

THE CHAMBERLAIN ESTATE OR: HOW INVESTORS WILL LEARN TO STOP
WORRYING AND GIVE ME MONEY TO MAKE MY MOVIE

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2014

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ABSTRACT

THE CHAMBERLAIN ESTATE: The Prep Work for a Feature Length Indie Southern Film (under the direction of Alan Arrivee)

The purpose of this thesis is to have developed a competent pre-production packet for a feature length indie movie set in the South that would pique the interest of potential investors, while having ascertained the knowledge and skill set to fully realize the script as a leader of the project. Methods to achieve this goal include working on movie sets from all angles to gain first hand experience—from directing to holding sound equipment—and researching the market potential from films of a similar genre to see if this venture is worthwhile financially for myself and other stakeholders. After working on sets for the last few years, I believe that I have developed many of the skills needed to run a movie set and found a competent film crew to make the project reach the best quality possible. Further, the popularity of Southern film today, as well the steady rise of independent filmmakers, would suggest that there is a great opportunity for this film to fare well financially. After the last few years of work, I feel that this project has enough talent behind it to reach a quality that would allow it to attract the audience of Southern film lovers.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

INT.	Interior
EXT.	Exterior
ITSD	Interior Thrift Store—Day
IAD	Interior Arby's—Day
ICSD	Interior Coffee Shop—Day
IKD	Interior Kitchen—Day
ICHD	Interior Chamberlain House—Day
ECD	Exterior Church—Day
ICD	Interior Classroom—Day
ISHD	Interior School Hallway—Day
IMRD	Interior Murdoch's Room—Day
ESD	Exterior School—Dusk
ICHdu	Interior Chapel—Dusk
EHSD	Exterior High School—Day
IHSCD	Interior High School Classroom—Day
IPOD	Interior Principal's Office—Day
IDWD	Interior Dad's Work—Day
IRCLD	Interior Rotary Club Lunch—Day
ECHD	Exterior Chamberlain House—Day
IBHD	Interior Barry's House—Day
ILRN	Interior Locker Room—Night
ISN	Interior Stadium—Night

Chapter I: Executive Summary

Goal: To obtain the financial backing that would be necessary to fully realize my feature.

Appeal of the project

Market potential: *The Chamberlain Estate* has the ability to tap into the popular market sector of Southern film. Further, the project is differentiated enough from the majority of mainstream Southern film that it would stand out on its own accord and not get lost in the mix of so many of the movies that are set in the South.

Logistics: In terms of cast and crew, equipment, locations, etc., the project is about ready to start shooting. Since pre-production can often be a grueling, costly, long and meticulous process, the opportunity to participate in a project with this much footwork already done is invaluable to potential investors. Thanks to the preparedness and generosity of the people on my team, the budgetary needs for the project are incredibly modest compared to those of the overwhelming majority of feature length movie projects.

Experience “in the field”: I have been consistently working on film projects for the last three years: directing, acting, filming, recording, editing, etc. Despite the steep learning curve, I am now at a point at which I am more than capable of leading my team—each member being just as capable in his/her respective field to successfully realize this film in a professional manner.

In short: Once money for the budget is in place, *The Chamberlain Estate* has more than enough potential behind it to be successful in the realm of indie Southern film.

Chapter II: Premise and Synopsis

Premise: The Chamberlains, an upper-middle-class suburban Southern family of five, try to hang on to their crumbling social status as it slips away one eventful Thursday.

Synopsis: CHARLES CHAMBERLAIN, father of the Chamberlain family and coach of his son GARRETT's soccer team, is giving a halftime speech during the championship game to his team in the locker room. Earlier that morning, Garrett and DEBORAH, his mother, are sitting in the kitchen for breakfast. ANNA GAINES, Garrett's Vandy-bound sister, soon comes in, followed by Charles and CHUCK, the oldest brother in the family. After breakfast, Charles is fitting a holster for BIDDLE, the principal at Anna Gaines' high school, at his otherwise empty place of business. Deborah pulls Garrett out of school later in the day so that he can prepare for an audition for a local children's cowboy-themed Bible show. When putting together Garrett's costume at home, she finds a pack of cigarettes in his jeans and immediately calls Charles. When Charles gets back home to find out what is going on, he is called over by his neighbor BARRY, who vaguely alludes to a sketchy sounding offer for Charles. He dismisses Barry and heads in to his house to hear about the discovery. He is certain that the cigarettes belong to Chuck, who often wears Garrett's jeans. After Garrett's name is cleared, he and Deborah go to the location for the audition, which turns out to be a bogus set-up put on by scam artists. Meanwhile, Biddle informs Anna Gaines that a picture of her doing ecstasy is circulating on social media, meaning that she will lose her massive scholarship to Vanderbilt. When Garrett gets back to school, he has an uncomfortable one-on-one discussion with his teacher,

MURDOCH. Desperate after learning of the money Deborah has sunk in to the scam, Charles decides to take Barry up on his offer. Barry then reveals he has been running an underground betting ring based around the recreational soccer league for which Charles coaches a team. Charles, in cahoots with Barry, then bets the entirety of Anna Gaines' college tuition fund against his son's team, with the intention of throwing the game. Fast-forward to the game, Charles finds that his speech to the team has worked against him, since the team has found new inspiration after the talk. They tie the game, taking it into sudden death. During the overtime, Garrett gets fouled in the other team's box, leading him to score the winning penalty kick. During the mass celebration, Charles is experiencing tremendously mixed emotions as his team pours the jug of red Gatorade over his head. Intermittent with the plot are scenes of Chuck and his dimwitted, cynical friends aimlessly musing over subjects like sports, philosophy, and God.

Chapter III: Influences

With regard to the “feel and look” that I have in mind for the project, the influences of several of my favorite filmmakers have played a significant role in informing the majority of these decisions. The filmmakers that have had the biggest effect on thematic and stylistic decisions are Stanley Kubrick, Quentin Tarantino, the Coen Brothers, and Wes Anderson.

Perhaps the biggest influence on my love for movies is Stanley Kubrick. One way that his style has informed my approach to the feel I want to create for *The Chamberlain Estate* is through his use of satire. Of course, it is easy to detect the satire in his classic film, *Dr. Strangelove* (which inspired about 84% of the title of this thesis). Quotes such as “Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here, this is the war room!” often come to mind when considering the many comic moments of the film.

