

## FILM REVIEWS

shown both leaders, complete with warts, and no one is likely to be swayed one way or the other. But Brittain is not neutral in the debate raging around him. He is afraid of the passions of nationalism and, like Trudeau is concerned with the idea that once it starts, nobody can say in what extremes it will end. His hard-hitting description of Duplessis sums up his attitudes: "Maurice Duplessis ran Québec as a piece of private property. At his peak, he controlled not only the police, but the newspapers, the universities, and the Church itself. He was a narrow, conservative, French Canadian nationalist, and to promote this, he stuffed ballot boxes and broke heads." Lévesque, albeit by democratic means, has been given the "awesome weapons of power." The statue of Duplessis is unveiled and sits in a place of honor in front of the legislature buildings. Quebecers now live under "majority rule with a vengeance."

Much of the fun of watching *The Champions* comes from its use of the old footage. A lot of it is loaded with irony. We see Lévesque in his early career as television commentator hosting the first trans-Canada television hook-up. He introduces "our" Queen Elizabeth who says that "the rising generation clearly shows that, French or English, we all belong to one great Canadian family." In a sequence which was on television in 1964, we see Trudeau, the lowly law professor, interviewing cabinet minister Lévesque on the disorder which his fledgling separatist ideas could create. "We live in a social and political context," said Trudeau, "where the forces of authority have traditionally behaved in a very authoritarian way." A different form of prophecy comes from a 1967 interview with newspaperman Claude Ryan. Lévesque had just committed what then seemed to be political suicide by trying to get the Liberal party to adopt a separatist platform. "He is dead now," said Ryan with a smile "but watch him in five to ten years from now."

With his deft scissors and wry narration, Brittain has made recent Canadian history into some sort of Tolstoyian soap opera. The characters who hold the fate of the country in their hands all seem to have grown

up together, and their lives are intertwined. The politicians and their stars grow and wane but history irrevocably marches on, symbolized and actualized in the figures of these two leaders. "It is not really a battle between the emotional and the rational man. Both minds are brilliant, both souls are passionate and there is a fine rage in each. Both are glad that, at last, it has come to this time of confronta-

tion. They are, in a sense, prisoners of each other. And this will be their final battle."

Ronald Blumer

Note. Part one of this film was shown on CBC television Sunday, Feb. 5th and part two on the following day. The film version of this film will be available from NFB offices in June of this year.

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

### TAKE YOUR MARK

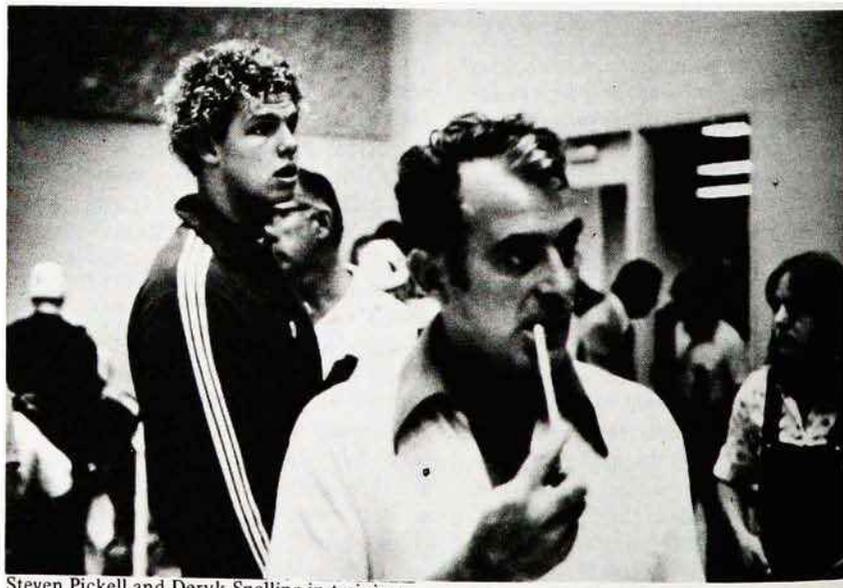
d: Michael Savoie, Peter Shatalow, ph: Michael Savoie, additional ph: Mark Irwin, Ray Burley, ed: Peter Shatalow, ass't camera: Greg Farrow, m: John Mills Cockell, p: Michael Savoie, Peter Shatalow, p.c.: Cedar Films Inc., 1977, dist: Cedar Films Inc., Running time: 25 minutes.

