odessa and attended Odessa College, where he earned an associate's degree. He has one semester remaining to earn a bachelor's degree.

Christian has worked different jobs since returning to Odessa. He has been at Avion Flight Centre Inc. at the Midland International Airport for the past two years.

Christian has never been married and has no children.

GARY GAINES

Head coach.

After the 1988 season, Gaines led the Panthers to the '89 state championship and the USA Today/ESPN national championship. He accepted an assistant coaching position at Texas Tech University the following year, then left after four years to head the Abilene High School football program. After two years in Abilene, Gaines accepted the head coaching position at San Angelo Central, making him the only head coach to coach at three different schools in District 4-5A. He currently coaches at Central.

RANDY MAYES

Coached linebackers and offensive tackles.

Mayes was promoted to defensive coordinator in 1990 under Tam Hollingshead, and earned another championship ring the following year when the Panthers won their second state championship in three years. He accepted his first head coaching position in Ennis in February of 1992, staying there for two years.

In 1994, Mayes accepted the head coaching position at Permian, a post that he still occupies today.

Mayes led the Panthers to the state semifinals in 1994 and the state championship game in 1995.

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Hoosiers' portrays last-minute victory over incredible odds

By Rick McLaughlin, Odessa American

The controversy stirred in Odessa by "Friday Night Lights" is far removed from the experiences of residents in rural Milan, Ind., whose high school basketball team was the subject of a book and movie, "Hoosiers," that has become a classic of the genre.

Consider this.

In downtown Indianapolis, there is a restaurant with the somewhat unusual name of Bobby's Last Shot.

Flashback to Milan, an otherwise ordinary bedroom community in the southeastern corner of the state, near the meandering Ohio River. The year is 1954. Milan High School, one of the state's smallest, with a senior class of about 50, is in the last game of the state high school basketball championship tournament.

Milan's opponent is a much larger metropolitan school and the state's powerhouse defending champion, Muncie Central High School-- a classic story of David and Goliath.

There are four minutes left on the clock in the fourth period with the score tied at 30-30. Guard Bobby Plump dribbles the ball for little Milan, circling the floor over and over, stalling and killing time, playing for one, last, game-ending shot.

At almost the last second, he crouches, he pumps. The ball arcs through the air amid the din of screaming and crying fans. He scores.

David 32, Goliath 30.

At that moment, Milan wins the game, the 1954 Indiana state basketball championship, state and local school sports fame and public accolades for decades to come.

Oh, the restaurant. Johnny Plump, Bobby Plump's son, named his Indianapolis restaurant, Bobby's Last Shot, in honor of that moment in his father's part in high school basketball history. That's not surprising in Indiana. "Basketball is king here," recalled Don Swisher, superintendent of the Milan Community School District. "It's like football out there."

For Milan, in a state where no attendance classifications separated the largest schools from the smallest in the state tournament-- all competed as equals-- "it was the biggest thing that ever happened around here," said Swisher. "In an era of no class sports, a small school with a graduating class of 50 beat Muncie Central. It really was a very big deal."

Swisher said that what stands out in his mind the most is that "a group of determined people can make history-- in and out of sports. There is a chance for the little guy," said Swisher.

Some things have changed since then. Although Milan's population has increased by only 200 since 1964, the school's boundaries have been enlarged, so its attendance is much larger. And last year Indiana ditched its one-classification basketball tournament and divided the schools into four classes, so a repeat of the David and Goliath scenario isn't even possible.

The town's only industry, a furniture factory, closed down years ago, said Roselyn McKittrick, unofficial local historian of the team's brightest day.

Farming isn't what it used to be and many people work in Cincinnati or cross the Ohio River to go to Lawrenceburg, home of a well-known distillery.

What hasn't changed is the celebrity status of that team and what it did on that night 44 years ago.

Bobby Plump wrote his own book-- "The Last of the Small Town Heroes" only last year. Team members still gather for an annual reunion. Only one, Ron Truitt, has since died.

"The community is still celebrating," said Swisher. "Gene Hackman (who starred in the movie) has made several appearances here and people come from all over to see the trophy and team picture in the foyer of the gymnasium."

High above the town, the water tower is still emblazoned with "1954 state basketball champions" on its white sides.

Downtown there is a virtual museum in The Railroad Inn, a display of pictures and artifacts, including letter jackets of original team members, of that championship year. The display was McKittrick's handiwork when she owned the place.

Nowadays, the team's chronicler owns the Milan Station Antiques and is attempting to acquire an old railroad switching building to make into a proper little museum.

And it's not over yet. The legend lives. Later this year ESPN will televise a rematch between today's teams-- Milan versus Muncie Central-- in the Knightstown gym near Indianapolis, the old gym where the recreated championship game was filmed for "Hoosiers."

October 30, 1998

Friday Night Lights' film version shelved indefinitely

By *Kathy Gilbert, Odessa American*

High-powered movie studios nearly carried the film version of "Friday Night Lights" across the goal line three times during the past decade.

But each time, rising costs and budget disputes forced them to drop back and punt-- leading some to question the future of what "Texas Monthly" calls "the most intriguing Texas high school football film of all."

"It's been a rollercoaster ride," said director Richard Linklater, who tried, and failed, to bring "Friday Night Lights" to the big screen this year.

"It's one of the biggest disappointments I've had," he said. "It's very painful."

After writing a new script, booking a 51-day Odessa shoot, and finding former Odessa high school football players to pose as Permian Panthers, Universal Studios pulled the funding for the film.

Production was shelved, in part, because of an overcrowded field of football films this year, said Tom Copeland, director of the Texas Film Commission.

