



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Palm Springs International Film Festival**

## **The Palm Springs International Film Festival**

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I am reporting on the Palm Springs International Film Festival. For several years, I had intended to attend the event. Publishing deadlines and other commitments kept me away from this two-week festival of films...which is saying a lot as my watching a movie comes close to the pleasure I gain from reading a book.

I say almost. When the deadline would approach for the showing of a film, I was involved in a book or banging my head against a tennis wall, as I tried vainly to emulate an actual tennis player.

### **The Festival**

Here is a quote from <https://www.psfilmfest.org> about the background of the festival.



“The Palm Springs International Film Festival (PSIFF) is one of the largest film festivals in North America, welcoming 135,000 attendees last year for its lineup of new and celebrated international features and documentaries. The Festival is also known for its annual Film Awards Gala, a glamorous, black-tie event, presented by Chopard and sponsored by Mercedes Benz and Entertainment Tonight, and attended by 2,500. The Film Awards Gala honors the year’s best achievements in cinema in front of and behind the camera. The celebrated list of talents who have been honored in recent years includes Ben Affleck, Javier Bardem, Cate Blanchett, Sandra Bullock, Bradley Cooper,

George Clooney, Daniel Day-Lewis, Leonardo DiCaprio, Clint Eastwood, Tom Hanks, Matthew McConaughey, Julianne Moore, Brad Pitt, Eddie Redmayne, Julia Roberts, David O. Russell, Meryl Streep, and Reese Witherspoon. PSIFF is organized by The Palm Springs International Film Society, a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit organization with a mission to cultivate and promote the art and science of film through education and cross-cultural awareness.”

The opening night of the festival (its 29<sup>th</sup> year) featured Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep talking about their roles in Steven Spielberg’s *The Post*. We were unable to obtain tickets for this interview and subsequent movie. Interestingly, the movie did not make the top 30 list. But Tom provided one of the best lines, the session. It was his first movie with Meryl. He commented, “I failed my audition for *Mamma Mia!*” We did see the movie the following week. It is worth attending and I believe it will be nominated for the best picture Oscar.

As of this writing, it is estimated at least 130,000 people attended the movies during the two weeks of the festival this year. The merchants of Palm Springs are grateful to have the festival in their city. Many attendees came from out-of-town, including Holly and me. The hotels were full and the restaurants had lines of people waiting for a table. The local media reported that 70 percent of the attendees came from outside of Coachella Valley (the Palm Springs area), including Canada and Europe.

Each movie we attended was booked full, and some were sold-out. If you decide to attend the festival, here are some ideas that will make your visit easier and more pleasant.

You can register before the event to purchase your tickets early, and guarantee seats to movies. First, logon to the website Palm Spring International Film Festival (the program for

2019 is not online yet). At this site, you will be given several options on purchasing tickets. I will not comment on what they will be for 2019, but 2018 gave discounts for certain packages and provided a feature that allowed the swapping of tickets, and a “jump line” to gain entrance to the theater before most of the viewers are permitted to enter.



The jump line option eliminates the hassle of finding good seats, as all the movies had long waiting lines, as seen in the photo on the left. The last time I queued-up for a movie was *E T* in 1982. I had taken my son Tommy to see the film. We had to wait in a long line to be admitted to the next showing. I attempted to amuse others in the line by making references to my 14-year old son being *E T* in disguise. I asked him to shed his human costume-skin....Oh well, it went over okay thirty-five years ago. Fellow movie-goers in the line got into the spirit of the joke and teased Tommy about being an *ET*.

Here is a quote from one of the local papers about the festival:

“Michael Barker, co-president of Sony Pictures Classics, described the festival as a good place to show foreign-language movies and heralded this festival's ability to spread good word-of-mouth for movies. The event is noted for screening most foreign Oscar nominees. In 2013, the festival screened 42 of the 71 movies that were submitted by countries around the world to the Oscars for that year's foreign language film prize.”

I will not comment on each movie we saw. Rather, I will comment on two that I favored over others: “Borg vs. McEnroe” and “The China Hustle.”

I know enough about the game of tennis to understand some of its physical and mental nuances. I defeated players who were better physical players than I, but they were prone to let their minds get in the way of their bodies. No hero here; I suffered similar fates in many matches.

Still, I had enough confidence in myself most of the time to know that a better player was going to have to beat me physically. He was not going to defeat me mentally. The doggedness, the tenacity of a tennis player is often what separates victory from defeat, or for that matter, most any aspect of life.

Anyway, having made a commitment to attend this film festival this year, I began browsing its offerings in a magazine whose cover is shown above. I was pleasantly surprised to find a film titled “Borg vs. McEnroe” being offered in the program. My juices are pumping for writing about this movie, as well as my attending the Wimbledon Tennis Tournament.

### **“Borg vs. McEnroe”**

In 1984, I made a commitment to attend a tennis match held at Wimbledon, England. Wimbledon is one of the top four tennis tournaments held annually around the world. The other three are the U.S. Open, the Australian Open, and the French Open. My bucket list included the other three tournaments, but Wimbledon was number one on my list.

I made this commitment while conducting some lectures in London and Amsterdam. I was too busy to be attuned to purchasing tickets in advance, which was a mistake. Nonetheless, on a weekend between my lectures, Holly and I decided to take the subway (underground) and connecting trains to the Wimbledon site. Our hotel concierge informed us many people showed up who did not hold tickets but waited in line for their turn to attend as other spectators left the stadium. So, we could get into the event if we were patient.

