

Caddyshack

by Emily Soares | February 27, 2004

One of the rare early-80s comedies to stand the test of decades, **Caddyshack** (1980), like several of its National Lampoon-affiliated brethren of the day - introduced a whole host of favorite comic lines into the American vocabulary. Douglas Kenney, who co-wrote with Harold Ramis and Brian Doyle-Murray, was also responsible for *Animal House* (1978) as well as founding editor of *National Lampoon* magazine. He fell to his death the month after **Caddyshack** was released, when the cliff he was standing on in Kauai, Hawaii, collapsed.

According to Ramis, **Caddyshack** was initially intended to be the story of a group of caddies, but as big names were hired onto the picture, the caddy characters, with the exception of Danny Noonan (Michael O'Keefe) took a backseat. But Ramis also says that at the time, he had in mind a dark comedy about the American Nazi party and Kenney wanted to do a film set in the Himalayas about Tibetan Buddhists fighting the red Chinese - so what can you believe? Though the latter might explain the confusion that production manager Mark Canton felt when the writers came in with a 199-page script. "I had no idea what it was," he admits.

Ramis feels that ultimately the picture is about caddy Danny Noonan's search for a role model. Not an easy search, considering his options. There's Ty Webb (Chevy Chase), the self-involved playboy golfer; stuffy club president Judge Smails (Ted Knight), uncle of clubhouse pin-up Lacey Underall (Cindy Morgan); and the degenerate rabble of the caddy shack. All Danny really wants is a way to earn money to get to college, but that task is complicated by the conflicting advice of those around him. Meanwhile, there's Carl the groundskeeper (Bill Murray) and his zealous hunt of the Bushwood gopher, and boorish new member Al Czervik (Rodney Dangerfield) who wants to turn the exclusive course into a condo development, plus a host of other characters and subplots to add to the chaos.

Co-writer Brian Doyle-Murray, who also appears as caddy master Lou Loomis, drew from his and his siblings' real-life experience as caddies: "A country club isn't just a place to take a ten-mile hike, whacking a ball at a small hole. It's its own subculture," he observes. Just like in Danny Noonan's family, there were nine young Murrays and several did a turn at caddying at the Indian Hill Country Club, outside Chicago. "Bill was a groundskeeper at another local course, the Evanston Country Club, which was the inspiration for his part in the picture," his brother says.

Whatever the original script looked like, the consensus is that very little of it turned up on the screen. Large portions of the film were ad-libbed, in true Second City and *Saturday Night Live* style. "It's an actual technique," Ramis explains. "Like having a script without finished dialogue." Some of the film's best moments occurred like this - "The Cinderella Story" speech by Murray, for example. In fact, Carl the groundskeeper was not a very large role in the film originally, but Murray (who Ramis first met when the actor was working the concession stand on an Illinois course) was on such a roll, that the filmmakers kept the camera rolling and kept getting gold. Anecdotes about his real-life involvement with golf as well as **Caddyshack** tidbits are found in Murray's book, *Cinderella Story: My Life in Golf*.

The film was set in Illinois, but shooting there would prove difficult as production began in late fall, along with the area's first snow. So producers headed to Florida to try and find a course minus the visual giveaways of palm trees and flamingos. Rolling Hills fit the bill, created by golf course architect William Mitchell, who was bored with the sub-tropic flora found throughout the state. Instead, he planted oaks and pines. Upon arriving at the location, Ted Knight remarked, "Gee it's so pretty. Too bad we have to destroy it." Though the producers did some construction on the clubhouse to create a mini studio, the worst that happened to the greens occurred during a famed night-time golf cart battle in which the cast and crew sought to recreate Patton and Rommel's African encounter. Neither carts nor course were reportedly recognizable the next day. The Boca Raton Hotel and Club was the setting for the dinner dance sequence.

Caddyshack was the first film that Ramis directed (several accounts have him looking through the wrong end of the camera on the first day of shooting) and the first major film appearance for Rodney Dangerfield. Both seemed to have had beginner's luck, though Dangerfield's minimal exposure to the film process did throw him for a loop initially. Scott Colomby (caddy Tony D'Annunzio), recalls that on Dangerfield's first day, the entire cast had assembled to watch the work of a comedy legend. But after a few takes, Dangerfield was sweating and looking distressed. When Colomby asked the veteran comic what was wrong, he said, "Nobody's laughing at me. I'm bombing out there! The comic was put at ease when Colomby explained that no one *could* laugh without ruining the take.

Mention must be made of the character that in some respects steals the show - namely, the gopher. The filmmakers auditioned live versions of every small mammal they could think of for the part, but to no avail. Finally it was decided that the gopher deserved special effects to make it work properly and the filmmakers went to John Dykstra of Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) fame.

Producer: Douglas Kenney, Donald MacDonald, Jon Peters
Director: Harold Ramis
Screenplay: Brian Doyle-Murray, Harold Ramis, Douglas Kenney
Cinematography: Stevan Lerner
Film Editing: Robert Barrere, William Carruth, Rachel Igel
Art Direction: George Szeptycki
Music: Johnny Mandel, Kenny Loggins, Neal Schon
Cast: Chevy Chase (Ty Webb), Rodney Dangerfield (Al Czervik), Bill Murray (Carl Spackler), Michael O'Keefe (Danny Noonan), Ted Knight (Judge Smails), Sarah Holcomb (Maggie O'Hooligan).
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