



THE PLAY

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THEPLAYMOVIE.COM



ABOUT THE MOVIE

Logline

The hilarious and epic story behind the greatest play in the history of American football.

Short Summary

On November 20th, 1982, the greatest play in the history of American football - dubbed 'The Play' - unraveled in front of 80,000 stunned fans in Berkeley's Memorial Stadium. To this day the details, nuances, legality, and glory of this fabulous and bizarre moment are hotly debated and roundly celebrated by the alumni of Stanford and Cal Berkeley as well as by football fans around the world. This is the story behind this hilarious and epic moment.

Medium Summary

On November 20th, 1982, the greatest play in the history of American football - dubbed 'The Play' - unraveled in front of 80,000 stunned fans in Berkeley's Memorial Stadium. To this day the details, nuances, legality, and glory of this fabulous and bizarre moment are hotly debated and roundly celebrated by the alumni of Stanford and Cal Berkeley as well as by football fans around the world. Every American football fan worth their salt knows 'The Play' but almost no one knows the real story: how this memorable play can trace its roots, in part, to the Kennedy assassination - or how the second greatest play in collegiate football that year happened seconds before The Play and was executed by one of the greatest quarterbacks of all time - or how after The Play a group of embittered Stanford students pulled one of the greatest collegiate pranks of all time. Lives and the trajectories of careers were changed forever as football fans received one of the sweetest pieces of candy to ever emerge from our sporting culture's gift bag.

FORMS: DOCUMENTARY

GENRE: Comedy, Independent, Sports, Period/Historical

Running Time: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Written & Produced by Peter Vogt

Camera – Lars Larson

Digital Effects – David Llama

Featuring:

Gary Tyrell

Joe Kapp

John Elway

Kevin Moen

Paul Wiggin



ABOUT THE GAME

The 1982 Big Game will always be regarded as one of the greatest football games of all time. As John Elway says in the film, “When you look at the last two minutes of this game there’s not many that compare”. But the ’82 game will be remembered for other strange and remarkable things as well. Not all of them happened on the football field...

In the old days the Stanford Band staged guerrilla performances on the streets of San Francisco during Big Game week. In 1982 an out of control driver crashed into the band injuring several people. No one was killed but the accident cast a cloud over the Band, which by the end of the weekend would grow into a thick blanket of fog.

The first half of the ’82 Big Game was a defensive stalemate which included 7 punts. In the second quarter Cal’s Gale Gilbert lofted a perfect pass to Mariet Ford who made an all-world acrobatic catch over a baffled defender. The referee signaled touchdown but Stanford fans packed into end zone seats cried foul. What they saw was a catch, drop, and trap by Ford. Replays are inconclusive. For years afterward- no matter what the sport- Stanford fans expressed outrage with referees by signaling touchdown.

The second half was a different universe. John Elway, who’d been blitzed mercilessly, began throwing short routes that exposed the overly aggressive Cal defense. Within minutes he took his team from a 10-0 deficit to a 14-10 lead. When Cal marched downfield on the next drive, Joe Starkey began to call the game like a horse race. That drive ended with another, almost mystical pass play from Gale Gilbert to Wesley Howell.

Gilbert put the perfect amount of air under the pass hitting Howell in stride in the back of the end zone. Howell hauled the ball in one handed, launching Starkey in a string of superlatives still echoing in Memorial Stadium. Cal took the lead 19-17.

On what seemed like their last drive John Elway fumbled in Cal territory with under four minutes to go. But the Stanford defense made an inspired stand that allowed them to get the ball back with a minute and change. Three plays drove them back to their own 13 yard line. On 4th and 17, John Elway threw a clutch bullet to Emile Harry to pick up a remarkable first down. The drive culminated in a 35 yard field goal by Mark Harmon and a Stanford lead, setting set the stage for miracle/debacle that followed.

Hidden under the layers of lore, jubilation, and invective surrounding The Play are two important footnotes emanating from Harmon’s field goal. The first is that Stanford was penalized 15 yards for excessive celebration on the ensuing kickoff. The second, and more important, detail is that Stanford called their last timeout too soon- leaving 8 seconds on the clock. If they’d let the clock wind down it would have run out as they kicked the field goal. In the aftermath, Joe Starkey insists that a fist fight broke out between two Stanford coaches in the press booth. They should have been happy! Who else besides a few alumni would have remembered the game if not for The Play?

--Pete Vogt

ABOUT THE PLAY

For the liveliest and best account of The Play I've read to date you should read this: <http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~pattsrn/anatomyofmiracle.htm>.

But I have my own analysis.

If you took away the names of the players, the backstory of the importance of the '82 Big Game, the heroics of John Elway and others (notably Gale Gilbert, Mariet Ford, Wesley Howell, and Mark Harmon) you are left with a tragicomedy of epic proportions. Funny, but not entirely random. And, as David Maraniss, and Steve Kroner mention in the film it's a one off. The NCAA ruled, after the game, that marching bands could not enter the playing field while a game is in progress.