*Take Your Mark* is a documentary on Steven Pickell, a world-ranked Canadian swimmer who is a key part of Canada's swimming plans for the 1980 Olympics.

The film, produced and directed by Michael Savoie and Peter Shatalow, also highlights Deryk Snelling, a former British army physical-training instructor who coached Canada's national swim team at the Munich and Montreal Olympics.

The film's editing, by Shatalow, alternates a judicious selection of fast cuts in the action sequences with interviews which are strong enough in their content to enable the viewer to identify at once with Snelling as the mentor-coach and Pickell as the young athlete. In fact, one spends the rest of the film figuring out what makes each of them tick.

Snelling, whom sports writers have dubbed the Vince Lombardi of swim-



Steven Pickell and Deryk Snelling in training.

ming, produced Britain's top swim team in 1966 and came to Canada in 1967 to coach the Vancouver Dolphins, a swim club which has won the Canadian team title every year since he arrived. In 1976, after conflicts over recreational versus competitive swimming at the Dolphin's home pool, Snelling accepted a coaching position at the Etobicoke Olympium sports complex near Toronto, taking with him several top Dolphins including Steven Pickell.

In the film one observes the recurring features of body language — in particular the messianic fervor of Snelling's intense brown eyes — which exemplify the coach's emotional involvement in his current goal, which is to make the Etobicoke Olympians club the tops in Canada by 1978.

Snelling's approach to coaching is to push carefully selected athletes such as Pickell consistently to the point of physical and mental collapse, in a training program where practice is also broken down into its most essential elements. The outcome of the program will, in one way or another, be evident at the 1980 Olympics.

In Pickell, one observes a similar intense quality of non-verbal expression as he discusses his goals, but in him, one also senses a little more sense of humor and fun.

Among Pickell's sources of enjoyment are the enormous release and pleasure and well-being that occur at the other side of the intense pain of the workouts and time trials which make up Snelling's "break-down, build-up" training regimen. This is a form of training practiced in a variety of sports. "There's a reason I swim," says Pickell, "it's because of the feeling you get after you've swum eight miles, and been in the water two hours. Your whole body aches, every muscle's sore, your arms feel like lead, you can't lift them up again, your legs are like rubber, they can't do a thing. Your lungs can't hold any more air, they can't do a thing, and yet you take another stroke. That's the ultimate feeling in swimming."

There are also passages in the film which make *Take Your Mark* a companion piece to works of literature such as Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* and Michael Murphy's *Golf in the Kingdom* and Jacob Atabet.

In these, sport becomes a metaphor for "things coming together" within a zen-like "right practice" which leads over time to remarkable powers of mind and body and levels of awareness which have connotations for personal growth that are ultimately unrelated to questions of winning or losing.

In one interview, for example, Pickell refers to the uncanny sharpening of perception which results from years of disciplined devotion to the same pursuit. "You can slow it down in your mind," he comments. "The more experienced you are, the more ability you have to slow down the action... and see it in minute detail, and

see the complexities that you've got to have, the thousands of things that have got to come together to make that thing just flow. I think when you do, it just sort of opens you up to what we are potentially capable of doing."

Altogether, *Take Your Mark* is a thoroughly enjoyable film which is as appealing for followers of the Vince Lombardi "win or die" school of sports competition, as it is for proponents of "swimming for swimming's sake", where the ultimate aim is to be involved in play instead of in beating the world.

Jaan Pill



The kids from the Point: sometimes winners.

## THE POINT

d: Robert Duncan, sc: Robert Duncan, ph: Andreas Poulsson, David DeVolpi, Savas Kalogeras, Douglas Kiefer, ed: Les Halman, asst. ed: Sidonie Kerr, sd: Claude Hazanavicius, Richard Nichol, Raymond Marcoux, Jean-Guy Normandin, sd. ed. Bernard Bordeleau, m.d.: Art Phillips, ed. Donald Douglas, Musicians: Gordon Lee, Harold Joyce, exec. p. Roman Kroitor, p: William Weintraub, p.c. National Film Board, col: 16mm, narr: Budd Knapp, running time: 50 minutes, year: 1978.

*"We don't care for all the rest of Canada, All the rest of Canada, All the rest of Canada, We don't care for all the rest of Canada, We're from Point St. Charles."*

*The Point* is a film about the Irish. It is a film which might be called racist but, paradoxically, a film which will be loved and applauded by those who star in it: the poor Irish of the dying industrial underbelly of Montreal — Point St. Charles.

*The Point* is also a film which has caused an enormous amount of con-