

Celebrity status

If magazine writers went on strike, would anybody care?

BY SCOTT BULLOCK

There's big news on the tube tonight—Hollywood TV writers are on strike. Some “famous” and “sexy” actors (nice Rolex watch, nice Gucci handbag) are walking the picket lines chanting “Hey, hey! Ho, ho!” in full-throated support. The *Entertainment Tonight* reporter (nice Boss suit) is taking it all very seriously.

The actors are panicked. They know they're the stars. But they also know that once the cameras go off, the dazzle quickly fades. They recognize the writers as the gods who created them.

TV has a way of magnifying its own importance. If you're not on TV, it's like you don't even exist. We live in a bountiful age of information and entertainment options, a smorgasbord laden with choices. But TV, with its mindless sitcoms and sports, still attracts the most eyeballs. Where the eyeballs go, so go the advertising budgets. And where the advertising budgets go, so goes the bling.

I wonder: What if magazine writers went on strike? With all the talk about a freelance writers union these days, it's not as far-fetched as it seems.

But would anyone who matters, like TV journalists or advertising executives, really care? Would the media report on it with the same degree of angst, earnestness and enthusiasm? Would our audience of near-sighted readers get agitated and write e-mails to the publishers?

I can picture the scene: Magazine writers stomping around in the rain (nice Birkenstocks, nice Timex) with placards, chanting “Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Slave wages have got to go!” Somehow, I doubt *Entertainment Tonight* would pay much attention.

So I can't help asking: Are circulators part of the problem?

We live in a celebrity culture, yet as magazine marketers we often fail to sell our celebrity writers, our celebrity photographers and our celebrity editors. Don't we have a role to play in manufacturing our own stars? Or are we too focused on selling discounts off the newsstand price? Too fixated on gimmick premiums? Too busy

devaluing our product by giving it away for free?

I buy magazines not just because I like to dog ear the pages, not just because I like to highlight great quotes with a marker, not just because I like the feel of beautiful paper in my hands, not just because I can save them for future reference, tear out the pages for my dream cottage ideas file, slip into bed with them or cuddle up on the couch in front of a roaring fire with them. Buying magazines is how I can ensure the writ-

both Canadian.

The Hockey News understands its market. Fans love authoritative lists of the legends, so for its 60th anniversary, the venerable brand compiled a list of the top 60 players since 1967. The editors didn't glorify the top 60 owners of all time or the top franchises of all time. The players are the talent. The players are the stars. Harold Ballard is not in the Hockey Hall of Fame; Gretzy, Hull and Orr are. *The Hockey News* can tell you who the best goalies, the best defenseman, the best scorers, even the best coaches were.

But who are the 10 Greatest Canadian Editors of all time? Who are the 10 Greatest Writers? Art Directors? Photographers? Illustrators? Who are the Rookies of the Year? Who should journalism students study as role models to emulate and to be inspired by? To honour those who have served and continue to serve readers with great features, great packages, great layouts and great photography, I propose enshrining our best and brightest in a Canadian Magazine Hall of Fame. Perhaps the NMAF will take up the challenge.

Circulators understand that a great editor is like a great coach. It's up to the editor to assemble a great team, to motivate them and to goad them if necessary. The talent is the franchise. It's much easier to get season ticket holders to renew their subscription when the players are Hall of Fame material.

As the editor needs the writers, photographers and illustrators, the circulator needs a great editor. So, to the creative talent in Canada and the great editors who groom them, this Bud's for you. May you someday be blessed with bling. **M**



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ers get paid, that their talent gets rewarded, that the stuff I value continues to get produced. Why do surgically enhanced actors and steroid-juiced jocks get all the bling? Because we will pay \$200 for hockey tickets and \$10 for a pint of Bud at the game, that's why. Don't our writers and editors produce entertainment that's equally worthy? And isn't it our job as circulators to make readers understand this?

Like Harold Ballard, who neglected to hang the retired numbers of the greatest Maple Leafs from the Gardens rafters, we have failed to honour our heroes and failed to create our legends. It saddens me to think that the average Canadian is probably more likely to recognize *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter than *Maclean's* boss Ken Whyte, even though they're