

sports & outdoors

They don't make 'em like this anymore

THE BEST SPORTS MOVIES OF ALL TIME

Well, did you get what you deserved?

We like to watch movies around our house during the holidays. Sometimes we try to come up with lists, like the funniest movies of all time, the next funniest movies of all time, the best Elvis movies of all time, or the shortest best-movie list of all time — which is the same as the best Elvis movies of all time list.



by Steve Sheppard

Independent Sports Editor

If you're wondering whether that DVD you just received is list-worthy or not, here's another list for you, the sports fan.

Last year, I ran down my favorite sports books. This year it's my favorite sports movies. From baseball to basketball, from golf to horse racing, there's something for everyone.

Most of these titles are available to rent on island, or for sale through the usual markets. *And so, in no particular order (until it's time to pick the best, that is) are one fan's suggestions:*

"Paper Lion" (1968) — Alan Alda plays writer George Plimpton, who gets to play quarterback for the Detroit Lions during a preseason game in the 1960s. That Plimpton did get in for a couple of snaps is amazing in retrospect — it could never happen today, for a number of reasons.

"The Stratton Story" (1949) — Like the best sports movies, this one is based on real life. Jimmy

Stewart plays Monty Stratton, a major league pitcher wounded during a hunting accident. Without giving anything away, Ted Williams told the story of facing Stratton after the accident and clanging a ball off his leg. "Damn it, Ted," Stratton said. "Can't you at least pull the ball?"

"Seabiscuit" (2003) — A horse is a horse, of course, and, come to find out, there was no horse like Seabiscuit. There's added interest for Nantucketers because seabiscuit is another name for hardtack, a staple on whale-ships. Alas, like most movies, the book is better.

"Knut Rockne, All American" (1940) — How can anyone resist Ronald Reagan playing George Gipp, or Pat O'Brien at the age of 40 playing Knute Rockne as a college student?

"Fear Strikes Out" (1957) — Before "Psycho," Anthony Perkins played Red Sox outfielder Jimmy Piersall with the same demented look on his face. Perkins throws left, while Piersall throws right, but hey, it's only a movie, right? Karl Malden plays the pushy father.

"Eight Men Out" (1988) — A near classic, directed with the right touch by John Sayles. Based on the book by Eliot Asinof, this movie puts the 1919 World Series in perspective. The only question that remains is: why isn't Shoeless Joe yet in the Hall of Fame?

"Hoosiers" (1986) — The only basketball movie on the list. Why? You think, perhaps, "Space Jam" or "Celtics Pride" are better? Speaking of which, have you seen the TV promos for the Celtics lately where Kevin Garnett asks: "Are we Hoosiers?" 'Nuf ced.

"The Greatest Game Ever Played" (2005) — A gem of a movie for those interested in (a) the history of golf in the U. S. and (b) the history of a local boy turned sports legend. Francis Ouimet, who lives across the street from The Country Club in Brookline,

takes on former U. S. Open champion Harry Vardon in the 1920 U. S. Open — with 10-year-old caddy Eddie Lowery. You can't make this stuff up! And it's all true. That more people from Massachusetts don't know the name of Francis Ouimet is a shame.

Okay, now let's pick some nits.

"Rocky" (1976) — Before II, III, IV, ad nauseum, there was this dark horse of a movie. If only we could watch it today with the fresh eyes of 1976 during the days of Bicentennial mania. Still, it has all the ingredients of a very good movie, including the soundtrack, and, while it treads along the razor's edge of corniness, it doesn't succumb to it. If only Stallone had gone on to other subjects after this one, but, hey, he was living the American Dream.

"When We Were Kings" (1996) — Let's continue with the fight theme, this time with a documentary. "The Rumble in the Jungle" — Ali vs. Foreman, 1974. It doesn't get much better than this. My cousin and I saw this in Harvard Square when it came out and the theater was jammed. Liberals like the fights, too, I suppose.

And my pick for the number one sports movie of all time — It's a split decision between:

"The Pride of the Yankees" (1942) — Gary Cooper as Lou Gehrig, the "Iron Horse" of baseball. How can a lifelong Red Sox fan pick this movie? Because we're baseball fans, that's why. Larrupin' Lou still holds the major league grand slam record with 23. You could look it up. Besides all that, this has to be the most emotion-charged movie you'll ever see. And how can it not be the best with Babe Ruth playing himself?

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PENGUINS AND POLAR BEARS

This used to drive my Uncle Gordon crazy. The old cartoons would show penguins and Polar Bears on the same screen. It made good entertainment for an eight-year-old but my 'Unkie' would be all upset. "Penguins never see Polar Bears," he would shout. "Penguins live in the Antarctic and Polar Bears live in the Arctic and never the twain shall meet."

Of course that whole charade is now being replayed every evening on TV when you see a Coca Cola commercial showing the cuddly little penguin chick offering the bear cub a soda. So another whole generation of viewers is being misled — or is it?

This week's bird appears to be a northern penguin. It is black and white, walks upright, and swims beautifully underwater, using its wings for propulsion. But there is one major difference. These wings will also propel the bird through the air, a little trick that real penguins forgot millions of years ago.

