



MURRAY'S 'LOST' CAUSE RESONATES IN BOSTON

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For Boston film fans, it was admittedly hard not to applaud Sean Penn's best actor honor at Sunday night's Academy Awards. He gave a powerhouse performance in local writer Dennis Lehane's "Mystic River," and his striding out of the Kodak Theatre with an Oscar was a fitting tribute to a career marked by challenging and often brave choices.

Yet as spring struggles to emerge from beneath another cold New England winter, it was hard not to feel empathy for his fellow nominee Bill Murray. Like our beloved Red Sox, Murray had taken an underdog role in the small-budget "Lost in Translation" to the brink of immortality, only to have his hopes dashed on the last play of the season.

It is a fate well known to denizens of the Hub. Murray, up against established leading men Penn, Johnny Depp, and Jude Law, as well as previous Oscar winner Sir Ben Kingsley, was a black sheep in the category. Nonetheless, his portrayal of a movie star on the decline coming to terms with his lot in life against the backdrop of another culture fulfilled the melancholic promise Murray first demonstrated in "Rushmore," this time with Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences members taking notice.

As if the nomination were not enough, there was also Murray's victory in the Independent Spirit Awards the previous day in Santa Monica. Nabbing the best male lead award was akin to sweeping the Yankees in a mid-season series. The award gave legions of the actor's fans a sense that this might indeed be their year, that Murray's subtle and often eccentric career actually stood a chance of being celebrated at the highest level.

So when Nicole Kidman, the previous year's best actress winner, read Penn's name, it was somewhat akin to Aaron Boone's season-ending home run in last year's American League Championship Series with the Yankees. A magical ride, in which the underdog seemed poised to snatch an improbable victory, was over.

Murray's stoic demeanor spoke volumes. Penn, Depp, and Law are well on their way to enjoying strong careers while Kingsley already has a golden reminder of his success. None is likely to have to search far for the type of script that will once again land them in contention for Hollywood's highest honor. Murray, however, is and always has been a horse of a different color.

The moment was not lost on host Billy Crystal, who jokingly directed the attention to Murray following Penn's acceptance, imploring the actor to not leave. While those in attendance applauded and Murray, as is his custom, deflected the adulation, there was

an overwhelming sense that opportunities like "Lost In Translation" come only once in a very long time.

In her acceptance speech for best original screenplay, Sofia Coppola said that all writers need a muse, and for her, that muse was Bill Murray. One can only hope that other writers were listening, and that for Murray there is another at-bat in his future.