

Film Review

Striker No. 9, **Based on a novel by Menis Koumantareas, Directed by Pantelis Voulgaris.**

In recent years several film makers have turned their talents to producing films about sport. A series of baseball films have emerged from the United States of America with John Sayles' excellent *Eight Men Out* being reviewed in *Sporting Traditions* (May 1990). Other well known films about sport include *This Sporting Life*, *Chariots of Fire* and *The Club* based on David Williamson's play. In addition to this there have also been television series *Bodyline*, *Phar Lap*, *The Four Minute Mile* and *The Manageress*.

The Special Broadcasting Service have shown *Striker No. 9*, a Greek film concerned with soccer directed by Pantelis Voulgaris, based on a novel by Menis Koumantareas. *Striker No. 9* is a film which traces the rise and fall of Vasilis (Bill) Seretis, a talented goal scoring centre forward. The film begins with Seretis leaving Athens to begin a soccer

career with a provincial second division club. Seretis quickly establishes his reputation as a skilful goal scorer. He is corrupted, however, by a journalist to play 'dead' in a particular game, not so much for money, but in exchange for newspaper stories to enhance his prospects of being noticed, and transferring to a more successful first division/Athens team. This incident is to haunt and dog Seretis throughout his career. Through a lack of skill and ability Seretis manages to achieve his dream of playing top flight football. However, in a particular game he is instructed by his coach to avoid shooting at goal, and, in the process is forced to take the blame, for a fixed game. His career is halted by a major injury. The film finishes with a slightly older, and not much wiser Seretis facing the agonising choice of staying as a reserve with his top club, or seeking to re-establish his career (and injured body) with a lower division club.

Striker No. 9 provides a penetrating insight into the darker side of soccer and professional sport. Under Pantelis Voulgaris's skilful direction two major themes emerge from the film. The first is the alienating nature of professional soccer. *Striker No. 9* is made with a hard, cold edge. While team sports always have a notion of collective endeavour, or of collaboration between individuals, *Striker No. 9* is inhabited by individuals who are pervaded by an overwhelming element of corruption and greed; of persons who would sell their souls for power, *glory* or money. Second, *Striker No. 9* focuses on the perverse linkages that exist between spectators, club officials, sporting apparatchiki and players. Voulgaris portrays soccer as being akin to an ancient religious cult with spectators buying for sacrifices to satisfy the bloodlust of entertainment, with coaches and journalists acting as high priests, and lining their pockets with gold, in making and breaking the careers of players who are only too willing to offer themselves as sacrificial lambs.

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