

Harvard Beats Yale, 29-29

August 25, 2009

Harvard Beats Yale, 29-29 (2008), directed by Kevin Rafferty, a thrilling football movie showing Harvard's astonishing come-from-behind "victory" - the title is the Harvard Crimson's — in the last 42 seconds of the 1968 Yale-Harvard game. Rafferty is a brilliant documentarian, known for his earlier Atomic Café. In some ways, Harvard Beats Yale is continuous with the themes of the earlier film. Harvard's largely working-class (and mostly anti-Vietnam War) team is up against the aristocracy and arrogance of Yale and its fans.. Yale's spectacular players - Brian Dowling, Calvin Hill and the others — fail to notice that, while ahead, they are not running out the remaining time and Harvard is gaining. The Yalies don't know what it is to lose (literally the case with Dowling - Doonesbury's "BD," and known to his classmates as "God.") While Yale falls deeper into jeopardy, in their ignorance, fans cry out, "We're Number One, You're Number Two," and the Yale Band expresses its contempt by playing "Mickey Mouse," protected by arrogance from the fact that their ship is sinking. A central character is Mike Bouscaren, the latest from an old Yale family, who seems a stand-in for his pal George Bush (Yale '68) — a vicious man who fancies himself a killer and so admires his own divine mission to "take out" Harvard players that he exaggerates his role in doing so, while we watch the film of what actually happened. It's hard not to see continuity with Rafferty's Atomic Café. A ruling class that thinks it was appointed by god commits barbarities, lies, even to itself, and goes under. Jesse Lemisch (Yale 1957) Available on DVD. See it. And if you're a Yalie, note in particular the music accompanying the ending credits.(In the film, Rafferty asks actor and Harvard football vet Tommy Lee Jones, who roomed with Al Gore, whether he can tell us anything funny about Gore. Jones tells us that when touch phones were new, Gore learned to play "Dixie" on the phone. The film ends with Yale football songs played in phone tones. It's an appealing form of ridicule.)