However he often peppers humor in his more serious films. For example, in the first half of *Full Metal Jacket*, Gunnery Sergeant Hartman has his men sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus in unison on Christmas morning. Despite the ghastliness of what happened in the Vietnam War, Kubrick manages to find humorous moments through his telling of the war film.

A moment in *The Chamberlain Estate* in which you can see this influence is in the scene with Mrs. Murdoch and Garrett sitting in her room after he has taken the sticky note off of the nude painting of Adam. In this scene, she compares Garrett’s removal of the sticky note to undoing God’s work of clothing Adam in order to hide his shame.

While the scene is not a light-hearted moment in the film, it is centered on a satirical approach to the story of Adam and Eve. This form of humor through such an uncomfortable moment in the film is certainly reminiscent of the satire seen in many of Stanley Kubrick's films.

Another quality in Kubrick's films that I intend to incorporate into *The Chamberlain Estate* is his use of pristine and pointed photography. Of course, we do not have the financial capacity to use the astoundingly beautiful cameras that he used. What I admire most about the photography, though, is that every aspect of the mise-en-scene—what is seen in the frame—seems to be incredibly, meticulously placed by Kubrick. That is to say, there are no accidental/incidental images in what he shows on the screen.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, one of my favorite shots occurs when Frank traps Alex in a bedroom upstairs while blasting Beethoven's Ninth Symphony—which triggers frightening nausea in Alex—through speakers in the room below Alex. As he desperately shouts and begs Frank to turn off the music and pounds his fists on the floor, we see a very slow pull shot. It starts with a close-up on Frank's maniacally gleeful faces looking at the ceiling. It then pulls to one of Frank's friends sitting on a desk while his assistant observes a painting behind Frank. Finally, the camera stops to reveal another of Frank's friends slowly, systematically rolling snooker balls into the billiards pocket immediately across from him. Through this slow pull shot, Kubrick masterfully demonstrates his ability to mold the mise-en-scene exactly how he wants it to look.

Though table reads of *The Chamberlain Estate* have revealed that rough drafts of the script's dialogue-heavy nature do not communicate this as well as I had wished, I intend use a similar type of pointed photography for many shots in my project. One idea

for *The Chamberlain Estate* that comes to mind is the scene at the very beginning of the film, when Charles is giving a locker room halftime speech in the is meant to sound as though was is going on is an incredibly important and life-changing event. In reality, he is only speaking to a recreation league children's soccer team. The comedy of the moment, though, only works if the camera movement has been fully established. The scene is meant to begin with a slow pull, starting with Charles's face (similar to the start of the aforementioned shot in *A Clockwork Orange*) that continues to reveal a more and more empty locker room as the speech progresses. Immediately following this shot is the reverse shot of the kids timidly and nervously sitting on and around a bench opposite him. Though the script will be revised to better communicate this comedic image, the idea has always been attached to the script in my head, mainly because of the heavily deliberate photography seen films like *A Clockwork Orange*.

One final way that the director has influenced some of my decisions is through the theme of inevitability that is often utilized in his films. The Kubrick film that informed this theme the most is *Dr. Strangelove*. Early in the film, General Jack D. Ripper initiates a missile strike against Russia that is devised in such a way that it cannot be called back by anyone in the US government. Furthermore, it is revealed that the missile strike will aggravate Russia's newly and secretly developed "doomsday device" that will ignite a nuclear chain reaction and destroy the world. Despite the attempts by the president and his men to prevent the world from seeing utter destruction, there is never much doubt that the film will end in a devastating nuclear holocaust.

I feel that this theme of inevitability works very well with a story that is set in suburbs based heavily off of Northeast Jackson. Having growing up around the area, I

have always thought of this region as clumsily hiding its flaws in such a way that they cannot remain hidden forever. Thus, the secrets among the Chamberlain family that are simultaneously exposed through Garrett scoring the winning goal in the championship game are meant to be revealed in a way that seems completely out of their own control. In other words, the Chamberlain family is meant to represent the region itself and how easily its flaws are exposed.

One scene that symbolizes this ease of exposure is when Deborah is in Garret's room, which she thought Garrett had cleaned. While the room appears to be spotless, when she opens the closet door, a mountain of clothes, toys, etc. fall top on Deborah. As simple as the comparison is, it is meant to demonstrate the overall theme of inevitable exposure in one small moment. Oddly enough, since the incident leads to Deborah's admission to Charles, it is this one tiny secret that sets off the Strangelove-level chain reaction that levels the entire family once it is exposed.

Although this project is by no means the most outrageous, wild, blood-soaked one out there, another director who has strongly played a big part in my influences with regard to *The Chamberlain Estate* is Quentin Tarantino. Albeit not to the degree that he does it, but I have tried to incorporate several Tarantino-esque qualities into the feel for this project.

One such tendency that I intend to utilize in making *The Chamberlain Estate* is Tarantino's referential style. From the *Kill Bill* movies to *Django Unchained*, many of his films are a colossal hodgepodge of genres that allude to thousands of different movies, ranging from the most respected of films to nauseatingly crude movies. For example, with *Reservoir Dogs*, Tarantino has said that the "first person shots" are alluding to the

first person shot seen in Kubrick's early heist film, *The Killing* (pardon the apparent obsession). On the flipside, his 2006 film *Death Proof* (made in conjunction with Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* to form the double feature *Grindhouse*) takes a tremendous amount of inspiration from "grindhouse" movies, usually involving exploitative violence and general grotesqueness. Despite the huge efforts of filmmakers to be as "original" as possible, Tarantino makes no attempt to hide the inspiration that is behind many of the iconic scenes in his films.

Likewise, I intend to have scenes in my film that clearly refer to works that have inspired me. The scene in *The Chamberlain Estate* that comes to mind initially is the one in which Deborah is chatting with her friend Betty at the church luncheon as she is dropping off some food. When thinking through this scene, I have always had it in mind for the conversation to be incredibly fast-paced and to involved quick cuts of reverse shots of Deborah and Betty. Fans of *Portlandia* are likely to catch the inspiration behind this scene rather quickly, which is the quick cuts that you see in skits such as the bookstore sketch. Through his films, Tarantino has shown that there is no reason to shy away from the birthplace of your ideas, and this is a concept I intend to often utilize in *The Chamberlain Estate*.