Let me tackle the NCAA's ruling first. What initially interested me about The Play was how it revealed something about "the nature of games". The really really interesting thing about The Play is that it represents the spectacle of "the real world" - the band, living and acting in "real time" intruding upon a "playing field" that was operating under a construct of rules that provide order outside the bounds of "real life". Somehow, as maybe only the LSJUMB could do, the band pierced this protected playground with an anarchic vitality that turned an incredible football play into a Keystone Cops film. I didn't know how to address it in the film. But I still find it fascinating. As I try to show in the film, it's not all random. Clearly, Joe Kapp, the Cal coach had prepared his players for The Play through their Sunday afternoon "grabass" practices.

That doesn't make The Play an actual play. But it does knock it down a notch from the realm of divine intervention. The other thing that really grabbed me was that the band's reputation for anarchy - which certifiably peaked with The Play - dates back to the Kennedy assassination. It's a long story but the upshot is that the band had gone on strike in 1963 because the school had fired their longtime leader. When JFK was assassinated the band made a deal with the newly appointed band leader, Art Barnes (who would remain their leader for nearly 35 years), so that they could perform a show the Saturday after JFK's death. The deal was that Barnes would stick to writing charts and the band members would orchestrate all on field activities, thus dividing the work of the former band leader. Shortly thereafter they gave up the charade of being a military style band and became a freewheeling "scatter" band. That story arc - from Kennedy assassination to The Play - is real and quite extraordinary.

Finally, The Play was a complete original. For the Cal side you could say that no one had ever seen a series of laterals like this in a game played at this level of American football. It's been copied since but never with the same swagger and rarely with the same results - or controversy. As for the Band's role - lightning will never strike in this spot again. Could not. And in its uniqueness The Play stands as a monument to the possible. This is a great gift- even though generations of Stanford

fans will continue to quibble with the results.

--Pete Vogt

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Pete Vogt is a sports fan, music lover, filmmaker, arts supporter, and sometime yoga practitioner. In addition to *The Play*, Pete has made *High and Outside* (2007), a biography of Bill “Spaceman” Lee, legendary pitcher for the Red Sox from 1969 through 1978. His most recent film, *Icons Among Us: Jazz in the Present Tense* (2009), is a series profiling contemporary jazz musicians. The project was selected to participate in the American Film Institute’s 20/20 Program, and is currently one of the most watched series in the history of the Documentary Channel. He also co-produced the documentary *Hype!* (1998) about the grunge music scene in Seattle, as well as a documentary profiling Argentine musician Dino Saluzzi called *Every Sound is Music* (2013).

Pete lives in Seattle where he is on the board of several arts organizations and is trying to get a new project about basketball player Bill Russell off the ground.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"Sports are more than entertainment."

A former trumpet player with the Stanford marching band said that during the first interview I conducted for this film. The cultural terrain suggested by "more than entertainment" is what I wanted to explore in *The Play*.

I also think *The Play* is the funniest thing ever.

Why are sports more than entertainment? It has something to do with history – especially the history of rivalries. Us and Them. Memory. It has something to do with specific qualities athletic competition yields: teamwork, grace under pressure, honor, competence, courage. There's "the clock" - always creating tension. How about expectations, and subsequently, the undermining of expectations? There is a quality of storytelling replete with underdogs and favorites, heroes and goats and villains. Hovering over it all is the swift sword of Fate.

Fate is defined as "the development of events beyond a person's control, regarded as determined by a supernatural power." This is real. Sports fans know that a spirit level exists in the athletic crucible, where heroic, dramatic, and totally unimaginable things happen. Context frames these moments but the God of Fate unleashes them. Come on! This is why we watch!

In the grand pantheon of sports history, there aren't that many moments that stand the test of decades: the Immaculate Reception, The Catch, Flutie's Hail Mary. Even in that rarified company *The Play* stands out. Minus the band, no one had ever seen a football play like this before. Plus the band, *The Play* embodies comedy and tragedy in such exquisite proportions Fate must have spent eons designing it. Finally, due to the chaos spawned by the moment, the legitimacy of *The Play* continues to be debated down to this day. Magic! Humor! Ambiguity! It's beyond sports - it's mythology!

Yet, the essence of *The Play* is its mystery. The backstory and personality I've provided in *The Play* is but scaffolding for a viewer to jump off and float for a moment in this most sublime of sporting moments. As far as I've chased the "why" of this story I always succumb to the "what." Because it never, ever, disappoints. One more thing about Fate.

A few years ago, at a cocktail party, I overheard two friends talking about *The Play*. I mentioned how I first saw it in a bar in Switzerland while on a collegiate walkabout. Where did you see it first? I asked them. "We were in the band!"

And that's where it began...

--Pete Vogt