Instead, Universal backed "Starkers," a Dallas-area comedy about a sports agent turned high school football coach. Paramount and MTV sponsored "Varsity Blues," a "goofy hijinks" film starring Jon Voight that began shooting in Austin in April.

"It was really kind of a dumb Texas high school football film," said Linklater, who was galled to find "Varsity Blues" shooting in his home town.

"It was very painful to me, to know I had at my fingertips a Texas football movie people could really be proud of."

Part of the problem is mounting production costs, said Linklater, who said he could produce "Friday Night Lights" for half the current \$40 million budget.

Another problem is that the studios "picked the wrong guy right out of the gate," when they assigned the film to a New York director, he said.

A high school backup quarterback in Huntsville during the 1970s, Linklater believes he understands the intricacies of Texas high school football better than those who never played the game.

"(The film) had to be made by someone who lived it," he said.

The Austin-based director and head of Detour Film Production said he had wanted to do a period piece from the point of view of the players.

"The movie I had in mind harkened back to the championship team and what it means," he said, "Strictly from the player's viewpoint. A high point in their life. The warrior spirit."

And, as the independent creator of offbeat low-budget movies like "Slacker" and "Dazed and Confused," his style would be a guaranteed non budget-buster.

"If I'd gotten it first, I could have kept the cost down," he said.

As it happened, actor-director Ron Howard of Imagine Entertainment optioned "Friday Night Lights" soon after its 1990 publication, said Copeland.

A pattern then developed under the supervision of Michael Bostick, vice president of Imagine. Money was poured into script writing, location scouting and other preparations.

A 1991 script by David Arron Cohen was supplanted by a 1996 script by Billy Ray, written for producer Brian Grazer, who won an Academy Award for Apollo 13.

Grazer brought in Jon Avnet, who directed "Fried Green Tomatoes," among other notable films, in 1996.

"That's when Avnet flew his whole crew in a Lear jet," remembered Chuck Hornung, public information officer for the Ector County Independent School District.

After years of development, the project was deep-sixed twice by underwriter Universal Pictures (in 1996 and 1997) in favor of more strategically timed projects, explained Copeland.

Production costs soared each time the project was picked back up again.

"As you go along, the actual cost of the project escalates," he said, "Now (Friday Night Lights) is still sitting there with a hefty little price tag on it."

Linklater is skeptical that movie buffs will ever see "Friday Night Lights" on film.

"Anything could happen," he said. "But I really doubt it (will be made)."

Time is working for the book, he said. Because the state's obsession with high school football has relaxed in recent years, "Friday Night Lights" is on its way to being a classic.

"(The book is) pretty timeless," he said. "But I think that kind of fanaticism; it's a thing of the past."

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Author visited with success since year spent in Odessa

By *Susan Serrano, Odessa American*

It's been eight years since "Friday Night Lights" hit the bookstands, sparking a spectrum of emotional reactions from Odessa residents who, for the most part, felt either purged or persecuted by the story of "a town, a team and a dream."

Author H.G. "Buzz" Bissinger says he stands by every word.

"I think the book totally and accurately depicted what was going on," said Bissinger, now a contributing editor for *Vanity Fair* magazine.

In 1988, Bissinger, then a *Philadelphia Inquirer* editor, took a leave of absence to spend the year with the Permian High School football team, gathering material for the book.

"I did the book with no expectation as to how it would do," Bissinger said, explaining he had set out to portray "the glory and the wonder, as well as the tragedy of sports in America."

That portrayal, he says recounting some of the negative aspects he remembers about the community, included a school system with an "out-of-control" emphasis on football. "Permian, I felt, was a school that could have, and should have, been a lot better."

He also has negative memories of the racial slurs he heard here, he said.

But there are good memories as well. "The positive memories are being with the kids I vividly remember the games."

Bissinger said he has fond memories of the town's hard-working residents, watching thunderstorms light up the evening sky and of Gary Gaines-- although the former Permian coach

has not spoken to him since early 1990, he said. His year in Odessa was "the most memorable year I've ever had in my life," Bissinger said.

Although it has been several years since his last visit to Odessa, Bissinger still has friends here, he said, adding that he has stayed in touch with some of the people featured in his book, including James "Boobie" Miles and his uncle L.V. "The roots are still there."

It didn't take long, for example, for Bissinger to learn of the Odessa High School Bronchos' history-making defeat of the Permian Panthers last year. "Within hours, I got several calls from Odessa." "Friday Night Lights" made Bissinger famous and brought national attention to Odessa. "I helped make Odessa famous," he said.

Top universities use the work as a textbook and Bissinger says he still gets between three and five calls per month regarding the publication.

"It had a wonderful impact on my career," Bissinger said, recounting the success of the book, published by Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, which he says still sells about 25,000 copies per year. "It's been a hard act to follow."

His latest book-- "A Prayer for the City: The True Story of a Mayor and Five Heroes in a Race against Time"-- which was released by Random House in January, has been well-received, but has not had nearly the sales of "Friday Night Lights," Bissinger said. The author spent five and a half years on his latest book, during which time Philadelphia Mayor Edward Rendell granted Bissinger total access to his administration.

"A Prayer for the City" is, according to a release from Random House publishers, "a no-holds-barred account of the politics and pressures that a well-intentioned mayor fares in dealing with race, unions, the federal government, self-interest groups and the nonstop absurdities of urban life." The 43-year-old Philadelphia resident is working on a screenplay about a series of murders of homosexuals in Texas. The work-- based on a piece he wrote for Vanity Fair-- focuses on one of the murders, he said.

Although Bissinger says he's "not sure what (Odessans) think of me," he still has fond memories of the time he spent here. "It was a great year of my life. I met people who will always be in my heart. I think about (the people of Odessa) a lot."