One factor that intrigues me about Quentin Tarantino's films is that in them, he explores the line between what makes something shocking either awful or hilarious. If I have learned anything from the multitude of mafia films I have seen, it is that killing women and children is objectively a horrible thing to do. However, I cannot stop laughing when I watch Calvin Candie's sister get flung back from a fatal bullet wound in

Django Unchained. This form of toying with the social constructs of what we can laugh at finds itself in a number of his films.

Considering the number of unwritten laws in Northeast Jackson, I think that it is essential for *The Chamberlain Estate* to have elements of this type of taboo humor seen in Tarantino's films. The best example in my project is the scene in which Garrett is walking through the school hallway after having just been dropped off and notices all of the obscured nude paintings of biblical figures. When he removes the sticky note, the sight of Adam's exposed genitalia causes Garrett to fall into a fit of growing laughter, despite never saying a word throughout the film. The scene is an attempt to observe the inexplicable yet certainly present humor that Garrett finds in the considerably taboo topic of sex (at least in the South).

Another moment when laughing at something horrible occurs in the film is when Charles first discovers Barry's underground children's recreational soccer gambling ring that he runs in his basement. Certainly no self-respecting person in the real world would ever condone the implementation of such a bizarre and twisted organization, yet the humor of the moment lies in the legitimization of such an entity. This legitimization of the horrible is concept that fits in quite well with the framework of many Tarantino films.

One feature I love about Tarantino's films, which many have called self-pandering or narcissistic, is that he puts himself in all of his movies. Though usually as a rather unflattering character like Jimmie in *Pulp Fiction* or as an insignificant character like a Nazi getting scalped in *Inglourious Basterds*, he is always sure to pop up in his own films at some point.

Likewise, my co-director and I have every intention of having small, unflattering roles in this film. Alex will be playing Jeremy, one of the gang's pretentious pseudo-intellectuals, and I will be playing Chuck, the oldest son of the Chamberlain family and the dim-witted leader of the crew. Finding themselves in go-nowhere conversations about things like film, philosophy, and God, these characters are in a way making fun of ourselves, who often get into these types of discussions. As such, it only seems fitting that we play a few of them.

Another role that is occupied by yours truly is that of the Deputy Reverend Bananas, the clown/cowboy substitute host of the local western-themed Bible show-within-a-show, *High Noon at the Sinai Saloon*. Much like Chuck, this character is by no means one that demands respect from the audience (either the audience in the show or our film audience).

From what I can tell, Tarantino's take on the filmmaking process is that of a kid in a candy store. Further, I think that his tendency to put himself in his own movies is reflexive of the amount of fun that he has in the entire process. As stressful as making a movie can be at times, there is no denying the amount of fun I have doing it, and I want that fun to be reflected through taking part in the processes in a number of ways—including showing up on the screen.

When it comes to writing, I have noticed that Joel and Ethan Coen have had a major influence on my style. Despite the dark nature of most of their films, I have always appreciated the humor that comes through the unusual dialogue of their characters.

An aspect of their writing that I love and have tried to incorporate in *The Chamberlain Estate* is their use of repetition in dialogue. Often, a lack of variation in

vocabulary can lend itself to some rather uninteresting dialogue. However, the Coen brothers have this fascinating ability to elicit as much humor from a particular phrase as possible by having characters repeat it over and over throughout the film. For example, in *The Big Lebowski*, when The Dude sees something as being an injustice, he will always say, “This aggression will not stand, man,” (something he unconsciously picked up from George Bush Sr.’s speech concerning Saddam Hussein). Rather than becoming stale, though, it only gets funnier every time he uses the phrase.

An instance in *The Chamberlain Estate* that uses repetition for a similar effect is when Biddle is in the gun store with Charles and mentions the success of the competing Pro Hunter Outlet down the road: “They gotta waterfall and this restaurant that sells fried andouille on a stick.” Soon after, Charles’s neighbor Barry starts talking about Pro Hunter Outlet, using the exact same phrasing. Every time Charles hears this sentence, it gets more and more on his nerves. The idea is that the repetition brings out humor in the same way that repetition does in movies like *The Big Lebowski*.

Another quality I intend to use for my project is the importance of regionalism seen in many Coen Brothers movies. Often, the setting is so vital to their stories that it is impossible for them to have taken place anywhere else. In *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, the nature of the story—meeting Tommy Johnson at the cross roads (clear allusion to Robert Johnson), the zaniness of Pappy O’Daniel’s campaign, etc.—only works within the context of early-20th-century Mississippi.

Likewise, elements in *The Chamberlain Estate* make it crucial that the story take place in a region similar to contemporary Northeast Jackson. A theme that runs through the film, for example, is dilapidation of the grandeur. Thus, set pieces like large-yet-

somewhat-rundown houses and failing stadiums, which are all over the place in Northeast Jackson, find themselves in this film. Another notable factor to the story is the importance of consumer preferences in the South, such as items sold at the Pro Hunter Outlet (the fictitious version of Bass Pro Shop). Another important theme is the over-emphasis on ultimately meaningless events. Having grown up in the Northeast Jackson kids' soccer scene—and having witnessed the absurd intensity of soccer parents in the region—has inspired me to place kids' soccer as a major component in this film. Any one of these elements in and of itself may not be exclusive to the region, but with all of these combined together, a filmmaker would be hard-pressed to find a better place to tell this story other than pseudo-Northeast Jackson. Setting it elsewhere would be like trying to set *O Brother Where Art Thou?* in British Columbia.

Though I am not as well versed when it comes to this director, I have noticed that the feel for this project has taken a few notes out of Wes Anderson's proverbial book. One thing that has informed my filmmaking style for this project is the heavy layer of irony seen in some of Wes Anderson's films. More specifically, the beginning the film *Rushmore* shows the style of irony that I intend to use in several scenes in *The Chamberlain Estate*. In the opening scene of *Rushmore*, Jason Schwartzman's character is challenged to solve some impossible math problem in his private school class. After coolly solving the problem, he is hoisted up by his peers and celebrated as a genius. Then he wakes up—revealing that the previous illustration of him is much more remarkable than the reality.

