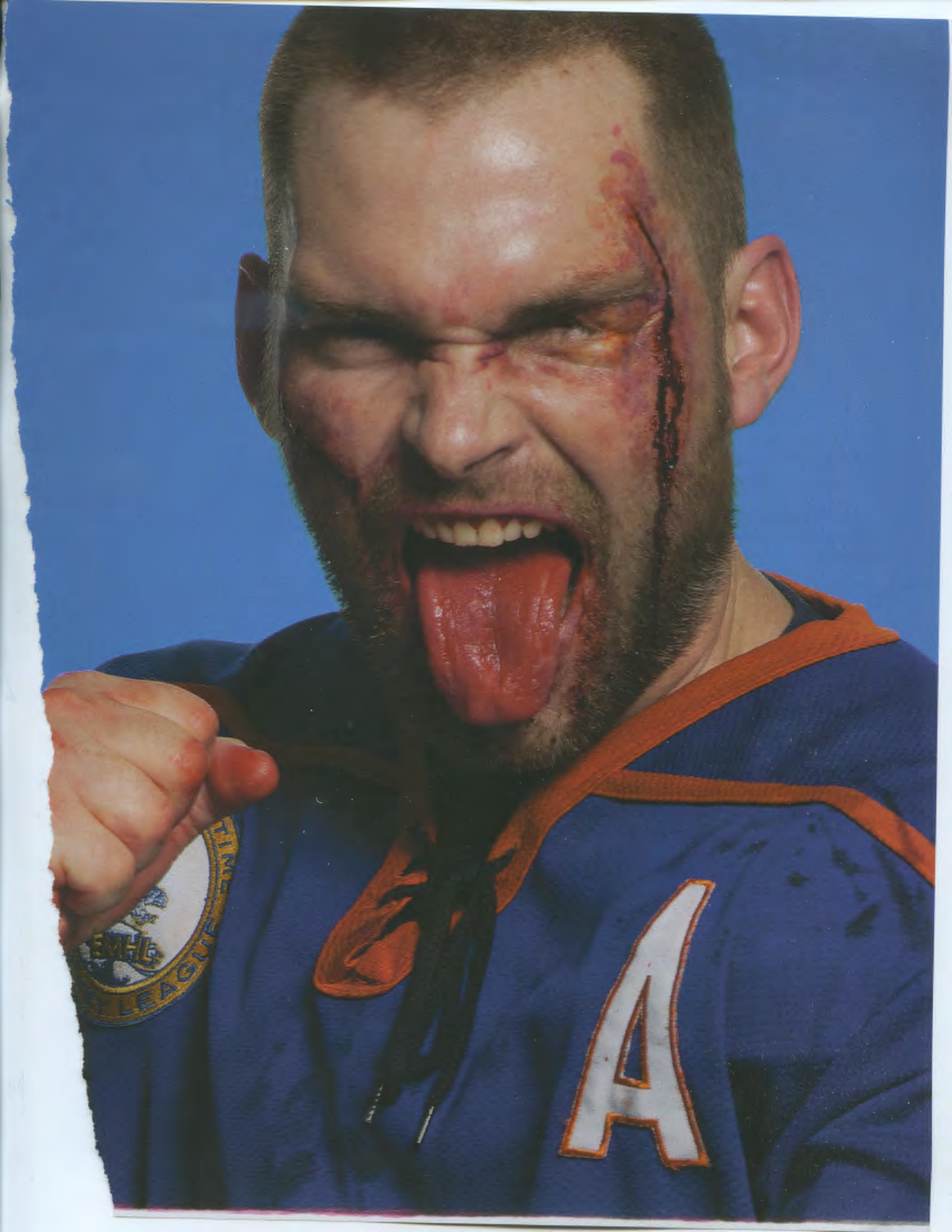


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SEANN WILLIAM
SCOTT TACKLES
MORE THAN JUST
A LEADING ROLE
IN HOCKEY'S
BLOODY NEW
BLOCKBUSTER.

BY JORDANA DIVON



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oss a Hollywood actor into the middle of Manitoba and you're likely to trigger an avalanche of culture shock. Now make sure it's the middle of winter in a place so cold most Canadians would rather gnaw off their own foot than set it anywhere near the area, and you're asking for a three-month orgy of whining and trailer-

trashing tantrums.

Good thing the producers of "Goon" saw fit to cast Seann William Scott as the lead bruiser in their recently released hockey flick. The down-to-earth actor, while not exactly prone to diva behaviour in the first place, also happened to be raised in Cottage Grove, Minn., a town just a quick sleigh ride over the Manitoba border. In other words, he felt right at home.

"People were super nice," a thawed-out Scott told TFP on the phone from his sunny California pad. "Growing up in Minnesota it's all hockey, so that wasn't a surprise for me. It just actually made it feel even more familiar and comfortable."

Well, familiar with one exception: "The girls were much cuter in Manitoba than in Minnesota," he admitted.