Off we went, and arrived to be placed in an orderly queue for about an hour wait. During this time, we purchased some wine and cheese, as well as an umbrella to shield us from hunger, thirst, and the sun.

We could not gain entry into the main stadium, but watched some matches on the side courts. Our recollections of this time were the strawberry and cream delicacies and seeing Michael Chang (a relative unknown in 1984) play for the first time. We liked the side court contests. They placed us close to the players.

John McEnroe defeated Jimmy Connors 6-1, 6-1, 6-2 in the finals that year. I was thankful we did not attempt to attend this match. The two players' crudeness and obnoxious behavior were akin to spoiled high school bullies. McEnroe and Connors would have, excuse the French, had their asses kicked where I grew up for their behavior. But tennis, with its inbred courtesy, outlandishly allowed them to insult the referees of the match, the audience...but in the final analysis, denigrate themselves. I have seen them play as seniors, and my opinion has not changed. Their churlish, childlike personalities remain the same.

**The Movie:** The movie was voted to be among the top 30 movies at the festival, which offered some 180 movies over a two-week period. The movie concentrated on the 1980 finals match, which Borg won by a score of 1-6, 7-5, 6-3, 6-7 (16-18), 8-6. The score itself gives an indication of what a great match it was.

The film also showed the personalities of the players and their thoughts (somehow) of the upcoming match. While Borg and McEnroe were played by actors, the actions on the court seemed real, as if played by highly competent tennis players. The movie displayed the beauty of the game, of the power and finesse it requires to be successful. And like all sports, it showed that, given phenomenal physical abilities, it is the goings-on between the ears that determine who will or will not be a champion.

In 1980, I watched this match from a hotel room near Disney World. My partners on this trip were my son, Tommy, and my mate, Karen. We had traveled to Florida to take-in the Disney World fantasy. On the morning of this match, we were slated to visit another part of the Orlando daydream landscape.

I make my most humbling and groveling efforts to beg-off from going with them to visit another synthetic dragon motorizing through a make-believe swamp. They did not care. *Just stay here in the hotel room. We're headed for real adventure!* Little did they know they were missing one of the best tennis matches ever played.

It was during this match that I resolved to someday go to Wimbledon. I did indeed go, as related earlier.

For the movie itself, even if you are not a tennis fan, I think you will enjoy the film. It received a stand-up applause. Why do we applaud people who are not there to enjoy our claps? Perhaps as a group, we jointly show to one another our appreciation for the movie. I like the idea and joined in the applause.

The movie devotes relatively few minutes to the match itself. Most of the footage is about the two men and their contravening characters and personalities. This approach does not take away from the historic match. It adds to it.

### **“The China Hustle”**

*The Economist* magazine devotes a section to China in each issue. The section contains at least two articles on the country. At times, more space is devoted to China, such as the December 16, 2017, issue, which displayed the cover story titled, “Sharp Power.”

I intend to write a report on this subject. For this the article about the film festival, sharp power refers to China’s increasingly asserting itself around the world, including many facets in America, such as politics. The idea is that China intends to spread its influence, not with war, but with its money, power, and propaganda. I say “not with war.” However, the country is rapidly expanding its armed forces.<sup>1</sup>

I have been following China for many years. Under China’s current leaders, Xi Jinping, the country is becoming even more authoritarian, and the Communist Party is gaining even more control over its citizenry. It is blocking-out many efforts of America’s successful, high-tech companies in order to build its own. It is not a pleasant set of events to witness, especially with President Trump moving America into more isolation from the world and inexplicably withdrawing from international forums.

How self-defeating! We should remain in all these conferences and pacts, if nothing more than to make our powerful positions evident.

For the movie, which also was voted in the top thirty in the Festival, I will close out this report with some quotes from <http://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/the-china-hustle-film-review-1202553451/>.

In the meantime, if you have a chance, take in this film festival. Added to the attractiveness of the Palm Springs area, plus all these fine films, you are in for a treat. Now some quotes about the movie *The China Hustle*.

What [some American investors and investigators] discovered was something called a “reverse merger”: Because Chinese companies couldn’t be traded directly in U.S. stock exchanges, hundreds of them were “merging” with American shell companies that still had a presence on the New York Stock Exchange or other trading floors. In theory, American investors could then seize on the opportunity to profit from the gains of an ascendant economy.

In practice, however, many of these companies were reporting assets and revenues that were way out of line with their actual value — and without any auditing firms on the level, there’s no one to call them on it. Through creative acts of surveillance, like offering free tea samples to employees at a Chinese factory to determine how many workers it actually had, [investors and investigators] were able to sniff out the fraud and make money by

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<sup>1</sup> I ask the reader to recall my stand that China has every right to assert herself. In previous essays, I make the case that China is doing little more than emulating the behavior of the United States since WWII and before President Trump began an inexplicable retreat from being the main actor on the world’s stage.

shorting the stocks once an investigation suggested a much different story than the goosed-up numbers were telling. But the opacity of the bookkeeping is hard to penetrate, then and now, and *The China Hustle* effectively sounds the alarm.

That's it from this end about the festival. We are headed back next year, but will make certain we buy tickets this fall .