This use of irony to put the spotlight on the unremarkable is exactly the intent I have for filming the scenes with Chuck and his friends. All of them think that they are the

next Jack Kerouac (not that they're sure who he is) and are totally oblivious to limits of their intellectual capabilities. Using the technique of irony in a way similar to Wes Anderson's use, I intend to capture just how comically hopeless they are in terms of understanding the world around them.

Another interesting feature seen in Anderson's films that I incorporated into this project is his interest in family dynamic. The film of his that I have seen this feature in most notably is *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The film pertains to the constantly dilapidating Tenenbaum family. Despite their best efforts (from a few family members) to stay together, there seems to be very little that any of them can do to stay together as a family.

The Chamberlain family is also having some similar problems, generally speaking, in our project. Though divorce is by no means an issue, as it is in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, the Chamberlains have secrets that they hide from one another that could potentially threaten the substantiality of the family. Further, they have a difficult time even communicating with Chuck, whom the rest of the family has accepted as being a lost cause. Of course, the aftermath of Garrett's game-winning goal is never seen in the film. However, the intent is that the ramifications of winning the game are illustrated as completely unavoidable (tying back to the Kubrick inspiration). Thus, despite the micro-problems being different, we can see the same level of fragility in the Chamberlains as we do in the Tenenbaums.

After taking numerous inspirations from these great directors and writers, it is my intention to utilize these influences in such a way that creates an utterly unique way of storytelling—ideally one that serves the tale of the Chamberlain family as well as possible.

Chapter IV: Marketability for Similar Films

It is no secret that Southern film is a popular genre in America. From Oscar nods like *Gone with the Wind* (Best Picture Winner—1940) to *Driving Miss Daisy* (Best Picture winner—1990) to *The Help* (Nominated—2012) (IMDb), the popularity of Southern film has spanned generations. The question, though, is this: why is *The Chamberlain Estate* a film that might find a similar audience to those of the previously mentioned films, and is the product differentiated enough to find its own corner in the sector of Southern film? This concern is what led me to put a new twist on the nature of this movie; as I put it to myself in the writing process, “I want to make a Mississippi movie that’s not a ‘Mississippi’ movie.” How many times, for instance, have you seen a movie set in Mississippi whose point is not racial strife? While films like *The Help* and *Mississippi Burning* have certainly had their successes nationwide, my project is one that is trying to deviate from the usual themes found in films like these in order to discover new territory in the genre that would be successful as well.

Perhaps the best example of a recent film project that has taken this approach successfully is *Winter’s Bone*. Set in the boonies of Missouri, this film breaks the mold of the stereotypical depictions of the South. Its characters are not the typically portrayed dimwitted, blissfully unaware people that you would see in *Ernest Goes to Camp*. In fact, the characters in *Winter’s Bone* are quite the opposite: they are fully aware of their surroundings and all have a keen sense for how the world around them works. For example, the observant Ree (played by the now famous Jennifer Lawrence thanks to the

film) is able to detect that an exploded meth house has been out of operation for years by looking at the weeds throughout it. Director Debra Granik was certainly going for something different in the Southern film genre, and it worked terrifically for the project: on a two million dollar budget, the film was able to rake in about sixteen million dollars through the worldwide box office (News). Though *The Chamberlain Estate* uses the intellect of its characters for the sake of comedy more than drama, my film contains a similar degree of differentiation from the typical product found within Southern film as *Winter's Bone*, which would give it the opportunity to stand out in the genre.

Of course, to compare my film and *Winter's Bone* financially would be somewhat irresponsible; after all, compared to its budget, mine is practically nonexistent. Further, while the Canon 5D Mark III—what we will be using on this project—is a terrific camera, it is not given nearly the same respect in indie film—as well as commercial film—as the Nikon Red, which was used to shoot *Winter's Bone*. Thus, how would *The Chamberlain Estate* have any shot of turning a profit at all? To answer this question, I turn to the financially successful and recently produced film, *For Lover's Only*. Though not set in the American South by any means, *For Lover's Only* has a very similar background to my project: it was shot with the same model camera that we are using and on a budget that was next to nothing. In fact, Michael and Mark Polish, who directed the film together, boast that “There was not one dime that came out of our pocket specifically for this movie” (Pond). Of course, they are not taking into consideration costs such as transportation, but after raking in \$200,000 from the project and having a top spot on iTunes movie downloads, who would? The film, which used a rapid-fire twitter and word-of-mouth advertising campaign, was even able to avoid the costly hassles of

dealing with hefty advertising campaigns through big-name marketing groups. I think that, given an equivalent effort of rigorous advertising methods, *The Chamberlain Estate* has the potential to do something quite similar success-wise.

The rise of indie filmmakers around the world means that more and more of the feature films that will be coming out in the near future will be shot on lower budget cameras like the Canon 5D as it gains popularity. Further, combining its popularity with unique take on the classic genre of Southern film seems to be a great way to develop a target market of young fans of films that have an appreciation for the great legacy that is Southern film in a way that has not been done before.

Chapter V: Budget

The actors we have cast for the film will be doing this work gratis. Currently acquired locations for shooting have been provided for us in kind. Many of the costumes and props have been accounted for. Further, we have access to equipment that is key to the shoot (Canon 5D, sound equipment, lighting kits, etc) via the equipment cage in Isom Hall and at the Powerhouse. With all of this in mind, I believe that our budget should be incredibly low, even relative to indie features on a similar scale of production. In order to cover everything that is not yet accounted for, we would need only \$4,000 more. To put this figure into perspective, *The Blair Witch Project*, which is often cited as the prime example of an extremely successful film with a super tight budget, cost about \$22,500 to make in 1999—about \$32,000 in today’s money (Menu).

A first glance, then, it may seem rather naïve to think that a feature can be shot on such a low budget. However, thanks to the numerous in kind benefits we are receiving, the project has been able to avoid a great deal of the front-end costs that drive up an indie film’s budget into the five figure region; for example, to rent the body of a Canon 5D and a 35mm Zeiss lens for three days costs \$102 and \$186, respectively (Rent). For a two-month shoot, these are the types of costs that so easily eat into a young filmmaker’s budget. Fortunately, renting from the university’s equipment cage has helped in saving from such daunting costs. Further, after using connections with people that we know around town we have been able to save ourselves a great deal of hassle with regard to money.

