

Canadian filmmakers took notice a few years ago when Ken Dryden's bestseller **HOME GAME** was turned into a popular CBC mini-series. Hockey was hot, and even English Canada's premiere director, Atom Egoyan, laced up for the small screen with the acclaimed telefilm, **GROSS MISCONDUCT**. **PARIS, FRANCE** director Gerard Ciccoritti is at work on the



highly anticipated Ted Lindsay TV movie (**NET WORTH**), and more films and TV series are in the works. However, step off the ice and you'd be hard-pressed to find Canadian films that dwell on sports other than hockey, and you'd be stumped to find one dealing with the women in sports.

That's something director Lois Siegel set out to change with her penetrating and altogether entertaining documentary *Baseball Girls*, which focuses on women who live and breathe the game of baseball. It's telling that an American-born filmmaker with a love for her national pastime would lead Canuck viewers out of the rink and onto the baseball diamond.

Siegel (now a proud Canadian citizen one might add), is known to *cinéastes* as the director of such documentaries as *Lip Gloss*, *Stunt*

left and right, the **COLORADO SILVER BULLETS**, an all-female professional baseball team; above, director **LOIS SIEGEL**



by Ingrid Randoja

*LOIS*

**B A S E**





# The Girls Summer

S I S I E G E L ' S  
B A L L G I R L S

*People and Strangers in Town*. She's made over 20 films, and although she splits her time between teaching animation and film theory at John Abbot College outside of Montreal and working as a casting director, she views herself first and foremost as a director. *Baseball Girls* is her most prestigious film to date, a National Film Board production that took five years to make. However, the time-consuming effort paid off as the film played to appreciative audiences at this year's Montreal Film Festival.

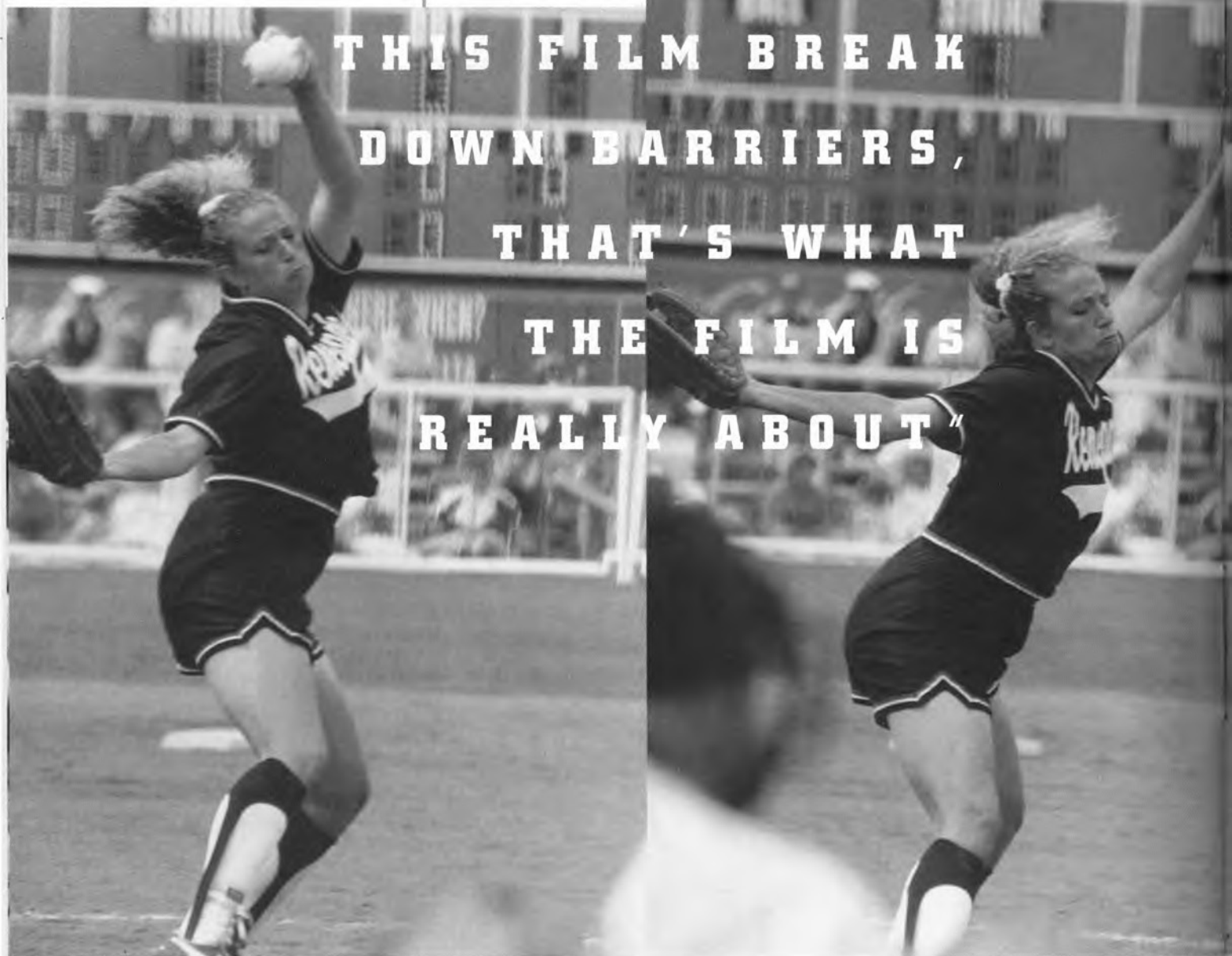
The film showcases both casual women players as well as more competi-

tive female teams. Siegel introduces us to 42-year-old homemaker Lucy Michaud, who confesses the only time she has for herself is out on the diamond. We also go behind the scenes at spring tryouts for the Colorado Silver Bullets, an all-female professional team that travels the States playing men's semi-pro and college teams. We also meet female coaches, senior citizens and owners who blow the lid off the idea that baseball is a boy's game. We are confronted with the game's feminine past, the glory days of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (1943-1954) and the disturbing accounts of a

woman umpire who suffered physical assaults and taunts.

