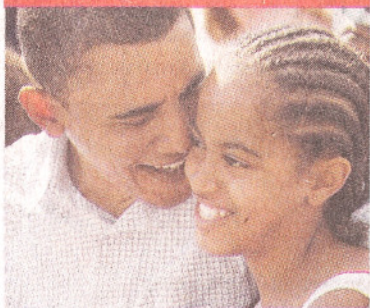


Parade



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Baseball and film

Documenting one man's 'Faded Glory'



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Mark Bradley

It's time for Tech, Hewitt to win

Team has the right players to make an impact this season.

Cover Story | Life lessons

More than a field of dreams

Film documents the challenges men face in their mid-life struggles.

By **Steve Hummer**
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A little documentary that premiered at this year's Atlanta Film Festival reached deep into the bubbling cauldron of the human condition.

In it, the men were flawed; the relationships were frayed; and the dreams were a little dated.

Welcome to the dugout of an over-35 amateur baseball team. "Faded Glory" is the film's title. And, yes, its 44-year-old maker, Sandy Springs' Rick Cohen, has had his glory put through the wash a time or two.

If you are a middle-aged American man, the thought is you will recognize yourself somewhere on Cohen's team, a collection of characters from Georgia, New York and California. Just hopefully not in the outfielder dealing with addiction or the first-baseman who hosts a

seedy Internet chat site when he isn't coaching high school baseball.

Cohen's story of team Network and its journey to the 2007 National Amateur Baseball Association World Series is making the film festival rounds and already has attracted one prominent supporter. Two weeks ago, Cohen signed a con-

Baseball continued on C6

» Meet two men who never lost their love of the game. **C6**



Rick Cohen turns an over-35 amateur baseball team into champions.

Sports

Based on audience reaction to the documentary, one of the most compelling characters is Troy Startoni. In one scene, Startoni, a former 16th-round Cleveland draft pick and unreformed free spirit, walks viewers through the day Virginia police nabbed him for growing marijuana.

More than a field of dreams

Baseball

continued from C1

tract with the entertainment arm of Leigh Steinberg Enterprises with the idea of expanding upon the theme of the over-the-hill ballplayer warrior who won't give up the fight.

"Like I'm the face of the over-40 athlete," Cohen said.

There is talk of a feature film spinning off the characters and the issues raised in the documentary. Maybe there's a book, too. And a series of "Faded Glory" fantasy camps, where graying guys can play with some of their favorite stars of the past by day and get in touch with their feelings by night.

What Cohen tapped into here, said super agent Steinberg (who was the model for Jerry McGuire), is the whole playbook of mid-life male anxieties.

"Issues like responsibility in marriage, the role of being a parent, the role of being a son, issues related to divorce, career, shattered dreams and the reality of aging," said Steinberg, hitting all the high notes.

All that and some baseball, too.

His own troubles

Importantly, the camera didn't blink when Cohen trained it on himself.

He fully documented both his failed marriages. During the action scenes, he was the one who played like the outcome of a game could change the course of history, just as he did half a lifetime ago when he played football at the University of Pennsylvania. You could see it in the film - he's the one whose uniform always seemed to be the dirtiest after the game.

And he was the son who grew up to be a little of everything except what his father wanted.

In between the scenes of aging players treating muscle pulls and reliving their baseball dreams is the stern figure of Arnold Cohen giving testimony to what his generation defines as success and how his son Rick continually had dodged it.

"Disappointment" is a word he freely uses while speaking about his son on his son's own film. He is the voice of old-school practicality throughout the film.

From nothing, his father had built a successful New York accounting firm and naturally figured his sons, with all the advantages he never had, would soar to great professional heights.

His youngest son rewrote that script. By the time Rick moved from Hollywood to the Atlanta area in 2000 - unwillingly, on his first wife's request - he already had an eclectic resume.

Changing direction at Penn from pre-med to communication. Cohen began dabbling in acting and screenwriting after graduation. He had appeared in a series of ads and bit parts and sold one screenplay for a hockey-based movie that never got made.

After he was involved in a horrific car accident, his Hollywood career lost all momentum. From 1993-2000, he and his wife ran a large teenage beauty pageant. To be closer to his wife's relatives, he agreed to move to Georgia - only the marriage was over a year later. Staying here to remain close to his two children, he took up a series of jobs ranging from bartender to teacher/coach at Lovett to mobile marketing to

producing a series of how-to videos for an on-line home improvement site.

'I wasted \$29,000'

It was while doing those videos, talking sports with the crew, that one of them suggested the adult baseball thing would make a fine documentary. Cohen went, "Hmmm."

After raising \$29,000 from

family and friends in a week, Cohen left Georgia to play with his former California team in the 2006 NABA World Series and put the experience on film.

"We shot some wonderful footage, but didn't really have a story. It was like I wasted \$29,000. I felt really bad about it. I said, 'I got to do something with this stuff.'"

The solution was to form a team of his own, built for both the World Series and good film making. He would call it Network, the same name as the collection of entertainment folk he first played with in New York in 1990.

