



Sweeping the nation with Rock! Paper! Scissors!

Fredericton native co-creates hilarious mockumentary. By Ashley Burse

When April Mullen and Tim Doiron walked through the door of the Rock, Paper, Scissors World Championships in downtown Toronto with sky-high hair, Day-Glo outfits and a full camera crew, no one even batted an eye. The group fit right in at one of the most eccentric competitive events in the world, surrounded by hardcore RPS fans sporting transparent unitards, suits of armour, and tutus.

For the two filmmakers, the decision that ultimately led them to the championships was a chance one. Doiron, originally from Fredericton and a Theatre St. Thomas alumnus, met Mullen in theatre school at Ryerson University. Although the two went their separate ways after graduation, it was always in the back of their minds that they wanted to make a feature film.

After spending a few years in Toronto, Doiron happened on the rock, paper, scissors tournament, with its colourful and eclectic collection of serious competitors – more than 500 at a stretch – and attended by thousands of fans rooting for their favourites. That's when *Rock, Paper, Scissors: The Way of the Toss* was born.

"When we started looking at it, we realized the subculture of the game was so intense and so insane," he explains, perched near the edge of the stage in an auditorium at St. Thomas University during the film's university screening tour. "We felt like we had tapped into something that was massive. We thought, wouldn't it be funny if there was a movie about a guy who took this way too seriously?"

Mullen and Doiron hit the proverbial nail right on the head. With that, they were off and running, putting together a 90-minute mockumentary starring themselves as Holly Brewer and Gary Brewer ("no relation...yet"), a couple of diehard RPS players gearing up to compete in the world championships. Gary, whose signature move is scissors (he even has a gold-plated pair for good luck) is goofy and intense, while Holly is the grounded, romantic other half.

The film also brings in a host of minor characters, including wacky neighbours Linda and Lloyd, orphaned oddball Trevor Morehouse, and arch-nemesis Baxter Pound.

Doiron and Mullen wrote and produced the film. They've seeing the project from inception to final curtain call; now, on a tour of the university circuit, they're excited to see fans – especially from the East Coast – laughing along with the characters on the screen.

"It all stemmed from characters we researched," says Mullen, who looks fairly conservative in comfy clothes right now. She'll be donning a fluffy white tutu and pink heels a little later on. "We did a lot of research at the RPS tournament, so we would go there and compete and take notes at the same time and notice that there were really unique nemesis in the competition world, and the cheating that happens, and we learned the rules and the different sorts of characters – we pulled a lot from real life."

"Then when we were writing, we created a really strong group of characters, because in a mockumentary, you need really strong characters to carry it through," Doiron adds. "There's a lot of truth and a lot of heart to the characters...and with the characters as well, there's a big East Coast flavour to the characters. I based the main trio out of Zealand, New Brunswick, and played on this whole joke – Gary Brewer, Holly Brewer, no relation...the East Coast flavour was really important in the writing of the film." Instead of making something for pure entertainment value, like the big-budget picture *Dodgeball*, the two wanted to create something that resonated with viewers, following in the footsteps of Christopher Guest or 1984's *This Is Spinal Tap*, a rock 'n' roll

mockumentary. The result has been compared to both *The Office* and *Napoleon Dynamite*, and clips on YouTube have garnered a cult following and mass acclaim.

But even though most of the movie is staged, the first day of shooting brought the gang to the actual RPS World Championships in full character and costume. In the film, they sign up for the tournament, stick their competition numbers on their backs, and put on their game faces, and no one is any the wiser.

Holly, who tells the audience about her fear of scissors (due to an unfortunate incident with an unruly player a few years back who 'snipped' her paper when he won), acts as Gary's cheerleader. On the other side of the arena, Baxter Pound – the skinny, hotdog-scarfing, collector-card yielding nemesis – is gathering quite a following. Fans know his name by the end of the competition and, in reality, he ends up doing quite well – Baxter-the-character comes within the top 10 of the entire competition, even garnering a spot on the championships' website.

Gary isn't quite so fortunate, falling short in one of the earlier rounds and dejectedly tearing out of the competition to lick his wounds in private.

But it's not all luck. After a couple of years researching the phenomenon of the sport, Doiron and Mullen are all about strategic gameplay and getting into the psychological aspect of the competition – developing, Mullen says, "the tosser in you".

"There is definitely stuff behind it. It's not just a game of luck," Doiron says. "People ask that all the time. There's strategies, there's psychology involved, there's getting in your opponent's head and knowing what they're going to toss next. It's

a full gamut. It's really interesting."

"There's an actual book written about it," Mullen adds. "It's called the *Rock, Paper, Scissors Strategy Handbook*."

"*Guide*," Doiron corrects. "By the brothers [who created the tournament] themselves. Doug and Graham Walker. They wrote a book, tactic strategies." "When we were at Ottawa University [on this tour], we saw someone reading it before they came up onstage to compete," says Mullen.

Adds Doiron: "Character-wise, Gary Brewer's strategy – he's more of an aggressive, in-your-face player. He likes to count out loud, he tosses fast, sort of tries to get the opponent off-balance, that type of thing. He tries to control the match, looks his opponent in the eye and really goes for it." They're having fun with it. Their outfits – think '70s-style aviators and skinny jeans for him, thigh-high socks for her, and over-the-top hair for both – reflect it. Their attitudes reflect it, especially as they cheer on UNB and STU students competing at an impromptu RPS match after the screening.

And the movie, with its side-splitting moments and awkwardly poignant storyline, reflects it.

"There's nothing better than being on set, live in the moment, and realizing that it's something you've created that you've envisioned in your imagination," says Mullen. "You see it in front of you and it's come to life and people are so passionate about the idea, and everybody's working so hard. It's really an amazing moment, when you look around the room and the cameras are ready, the lights are up, you're sort of sitting there and you're staring this moustached man in the eyes and it's like...wow. It actually all came together. The film being made, that was sort of the realization of what we'd be doing for the next few years of our lives. That was an incredible moment." ■

For more on this hilarious film, check out www.wayofthetoss.com. Also be sure to keep an eye out for the soon-to-be-released DVD.