For the most part, our budget involves a significant accumulation of small purchases, such as props and clothing/costumes for the actors. The only exception to these low-scale costs is that of one location, for which we will have to provide hourly payment while we are shooting there. The acquisition of this location is by far the biggest expense of the project, but once it and all of the more minor costs are accounted for, our team will be ready to begin shooting. Table 5-1 (see appendix) shows the budget, including in kind accounts, then a representation how some of the expenses have been accounted for.

Chapter VI: Marketability Based on Alternative Budget

The unique nature of *The Chamberlain Estate* makes it difficult to compare its potential success—artistically and financially—to previously made films. Taking into consideration the intended “feel” of the film, as well as the proposed financial backing (assuming the roughly \$100k budget, as illustrated in Table 6-1), I feel that the films *Clerks*, *A Serious Man*, and *My Dog Skip* should provide insight into the potential success of *The Chamberlain Estate*. Though the three of these films share little commonality with each other, they each have significant elements in terms of their general structures that have/will be utilized in this film project.

As do numerous scenes in *Clerks*, several scenes in *The Chamberlain Estate* play on the absurdity/hilarity of idiotic, sophomoric discussion. Though certainly not as vulgar, any glimpses in the film of Chuck hanging with his cronies are reminiscent of the inane conversation between people in *Clerks*. For example, the in-depth discussion of nonexistent philosophical theory “Hendel’s Armoir” in *The Chamberlain Estate* seems to explore the same absurdist humor as Randal Graves and Dante Hicks’s discussion of independent contractors for the Death Star.

Another similarity between *Clerks* and *The Chamberlain Estate* is that they both put the spotlight on unremarkable characters in far-from-extraordinary settings. Much of the humor that comes from these projects is out of the far-fetched notion that the characters in focus are worthy of hero-status. Though certainly more colorful, Dante and Randal’s inane arguments serve about the same ultimate importance as the petty,

competitive conversation between Charles and Jack concerning the successes of their respective companies. The dialogue-heavy nature of both of these stories tries to play on the humor of colossally pointless, mundane conversation that knows no regional bounds.

Independent of its storyline or themes, one of the most practical similarities that *Clerks* shares with *The Chamberlain Estate* is that it has a modest budget. *Clerks* was made on a budget of \$27,000. Though *The Chamberlain Estate* budget is about four times as much, \$100,000 is still considered a small budget in relation to the vast majority of feature length films. After *Clerks* acquired a theatrical release following its success in festivals, the film was able to rake in \$3,894,240 in the worldwide box office—obviously a huge return on the investment into the project (The Numbers). I believe that on the higher-end budget, *The Chamberlain Estate* has the potential to see a similar level of success.

A Serious Man and *The Chamberlain Estate* are both films in which the setting is essential to the story. Beyond the physical location, *A Serious Man* film plays with a fascinating combination of both Mid-western and Jewish personalities and vernaculars. You can often see this clash of personalities whenever Larry is having discussions with non-Jewish people (or “goys”) in the story. For example, whenever uses a Yiddish word in discussion with a goy, the response is typically a pause, followed by “A what?” Similarly, *The Chamberlain Estate* plays with both Jackson personalities and twists on contemporary Christian buzzwords and bizarre phrasing. One such scene is when Winslow is teaching the kids about “good and bad times to be naked” without being explicit—citing “our buddy Habakkuk” and asserting that the Scriptural “shame instead of glory” alludes to the consumption of Jagermeister.

Another common feature is that these films are by no means trying to be blockbusters. Both projects are heavily injected with dry, sarcastic humor that does not typically play to mass audiences. Rather, both of these films are made with specific, guaranteed audiences in mind; though this does not usually yield a huge commercial success, by knowing what their shooting for, films like these have a better capability to be strategically placed in the theaters that provide the “right” audiences. Although *A Serious Man* was not an *Avatar*-level success, it is a safe bet for producers who are looking for something that will provide a big enough audience to turn a good profit—in the case of this film, a \$30,000,000 return on a \$7,000,000 budget (The Numbers). Applying a similar strategy of well-selected theaters could prove to have the same, successful effect for *The Chamberlain Estate*.

Finally, looking at the track record of the film *My Dog Skip* is evidence that a Mississippi-set film that does not conform to the typical themes of films set in this region is capable of being profitable. Rather than focusing heavily on the topics of racism and hatred that often find their way into movies about Mississippi (think *A Time to Kill* or *Mississippi Burning*), *My Dog Skip* is simply the heart-warming (yet tear-jerking by the end) tale of a young Willie Nelson and his beloved dog. Though certainly not same story, *The Chamberlain Estate* also tries to get away from the dark, heavy (albeit, historically important) stories that have been told about Mississippi a million times over. Further, the film saw a success very similar to that of *A Serious Man*—about \$35,000,000 return on a \$7,000,000 budget, without making TVM adjustments (The Numbers). I believe this success stems from the ability for the film to differentiate itself from what most people

think of when they hear about a movie set in Mississippi. As such, *The Chamberlain Estate* has the ability to find success by doing a similar differentiation.

Of course, strategy is key to the success of this project, but if the success records of *Clerks*, *A Serious Man*, and *My Dog Skip* show anything, it is that *The Chamberlain Estate* shares enough thematic and financial commonalities with these films to find a fruitful place with audiences.

Chapter VII: Overviews, Storyboards, and Shot List

Though many of these three elements will ultimately look different after collaboration with the cinematographer, the overview, storyboards, and shot list provide the best visual description of how I have pictured the film.

Overview: a sketch of a particular set that gives an aerial or “bird’s eye” view of the set. This visual allows the director, the cinematographer, and the actors to get a good idea of what character blocking would work best within the location.

Storyboard: an illustration of an individual shot. Storyboards inform the cinematographer what the composition and *mise en scene* (what is contained within the frame of the camera) of a shot should be.

Shot List: a verbal composite of all the shots depicted in the storyboard. With it, the director is able to describe exactly what he or she wants the shot to look like: what character he wants, what camera angle, how close up to the subject, camera movement (or lack thereof), etc.

These three work together to illustrate/verbalize as well as possible how each individual shot should look; no one of these elements works well without either of the others. The shot list (Table 7-1 in appendix) shows the order in which the film will be shot (i.e. the scene “Interior Thrift Shop—Day” will be shot first, and “Interior Stadium—Night” will be shot last). Numbers have been assigned to each storyboard that correspond with the numbers in the shot list; shots labeled on the list by set location rather than a number should be assumed as shot one on the storyboard.