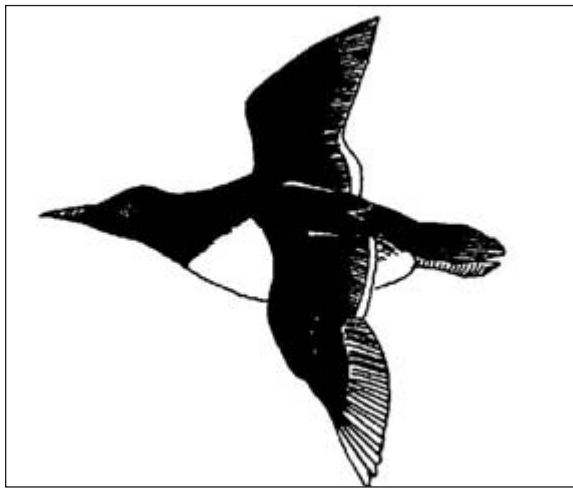
If it looks like a penguin, walks like a penguin, quacks like a ... oh wait a moment, make that, 'growls' like a penguin, it's not necessarily a penguin! Originally these birds were called 'guillemots,' from the French for 'Little William.' Now we call them 'murre' from the Celtic name for the same bird. There are two species of murre, Common and Thick-billed and we're talking about the Common Murre, *Uria aalge*.

The genus name, *Uria*, was given by a man named Erik Pontoppidan, an eighteenth century Danish naturalist and theologian. Erik was an amazing person, Bishop of Bergen, Norway, a contemporary of the father of modern ecology, Linnaeus, and has been called "Norway's Pliny." *Uria* is one of those complicated Greek words with multiple meanings — a fair wind, a guardian, a boundary, a trench for hauling ships, a buffalo, or even a dark water bird with a long bill, depending on context. I'm leaning toward the last one.

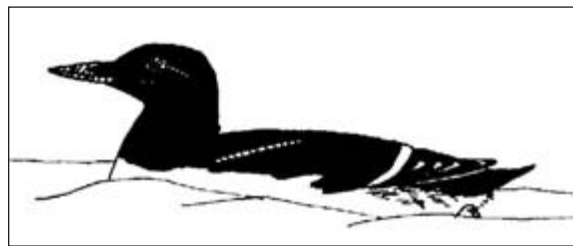
"Birding Nantucket" by Andrews and Blackshaw lists Common Murres as uncommon from December until early April. They are hard to find close to land and when we see them it is usually off our ocean beaches. Their close relative, the Razorbill, is more common. Both birds are about a foot and a half long, black above and white below. But the Razorbill is well named with a heavy, thick, black bill looking like an old straight

BIRDS OF NANTUCKET

by Kenneth Turner Blackshaw



Common Murre flying



Common Murre swimming

razor. The Common Murre's bill is also black but slim and pointed. The much more rare Thick-billed Murre's bill falls between these two.

Murres nest on rocky islands from the coast of Maine north to southern Greenland, also in Iceland and Scandinavia. When Europeans first arrived in the New World these birds and their eggs were persecuted terribly. In 1840 Audubon wrote about a visit to Great Macatina Island off the coast of Labrador. The island was packed with birds. From one side the birds' bellies made the island look as white as snow. If you approached from the other direction their black backs gave the island a 'black pall.' The ship's crew went ashore to bring back some eggs and returned with the dory loaded to the brim with over 2500 eggs even though they had been admonished to just bring back a

few dozen. Excesses like this reduced the population to a small remnant by the early 1900s and they are still recovering to this day.

The aforementioned eggs are well adapted to their living conditions. Murres build no nest but lay their eggs right on the steep rocky ledges of these 'bird' islands. The eggs are tapered on one end with the weight distributed so when they roll, they roll in a circle, making them less likely to fall into the sea hundreds of feet below.

When the chicks are just five or six weeks old the parents cajole them into leaping downward into the water for the final few weeks of their upbringing. Seeing the chicks agonize about making that first leap provides great drama. They may somersault a few times in mid-air but most survive that initial 'flight.' Now it's time to learn to swim and dive for the small fish that make up most all of their diet.

Often when Nantucketers encounter a Common Murre it is with tragic circumstances. If they are blown inland it is a death sentence for them because they can't take off from land. Perhaps that is why there are a surprising number of these northern, penguin-like birds in the Edith Andrews Bird Collection at the Maria Mitchell Association.

To see a live one, scan the ocean waters along our beaches for a striking black and white bird, and watch for it to dive, using its wings to assist with the initial plunge. When it pops back up, check for the slim, black bill to see if you have spotted a Common Murre instead of a Razorbill. Occasionally they make their way right into the harbor. A few years ago the birders were treated to one that hung around for days near the Boat Basin.

Birds can add great adventure to winter life on Nantucket. But don't expect to find a Polar Bear with them. ■

George C. West creates illustrations for these articles. If you enjoy 'social' birding, join the Nantucket Bird Club at 8 a.m. Sundays in front of Nantucket High School for a two to three hour birding trip. Call 228-1693 for more information. To hear about rare birds, or to leave a bird report call the Massachusetts Audubon hot line at 1-781-259-8805. Ask Ken a question at: kenandcindy1@comcast.net