He would pluck five old friends from that roster, five from his California team and five from the adult league team he played with here, the Atlanta Bulls. They wouldn't play together until the World Series, once he convinced the NABA organizers to allow this patchwork group into its national tournament.

The southerners, for the most part, would be the normal ones.

"The New York and California guys are way out there," laughed Pat Zapp, a Coca-Cola national sales account manager and 54-year-old pitcher on that new Network remix.

For instance, based on audience reaction to the documentary, one of the most compelling characters is Troy Startoni. In one scene, Startoni, a former 16th-round Cleveland draft pick and unreformed free spirit, walks viewers through the day Virginia police nabbed him for growing marijuana. "For all the sort of despicable things he's done in his life," Cohen said, "he's so likable and innocent and naive somewhat - a 40-something-year-old man who acts like a child."

And there's Cohen himself, finding meaning in a mostly meaningless game. Through baseball, he - yes, like his father - built something (a team) from scratch. He took such disparate characters as a professional poker player from Las Vegas, a local TV anchorman from Charlotte, a computer technician/horse trainer from the California

outback and a Kennesaw State University professor and joined them with the solder of sports.

And with backing from a wealth management expert he met in Atlanta three years ago at a poker game, Chris Pullaro, Cohen turned one of his many of film. Baseball was in a way redeeming him.

Next step: A feature film

At the Delray Beach (Fla.) Film Festival, "Faded Glory" won the Audience Award as the most entertaining entry. At Newport Beach, it attracted interest from the right people. The next step, as Cohen sees it, is to transform it into a feature film, and then a brand.

While the Cohens say the documentary has helped build a better understanding between them, there's a philosophical gap that may be never bridged.

The father, speaking last week, still wonders about all his son's wasted time: "I believe in my heart that these last 22 years could have been channeled into something that he would have been successful at anyway. So, why did I have to wait 22 years?"

Meanwhile, the son continues to trade in such intangibles as dreams and the everlasting joys of youth, a big message of "Faded Glory."

"Success can't be measured monetarily," Rick Cohen said. "It's important to recognize life is short, you have to make your dream come true now, because when you're 60, if you don't, you're really going to regret it."

Giving away the ending of "Faded Glory" here - Network did not win that World Series in 2007, falling in the semifinals. As an epilogue, it returned to Arizona with a slightly improved roster and won it all in 2008.

Cohen is a busy man these days. As well as trying to turn adult baseball into a commercial vehicle, he also is part of a business, Endorphin Athletes, that makes highlight videos for high schoolers seeking a college scholarship. No matter the real life obstacles, he is determined to defend his team's championship standing in the adult baseball world this fall.

Isn't there always time for baseball? And can you really ever be too old to put on a game face?

"I'd be surprised if we don't repeat," he proclaimed confidently.

Love of baseball lives on

By **Steve Hummer** / steve@ajc.com

Meet two players from the documentary "Faded Glory" who don't come with a bat bag full of issues.

Just a couple of guys who never forgot their first love - baseball:

Terry Loe, 51, catcher

A marketing professor at Kennesaw State. Plays for the Atlanta Bulls of the Men's Amateur Baseball League, sometimes catching as many as four games a week. Played at Mississippi State, making the final out of the Bulldogs 1981 College World Series appearance.

● **On why he keeps playing:** "When I'm squatting behind the plate, in my mind I'm 20 years old. I'm at Mississippi State or in one of the summer leagues I played in."

"When I'm talking to the pitcher and we're working on getting the guy out and thinking through all that, it's a release. Business can be competitive. There is joy and satisfaction in being successful in your career, but there's just something about competing in a game that brings a huge amount of satisfaction. It's something you can't really get anywhere else."

● **On the difference between baseball and softball:** "I've played softball and that was fun. I did it mostly for the camaraderie. But still, in hitting a baseball solidly, there's a feeling of accomplishment or euphoria, whatever. And throwing somebody out at second base, I may enjoy that as much as I do hitting."

Pat Zapp, 56, pitcher

Zapp is a lefthanded pitcher who in 2005 had a pacemaker installed on the right side of his chest so as to not interfere with his pitching motion. An Atlanta resident and account manager for Coca Cola, currently recovering from rotator cuff surgery. Played Div. III college baseball in Indiana.

● **On why he keeps playing:** "I just love to do it. I had two brothers growing up, and baseball was the game we played the most and loved the most. I've been playing it since I was 9 years old. I love the part of being on team and contributing to team and playing a game. It's like dialing back 30 years when I get back out and play again."

● **On what he hits on the radar gun:** "After shoulder surgery, maybe 70 (mph). Before surgery, I could throw in low 80s, which was pretty good for our age. I'm going to have to learn to throw a change-up; that's always been a challenge for me."

● **On how long he'll continue to play:** "My goal is to keep doing it until 60. It all depends on the shoulder."



The Network team celebrates its 2008 NABA World Series title, making up for its semifinal defeat in 2007.

Photos courtesy of Rick Cohen



Admitting 'disappointment,' Arnold Cohen (right) says his definition of success is not the same as his son Rick Cohen's definition.