Candid statements tend to flow naturally from the 35-year-old actor, who first shot to fame as the endearingly stupid Stifler from the "American Pie" series. Scott tends to say things that would give most celebrity publicists a heart attack, but his spontaneity and self-deprecating humour underline why the goofily handsome actor first shot to fame in the late 90s.

Take his description of the Stifler groupie, for example: "I don't get girls coming up to me! I get older women who are naughty and lonely. They're like, 'Oh, that guy is the crazy weird guy who drank semen in "American Pie." He'll probably hang out with me.'"

Or how about his absolute lack of compunction when discussing career flops: "There's nothing worse than seeing a shit movie that you've done," he said with a laugh. "I remember going to the "Bulletproof Monk" premiere in L.A.... my whole family flew down for it and I didn't know how bad it was going to be but I had a bad feeling when I did 75 per cent of my performance in ADR (automatic dialogue replacement, or "dubbing" in layman's terms)."

But despite his popularity in films like "Road Trip," "Old School," and stoner classic, "Dude Where's My Car?," Scott spent most of his 20s yearning to break out of the broad comedy deadlock. "I'd never considered myself funny, and those movies that I wanted to do were darker

things so I was really anxious to start getting into that," he said.

While he admits he's since gotten "far less anxious" about proving his versatility, Scott leapt at the chance to play Doug Glatt, a dim-witted small town bouncer whose ability to throw a punch lands him an accidental career in semi-pro hockey. Glatt forms the nucleus of "Goon," an idiosyncratically Canadian movie that screenwriters Jay Baruchel and Evan Goldberg ("Superbad," "Pineapple Express") are hoping will have enough universal appeal to attract hockey fans worldwide. For Scott, however, it was love at first read-through.

"Something I've been waiting to do is just get the opportunity to work with these filmmakers who believe that I was capable of doing more than I had, and playing a character that was more than just the guy drinking semen," he said of the chance to star in the movie.

Though he grew up near hockey-crazed Minneapolis, Scott is the first to admit his skills on the ice left much to be desired.

"I played a little bit when I was a kid. I was awful. So I was like, I guess I have to figure out another winter sport. But I was pretty clueless (in the rink) to tell you the truth, and it's embarrassing because I'm an athlete and it's just unfortunate that the one sport that I ended up getting a chance to play in a movie wasn't one of the three or four I grew up playing," he said.

Luckily, Doug is also supposed to suck, at least initially, making it easy for Scott to lend a little realism to the role. "My character is not supposed to be a good skater, so I had that going for me," he said. "I really think my lack of experience was beneficial to my performance because if I'd been an awesome skater it would have been so hard to dumb that down."

One thing Scott could do convincingly was throw a punch—an essential skill for playing a character described as having "the fist of God." And the ability to wield those fists made it easier for the actor to shoot Goon's grueling, all-night fight scenes.

"Some of the guys that I'd be fighting wanted to get hit in the face," he revealed. "They were ex-hockey players who were just tough badasses and they knew they'd look cooler if we made contact. So it wasn't 100 per cent full-on hitting people, but it was physical."

Producers brought in former Montreal Canadiens fighter Georges Laraque to train Scott on the finer points of beating the shit out of grown men on skates. Scott was so impressed by Big Georges' skill he managed to get him a bit part in the film; a scene in which they, naturally, beat the shit out of each other on skates.

"He was like, 'You can hit me if you want.' I think he regretted it because he did get smacked around a little bit, so he might have gotten a little injured but he liked it. He's one of those guys who don't even feel the pain," Scott recalled with a mixture of awe and bewilderment.

Goon's hyper-violence may be played for laughs in the movie, but it's a subject that also happens to be a timely and serious issue around the League.

Although research exposing the devastating long-term effects of concussions had yet to be published while they shot the film, Goon's Tarantino-esque blood-and-gore fest may rattle hockey's anti-violence squad.

When asked if he thinks the violence may affect Goon's reception, Scott gives his first semi-evasive answer. "I think we just wanted to portray the violence and the aggression of this guy putting it his blood, sweat and tears into protecting his team and what they go through, but we never would have imagined at all the stuff that happened afterward," he said, suggesting Jay (Baruchel) would be a better person to speak to on the topic.

However it's received by critics after its February 24 release, the film already appears to have generated a lot of

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positive pre-screening noise. Early reviews are saying it's the best hockey movie to come out since "Slapshot,"aa while others note the strong performances pulled off by a cast that includes Liev Schreiber, Alison Pill, Eugene Levy, Baruchel, and French-Canadian star Marc-Andre Grondin.

And based on the standing ovation Goon received during its Toronto International Film Festival premiere, Scott has high hopes for the film - particularly since it earned the approval of a tough crowd.

"I went to TIFF with my mom and my brother and friends, and they're not necessarily hockey fans but they just loved it," he said. "They laughed, they loved the characters and they weren't bothered by the violence because it was all for a reason and it played into the story. So I just think if you love movies, you're going to love this one." ■