"All the women in this film break down barriers," says Siegel, "that's what the film is really about." The youthful-looking filmmaker is seated in the boardroom of the NFB's Toronto office, located above the John Spotton Cinema, which will hold a special screening of the film later on in the evening. Siegel believes the film's message of women knocking down closed doors carries over to the real world. "During the Montreal festival a girl came to see *Baseball Girls* with her mother, who is the head of cre-

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ative arts at the school where I teach. They watched the film, and I don't think the mother talked to her daughter very much about the film, but the next week the kid went to her high school basketball coach and asked why there aren't women on the team. She said: 'I can play just as good as the guys.' This came out of nowhere. The mother told me this story, and I was just overwhelmed. This girl began a mini-revolution in her high school and that's just amazing to me. It's like she's woken up. She's now going to be aware of things around her."

The idea for the film came to Siegel in 1990 during a softball league meeting. Siegel, a league pitcher, was there to argue in favour of the harder-to-hit, high arching pitch. However, she soon got bored and tuned out of the discussion and found herself sketching out a movie about women ball players. She took the proposal to an NFB executive producer named Dennis Murphy, who liked the idea and started the ball rolling. "Thankfully he liked baseball," says Siegel.

One of the first things viewers want to know is if Siegel saw and/or was influenced by Hollywood's take on the girls of summer, the entertaining comedy, *A League of Their Own*. "A *League of Their Own* came out in 1992. I began *Baseball Girls* in 1990, so when I started there was nothing out there about the subject," says Siegel. "It was bizarre when that film opened, but I think it helped me because it made people aware of the subject. The film focused on the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and there was a companion documentary about a reunion with those women players. I didn't want to concentrate on just that part of the story, but instead show the entire scope of the subject. I did watch those films, but I then forgot about them because I didn't want anything to influence what I was doing."

Siegel didn't have to worry about being influenced by Ken Burns's epic PBS mini-series, *Baseball*, which aired last year. "In his series, Burns has 23 minutes on women out of 18½ hours on the game. There's a little bit of disparity there. Also he kept introducing baseball as a little boy's game, and I'd be throwing

things at the TV set. I'd yell: 'Hey, wait a minute, this was my game as a kid, too. Where do I fit in?'

Siegel grew up playing baseball and her father owned a department store that sponsored a women's fastball team in Kansas City. Siegel has always enjoyed sports and early on set her sights towards a career in sports journalism. "When I went to Ohio University I wanted to be a sportswriter. I had been the first female sports editor of my high school paper, but there was no way they were going to let me become a sportswriter. They told me to go over to news."

Moving to the news department wasn't the only surprise waiting for Siegel. "When I was growing up I'd watch Mickey Mouse and Lassie movies. During my freshman year at university I remember going to see Fellini's *8 1/2*, and if you've only seen Mickey Mouse, all of a sudden your brain goes boing! For two weeks I walked around in a daze. I loved it, but I'm not sure what I saw. Then I started going to films, seeing all the foreign stuff. Since I was in journalism, I had to take a photography course and I was hooked. A friend of mine got kicked out of film school and he gave me his camera. The first time I shot with it, it was mind-boggling. All of a sudden I went from stillness to movement. That's when I knew what I wanted to do."

Siegel then spent the summer of 1967 in Paris at the Sorbonne learning

French. When her parents wouldn't okay a second trip, Siegel looked for alternatives. "I was in graduate school studying comparative literature and I needed a language. So instead of sitting in a class with students with southern accents saying things like, 'just swee la,' I decided it would be much more exciting to learn a language where it's spoken. One of my professors told me that they spoke French in Montreal, and I said, 'Oh, do they?' Like a typical American, I thought Canada was full of Sergeant Prestons and polar bears.

"I enrolled in the McGill University French Summer School and was hooked. It's not that I learned a lot of French, but filmmakers and artists from France were all around and there was a film course. After my fourth summer, I decided to stay in Canada. At that time you had to give up your U.S. citizenship if you wanted Canadian citizenship, which, of course, was a big decision. I decided if you're going to stay somewhere and you want to vote and be committed, you have to do it. So I became a citizen." Since then Siegel has managed to carve out a career as a director, teacher, animator and casting agent. She plans to tackle writing next and is working up material for a screenplay. The move into feature films is her next large-scale challenge and she already knows that it will be a difficult transition.

"After *Baseball Girls* was screened, two young producers from Montreal approached me about directing a film about Jackie Robertson and the year he spent in Montreal. But it's very hard for a woman film director to do these things because although I've made 24 films, they came back to me and said our insurers want someone with a track record. To me that translates into: you're a woman director and we can't trust you. There have been many times I've been offered a film and then all of a sudden a 20-year-old guy gets the job. I've started to catch on. It's like, 'Hey guys, when do I get my chance?'" With *Baseball Girls*, that chance has come ●

*Ingrid Randoja is a film and video reviewer for Toronto's NOW magazine. Her work has appeared in TAKE ONE, ICON magazine and SIGHT AND SOUND.*



far left, Michele Granger, pitcher for the Renegades: *BASEBALL GIRLS* focuses on women who live and breathe the game of baseball; left, "I CAN PLAY JUST AS GOOD AS THE GUYS"