Chapter VIII: Film Crew Pride and Joy

While gaining filmmaking experience and knowledge from working on sets for the last few years has been an invaluable asset to my preparation for this endeavor, connecting with the fellow filmmakers within the department has been of just as great fortune. Beyond getting to watch these people at work, one cannot help but get an understanding of how they think. Learning how to work with some of these people is key to developing the chemistry on the set that leads to the production of a meaningful and successful film. Further, it is through these experiences that I have put together my team, which is why I am more than confident in each member's capabilities. Behind the camera, two of the best assets to the team are my cinematographer, Britt Allen, and my co-director, Alex Thiel.

If I have learned one thing while working on films here, it is that Britt Allen is the guy that directors want to shoot their movies. Whenever people win grant money from the UM Cinema Competition, Britt is always the one that gets asked to shoot the movie. What's more, he is an absolute natural with the Canon 5D, which is the camera that we will use for this project. His work shooting beautiful looking films like *Current* and *Lifted*—which received the award for best film at last year's An Evening of Cinema—shows how skilled he is behind the camera. Further, Britt has a “dirty” style of film, often used to allow an image in the foreground to deliberately obscure the subject of the shot. Since *The Chamberlain Estate* often plays with the idea of people “hiding” behind secrets, allowing Britt to incorporate this style of filming seems all-too-necessary.

It is rare that Alex and I do not work on a film together. Having realized our similar senses of humor and passions to pursue film, we have found ourselves heavily involved in each other's projects in the last few years. The advantage of working with a partner like Alex as closely as I do is that we are able to shamelessly spitball ideas off of each other and workshop those ideas into something interesting and useful. Working this way has helped us to develop a back and forth that is crucial to co-directors. In fact, our teamwork has led us to success before; Alex and I were the winners of last year's UM Cinema Festival—Musical Category for our death metal rendition of *Oedipus the King*, entitled *Eddie REXX: A Boy's Best Friend: The Musical Extravaganza!* Our ability to focus on the same vision is what makes us work so well together, even when that vision is beyond strange.

It is with fully talented and easy-to-work-with guys like these and many of the others on my team that I am confident that the realized product of *The Chamberlain Estate* will be of the highest quality.

Chapter VII: More on my Filmmaking Experience

It's fine and good to know all of the lingo behind making a movie, but the only way to learn about the process itself is to do some work in the lab; that is, you have to throw yourself into the treacherous process of making a film. Even if it just means standing around while others work, it is one of the best opportunities to hone your craft and see how everything works.

In my experience over the last few years, I have found the process to be many different things: exciting, invigorating, and fun, but also slow, frightening, infuriating, exhausting and tedious. Thus, the first thing that I learned about filmmaking is that—whatever you think about it—it is hard work. From making sure everyone is where they need to be to keeping up with every meticulous detail of continuity and shot set ups, it all takes far too long to put together to let people goof around on the set. In fact, whenever actors ask me how long I think a shoot should take, I always preface with something like this: “Whatever I tell you, double it. Then probably add about an hour.” Working overtime is just as present and unpleasant as it is with any other job, and it more often than not is what happens with a shoot.

Continuing on the previous point, another important lesson to learn is that, as the leader of the group, you are not there to be friends. Going past schedule may be annoying when shooting at a buddy's house, but it is completely inexcusable when dealing with shoots at restaurants or other public places of business. Therefore, when working with

places that are generous enough to let you shoot there, the most important thing is to respect the time agreement that you have with them. Sure, it may mean you have to be a little snippy with your crew and actors, but that does not hold a candle to the rudeness of still shooting at two in the morning when you told the people at Applebee's that you would be finished by midnight.

One of the most important steps to learning about film equipment is being willing to admit that you do not know something you think you should. Often, people on the set do not want to look like the guy out of the loop and let pride get in the way of them learning how to do an important task. I, for instance, never admitted to people until last spring that I didn't have a clue what I was doing with the university's camera equipment. After owning up to it though, I finally took the initiative to play around with the equipment on my own time so that I would show more competence on the set. On the flip side of this point, you have to be willing to help the people on your crew with what they might not know. Thanks to my willingness to admit to my prior incompetencies, I am now knowledgeable enough—as well as humble enough—to walk someone through the process of working a Zoom recorder to get the proper sound.

Finally, a skill that I have discovered is needed more than any other is the ability to be proactive on the set rather than reactive. If Murphy's law applies anywhere, it applies on the film set. At this point, I have come to always assume that if something can go wrong on one of my shoots, it will go wrong. One solution to this issue is preparedness: you always have a backup to everything. I cannot begin to describe the anger I felt a few years ago when I was ready to go on a shoot at Sardis with elaborate, expensive army costumes and realized I had a dead camera battery on my hands without

a charger or a backup. These are the lessons that you almost always learn the hard way, and I was certainly no exception to that. Now, though, I never forget to bring backups for everything from battery pack with chargers to memory cards galore. I would say that my shining moment in proactive thinking came last year while shooting *Eddie REXX*. We were supposed to shoot a dance party scene in a room chock full of college guys and girls and hence asked everyone we knew to show up for the shoot. The problem with what actually happened was twofold: 1) about ten people showed up, and 2) they were all guys. Fortunately, I had anticipated something like this happening (call it an intuitive sense of my lack of charm with women) and planned accordingly: with a quick rewrite, we were able to carry on the shoot and were left with a product that I honestly believe was better than how Plan A would have turned out. Thus, it is the ability for the leader of a film project to prepare to make lemonade if unwanted lemons show up that can make or break the outcome of a particular scene or even the entirety of the film.

Frankly, I am surprised to see how far I have come in my ability to work on a set, whether it means taking orders or giving them. Despite the unexpected improvement, I now see in myself the ability to take on a project as big as the one that I propose to investors and to come out with a solid product.

Conclusion

The Chamberlain Estate has a unique blend of elements in it that is sure to catch the attention of fans of both new and old film. The manifestation of the script and all the aggregates of its pre-production have certainly benefitted from the experience that I and my crew have gained over the last few years of our times working on sets and piecing together interesting stories. With the tacit knowledge that is now under my belt, I am confident that this project has what it takes—through the unique-yet-familiar story, my leadership skills that I have developed working as a director, and the enviable talents of everyone on my team—to acquire an appeal to widespread audiences.

