

# Haskell Wexler on shooting with the Hawk 150-450mm T2.8 zoom:

We asked Mr Wexler about his use of our lens to add a sense of documentary reality to a feature. Here are some of his answers:

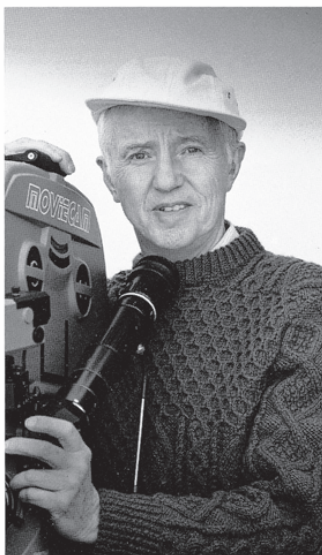
“We had a crowd of shabbily-dressed extras, playing Thirties dust-bowl migrant farmworkers in a camp. Between setups, they stopped acting and behaved unselfconsciously.”

“To get that on film, we hid my 35BL inside a battered suitcase with a hole at one end and we dressed an operator in shabby Thirties clothes. Between setups, he sat on a box with the suitcase on his lap, looking down into the eyepiece and with his lens aimed sideways at the extras. Nobody noticed him.”

*That’s how Mr Wexler did it on Bound For Glory in 1975. But on this new job, the cameras could not be hidden. The extras would be baseball players and spectators. The cameras would be out there on the field, in plain sight.*

#### About the lens:

Mr Wexler didn’t mention it, but it’s worth knowing that there are two internal slots that accept 48mm round filters. One of those can be a polarizer, which you can rotate externally by hand or motor, using the built-in gear.



Director of Photography  
Haskell Wexler ASC

*The movie’s story was the rivalry between Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris during the Yankees 1961 season. It was to be directed by Billy Crystal, a long-time baseball fan and friend of Mickey Mantle. That year, both Mantle and Maris were trying to be the first to beat Babe Ruth’s single-season home-run record.*

#### True story

*Mr Crystal was determined to get every detail accurate. The home-run race was a*

*drama, but much of the picture’s impact would depend on its credibility as a true story, truthfully told. Parts of it almost like a re-enacted documentary.*

“To give a realistic documentary feel to the baseball sequences, I wanted our footage to remind the audience of the way they see real games covered on television,” says Mr Wexler. “That would mean long lenses. And half the baseball sequences would be night games. *Fast long lenses.*”

“Even for the *day* games, we would need fast, long lenses for shallow depth of field. Television uses that to isolate the pitcher out there. I would also need it for shots of the spectators in the stands. We would have about a thousand extras in the first few rows. Behind them, the spectators would be cardboard cutouts and balloons.”

#### Pick out details and frame them well

“My usual package includes some long Canons. But they’re not fast and you can’t vary the framing. We wanted to *find* details in the scenes staged for the A and B cameras — to discover a kid eating a hot dog in the stands and to get interest-

ing closeups of unaware players 150 feet away. You can’t properly frame spontaneous shots like that without a zoom lens.”

*When shooting began, Director Crystal asked the baseball-player extras to stay in character even if they were in the background or the dugout. That was no problem — they were all former professional baseball players.*

“With the Hawk lens on the C camera, we could follow an outfielder as he ran back looking over his shoulder, and then zoom in to see him catch the ball close up,” says Mr Wexler. “We also set up behind the pitcher, filling the frame with the ball in his hand. We pulled back to a waist shot as he wound up. As he pitched, we shifted focus to the batter.”

#### Awards

Haskell Wexler has won two Academy Awards: one for *Who’s Afraid Of Virginia Woolf* and one for *Bound For Glory*. The film Mr Wexler talks about here (61\*) has won twelve Emmy Nominations, including one for its Cinematography.

*The player extras in the dugout could see several camera crews out there, all apparently shooting the game. With the cameras so far away, the extras assumed their dugout would be a small part of the background. One player would take off his cap and scratch his head unselfconsciously. Another would spit like a real pro, which he was. All that was caught in closeup at 450mm.*

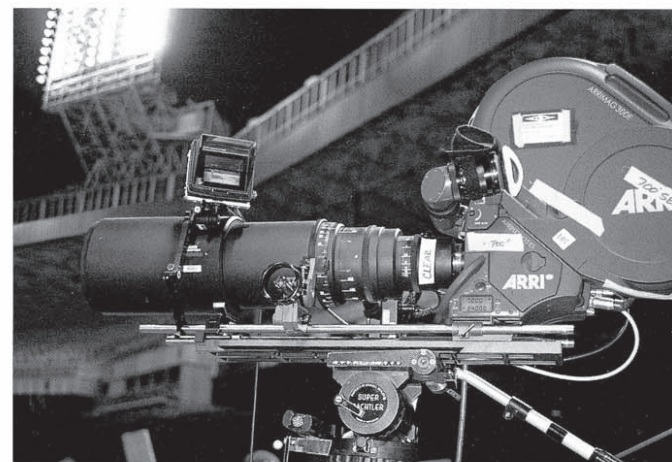


Photo above: Hawk lens on 435 during shoot at Tiger Stadium in Detroit. 50% of game footage was shot at night, some of it at T2.8 and 450mm. Crew used Preston FI+Z remote control with Hawk for focus, iris and zoom.

“During one scene, the Roger Maris character was sulking in the dugout, partly hidden from C camera by players out on the field in front. From 150 feet away, I zoomed past and between them, and in on his angry face,” says Mr Wexler. “The extreme perspective compression and the out-of-focus foreground figures gave the shot a voyeuristic realism.”

#### Image quality on screen

“Later, when we screened a workprint at the lab back in Hollywood, I was very happy with the image quality. It had been a pleasure to use a really long zoom and not worry about losing the light or being out of business at T5.6. As to the night games: I couldn’t have stolen those closeups without that lens.”

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