With all of this in mind, I believe that *The Chamberlain Estate* is a great opportunity for investors to put money into a potentially well-rewarding project, both artistically and financially.

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APPENDIX

Table 5-1—Budget Breakdown

Soccer uniforms	\$334.69	3.12%
School uniforms	\$300	2.80%
Gun holster	\$18.99	0.17%
Hipster thrift shop clothing	\$30.00	0.28%
Catering platter w/ chicken	\$35.50	0.33%
Gavel	\$35.00	0.32%
Pigs in a blanket	\$15.00	0.14%
Cowboy costume	\$50.00	0.47%
Kids jeans	\$30.00	0.28%
Jogging suit	\$25.00	0.23%
Plates, glasses and silverware	\$100.00	0.93%
7 classic Bible painting posters	\$200.00	1.87%
Fake fruit	\$20.00	0.19%
10 Blu electronic cigarettes	\$110.00	1.02%
Chalkboard paint	\$20.00	0.19%
Briefcase	\$20.00	0.19%
Payments for use at Jackson Mem. Stadium (4 hrs)	\$2000.00	19.65%
Water jug	\$25.00	0.23%
Red Gatorade mix	\$7.00	0.06%

Food and transportation	\$600.00	5.60%
Canon 5D Body (2 months rent)*	\$657.00	6.13%
35mm Zeiss (2 months rent)*	\$1039.50	9.70%
Lighting kit w/ 2 fixtures (2 mth r)*	\$472.50	4.40%
Boom microphone (purchase)*	\$200.00	1.87%
Camera rig (2 months rent)*	\$576.00	5.37%
Regents school (6 hrs)*	\$600.00	5.60%
Hunter's Hollow (2 hrs)*	\$200.00	1.87%
Lodging for actors^	\$1000.00	9.32%
Unforeseen expenses^	\$2000.00	18.65%
Total cost	\$10721.18	100%
Total in kind expenses (less)	(\$3745.00)	(34.93%)
Total out of pocket expenses (less)	(\$3000.00)	(27.98%)
Total covered expenses (less)	(\$6745.00)	(62.91%)
Total cost less covered exp's	\$3974.18	(37.07%)

* denotes an expense covered in kind

^ denotes an expense covered out of pocket

Table 6-2—Alternative Budget Breakdown

Soccer uniforms	\$334.69	<.5%
School uniforms	\$300	<.5%
Gun holster	\$18.99	<.5%
Hipster thrift shop clothing	\$30.00	<.5%
Catering platter w/ chicken	\$35.50	<.5%
Gavel	\$35.00	<.5%
Pigs in a blanket	\$15.00	<.5%
Cowboy costume	\$50.00	<.5%
Kids jeans	\$30.00	<.5%
Jogging suit	\$25.00	<.5%
Plates, glasses and silverware	\$100.00	<.5%
7 classic Bible painting posters	\$200.00	<.5%
Fake fruit	\$20.00	<.5%
10 Blu electronic cigarettes	\$110.00	<.5%
Chalkboard paint	\$20.00	<.5%
Briefcase	\$20.00	<.5%

Payments for use at Jackson Mem. Stadium (4 hrs)	\$2000.00	2%
Water jug	\$25.00	<.5%
Red Gatorade mix	\$7.00	<.5%
Food and transportation	\$600.00	1%
RED Epic-M Package	\$9895.50	10%
RED Pro 17-50mm T2.9 Lens	\$2700.00	3%
RED Pro 18-85mm T2.9 Lens	\$1417.50	1%
RED Pro Prime 300mm T2.9 Lens	\$1395.00	1%
Zeiss LWZ.2 Lightweight 15.5-45mm T2.6 Zoom PL Mount	\$5098.50	5%
REDMag SSD 256GB	\$702.00	1%
35mm Zeiss (2 months rent)	\$1039.50	1%
Lighting kit w/ 2 fixtures (2 mth r)	\$472.50	<.5%
Boom microphone (purchase)	\$200.00	<.5%
Camera rig (2 months rent)	\$576.00	1%
Regents school (6 hrs)	\$600.00	1%
Hunter's Hollow (2 hrs)	\$200.00	<.5%
Lodging for actors	\$1500.00	1%
Helicopter rental (2 hrs)	\$4000.00	4%
Hiring a camera operator (\$750/hr*~60hrs)	\$45000.00	45%

Food	\$1500.00	1%
Contingency	\$20000.00	20%
Total	\$100272.68	100%

Table 7-1—Shot List of all Major Scenes

<u>location</u>	<u>shot type</u>	<u>subject of shot</u>	<u>Cam movement</u>
ITSD	MCU	Chuck and friends	push to
	2 CU	Chuck	lateral push to
	3 CU	Beau	track crew to
	4 LS	Chuck and friends	push to
	5 CU	Chuck and Beau	push to
	6 MCU	Cashier	fixed
IAD	MCU	Guy at front	fixed
	2 LS	Chuck and friends	fixed
	3 CU	Chuck	fixed
	4 CU	Jeremy	fixed
	5 CU	Jerome	fixed
	6 CU	Beau	fixed
	7 CU	Chuck and Jerry	fixed
	8 CU	Jerome and Beau	fixed
	9 ECU	Burger	fixed
	10 MCU	Chuck	fixed
	11 MCU	Beau	fixed
	12 MCU	Jeremy	fixed
	13 MCU	Jerome	fixed
ICSD	MCU	Guy at front	fixed
	2 LS	Chuck and friends	fixed
	3 CU	Chuck	fixed
	4 CU	Jeremy	fixed
	5 CU	Jerome	fixed
	6 CU	Beau	fixed
	7 CU	Chuck and Jerry	fixed
	8 CU	Jerome and Beau	fixed
	9 ECU	Burger	fixed
	10 MCU	Chuck	fixed
	11 MCU	Beau	fixed
	12 MCU	Jeremy	fixed
	13 MCU	Jerome	fixed
IKD	CU	Deborah (oven)	fixed
	2 ECU	TV with cowboy clown	fixed
	3 MCU	Garrett	fixed
	4 LS	Anna Gaines	fixed
	5 MCU	Charles	fixed
	6 MCU	Chuck	fixed
	7 CU	Deborah	fixed
	8 MCU	Deborah and Charles	fixed
	9 LS	Chamberlain family	fixed

ICHD	MCU	Charles	fixed
	2 LS	Walking up stairs	track up
	3 MCU	Deborah	fixed
	4 CU	Deborah	fixed
	5 CU	Charles	fixed
	6 MCU	Garrett	fixed
	7 MCU	Garrett and Charles	fixed
	8 LS	Deborah	fixed
	9 MCU	Deborah and Charles	fixed
ECD	LS	Deborah and Garrett	fixed
	2 MCU	Deborah and Garrett	fixed
	3 ELS	Deborah and Garrett	fixed
	4 ECU	chicken platter	fixed
	5 MCU	Deborah and Betty	fixed
	6 CU	Deborah	fixed
	7 CU	Betty	fixed
	8 CU	Deborah in front of Betty	fixed
	9 CU	Betty in front of Deborah	fixed
	10 MCU	Garrett	fixed
ICD	LS	Winslow	fixed
	2 LS	students	fixed
	3 MCU	Winslow	fixed
	4 CU	Garrett	fixed
	5 CU	Thomas	fixed
	6 CU	Taylor	fixed
	7 MCU	Garrett and Thomas	fixed
	8 CU	Winslow	fixed
	9 ECU	Speaker	fixed
	10 LS	Winslow	fixed
ISHD	LS	Garrett	fixed
	2 LS	Paintings	slow push
	3 CU	Adam and Eve painting	fixed
	4 MCU	Garrett	fixed
	5 ECU	Adam in painting	fixed
	6 ECU	Garrett	fixed
	7 MCU	Murdoch	fixed
IMRD	8 LS	Garrett	fixed
	LS	Murdoch	fixed
	2 LS	Garrett	fixed
	3 CU	Murdoch	fixed
	4 CU	Garrett	fixed
	5 MCU	Murdoch	fixed
	6 MCU	Murdoch and Garrett	fixed
	7 CU	Murdoch and Garrett	fixed
	8 ECU	Grape juice	fixed
	9 ECU	Garrett's eyes	fixed
10 MCU	Garrett	fixed	
ESD	CU	Garrett	handheld
	2 LS	Garrett	handheld

	3	LS	Soccer field and chapel	handheld
	4	LS	Soccer goal and graves	handheld
	5	MCU	Garrett	handheld
	6	MCU	Chapel	handheld
IChDu	7	CU	Graves	handheld
		LS	Pews	fixed
	2	LS	Garrett and Anna Gaines	fixed
	3	MCU	Garrett and Anna Gaines	fixed
	4	CU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	5	CU	Garrett	fixed
	6	ECU	Chicken biscuit	fixed
	7	MCU	Garrett and Anna Gaines	fixed
	8	LS	Anna Gaines	fixed
	9	LS	Garrett	fixed
EHSD		LS	Anna Gaines and Margaret	fixed
	2	CU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	3	CU	Margaret	fixed
	4	MCU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	5	MCU	Margaret	fixed
	6	CU	Anna Gaines and Margaret	fixed
IHSCD		MCU	Anna Gaines and council	fixed
	2	CU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	3	MCU	Council	fixed
	4	CU	Slacker student #1	fixed
	5	CU	Slacker student #2	fixed
	6	CU	Slacker student #3	fixed
	7	CU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	8	LS	Biddle	fixed
	9	MCU	Anna Gaines and Biddle	fixed
IPOD		LS	Anna Gaines	fixed
	2	LS	Biddle	fixed
	3	MCU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	4	CU	Biddle	fixed
	5	MCU	Biddle	fixed
	6	MCU	Biddle w/ Anna Gaines	fixed
	7	CU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	8	MCU	Anna Gaines and Biddle	fixed
	9	CU	Anna Gaines	fixed
	10	CU	Biddle	fixed
IDWD		ECU	Gun	fixed
	2	CU	Deer mount	fixed
	3	ECU	Holster	fixed
	4	LS	Biddle and Charles	fixed
	5	MCU	Biddle	fixed
	6	MCU	Charles	fixed
	7	CU	Biddle	fixed
	8	CU	Charles	fixed
	9	MCU	Charles	fixed
	10	MCU	Biddle	fixed

	11	LS	Entrance	fixed
	12	LS	Charles	fixed
IRCLD		LS	Rotary club	fixed
	2	MCU	Jack and Charles	fixed
	3	CU	Jack	fixed
	4	CU	Charles	fixed
	5	ECU	Plate	fixed
	6	LS	Waiter	fixed
	7	MCU	Waiter	fixed
	8	CU	Jack	fixed
	9	MCU	Kevin	fixed
	10	MCU	Waiter	slow push to
	11	CU	Waiter	fixed
	12	MCU	Charles and waiter	fixed
ECHD		LS	Driveway	fixed
	2	LS	Charles	fixed
	3	CU	Charles	fixed
	4	LS	Barry	fixed
	5	MCU	Barry	fixed
	6	CU	Charles	fixed
	7	CU	Barry	fixed
	8	MCU	Charles	fixed
	9	MCU	Charles and Barry	fixed
IBHD		CU	Barry	fixed
	2	MCU	Charles and Barry	fixed
	3	LS	Charles and Barry	fixed
	4	LS	Bartender	fixed
	5	LS	Poker players	fixed
	6	LS	Charles and Barry	fixed
	7	CU	Barry	fixed
	8	CU	Charles	fixed
	9	ECU	Handshake	fixed
ILRN		CU	Charles	slow pull to
	2	LS	Charles	fixed
	3	LS	Soccer team	fixed
	4	CU	Garrett	fixed
	5	MCU	Garrett and Mitchell	fixed
	6	ECU	Sink	fixed
	7	MCU	Charles	fixed
	8	CU	Reflection of Charles	fixed
ISN		LS	Charles	fixed
	2	MCU	Gilligan	fixed
	3	ELS	Parents and fans	fixed
	4	MCU	Referee	fixed
	5	LS	Players	fixed
	6	ECU	Cleats colliding	fixed
	7	MCU	Parents and fans	fixed
	8	LS	Garrett	fixed
	9	LS	Mitchell	fixed

10	LS	Goalie	fixed
11	CU	Garrett	fixed
12	LS	Garrett	fixed
13	CU	Charles	fixed
14	ECU	Ball hitting net	fixed
15	ECU	Gatorade pouring over	fixed