

STREET CRACKS

Bob Nelson scores touchdown with his zany team

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Comedian Bob Nelson has earned respect, mainly thanks to a guy who never gets any.

Rodney Dangerfield gave the Long Island, N.Y., native his break in the business, turning the madcap slapstick comedian loose on audiences at his New York club, Dangerfield's. Dangerfield eventually took Nelson on tour to open for him at such prestigious venues as Carnegie Hall, Radio City and Caesars, which was unusual in a way. Many humorists prefer to have musical acts open for them rather than another funnyman.

"He (Dangerfield) gave me confidence; he gave me the knowledge on how to deal with these things," Nelson said. "He has so much wisdom."

"He would never say something sucks. He's never been critical of another comedian's act."

IRONICALLY, THEIR styles of humor are completely divergent. Whereas Dangerfield is a litany of one-liners, Nelson's comedy relies on the three-dimensional with characterizations and props.

The experience of touring with Rodney Dangerfield, though, offered Nelson enough self-assuredness that's paying off today. Nelson is co-starring in an upcoming Paramount film, "Lame Ducks," which opens in theaters this fall. He's cast as a Harpo type character in a Marx

Brothers takeoff, using his zany brand of physical humor throughout the movie.

The film features Nelson in his first major role. He did have a part in Arnold Schwarzenegger's "Kindergarten Cop."

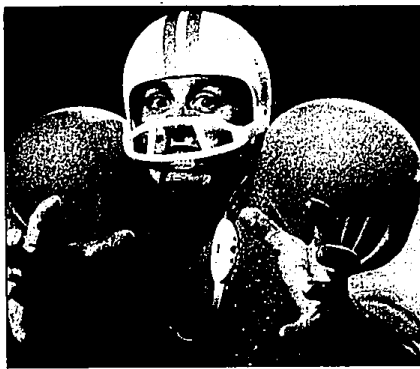
"You're there for four months," Nelson said. "It was very physical and demanding. But it's easier than your live appearances. If you're on stage and you make a mistake, you can't go back 30 minutes later and do a second take."

Film has since become a natural career extension for many comedians. So, too, is television.

Nelson has also been involved in several HBO comedy specials, including "One Night Stand." Unquestionably, though, Nelson's biggest break came on an earlier HBO comedy special in 1985. Again, blame it on Rodney. "Rodney Dangerfield's Ninth Annual Young Comedians Special" featured the likes of Sam Kinison, Rita Rudner, Louis Anderson and Bob Saget. All of whom have gone on to comedic fame and fortune.

But it was a ballooned shouldered comedian with an ill-fitting football helmet who stole the show, doing public service commercials because "a mind is a terrible thing."

YET, UNLIKE those aforementioned comedians, Bob Nelson hasn't garnered the publicity they have. Though that all could change with "Lame Ducks," in which he co-stars



Bob Nelson has plenty of stand-up credits, including those times, when as a wide receiver on his high school football team, he'd go for the laughs instead of the touchdown.

with John Turturro.

One reason is that Nelson hasn't chosen to go on the road much, preferring to perform mainly in the Northeast.

Another aspect could be his style of comedy. Visual aids are considered something of a hindrance in

some high-brow stand-up comedy circles and television.

This in spite of the fact humorists such as Red Skelton and Steve Martin are masters at using props.

"There are guys who are against props," said Nelson, who adds he once had his props taken away by

other comedians while on stage. "They believe comedy is (for the mind). You don't need props. They think it's a medieval form of comedy."

Also, Nelson is a series of characters and personalities. All of which are "alter-egos" of himself. They are so well-developed they virtually envelop the person who is performing them.

There's the swaying drunk who tries to pick up a woman at a bar. He asks her astrological sign while hiccupping to her, "I'm a feces."

Nelson does a punch-drunk boxer ala Leon Spinks and one of a toddler.

Of course, his All-American football team draws the most howls, including a lineup of such characters as the loping Bruce Kowalsky from San Francisco University and the Rocky-hinged Tony Cappuccino from the University of Brooklyn. Then there is Number 72, oops Number 27, who tells players to make sure to wear their athletic cup.

GRIDIRON PORTRAYALS come natural for Nelson, who played wide receiver and defensive end for his high school team in Massapequa, N.Y. The quarterback of the football powerhouse was actor Alec Baldwin. Sometimes when his team was up 55-0, Nelson would display his comedic talents.

"If I was in the end zone, wide open with my hands and no one around, I'd let the pass hit me in the head and go for the laugh."

Nelson went to Nassau Community College to major in theater. At the time, he was also working as a paste-up artist when a co-worker asked him to make a phone call. He did, impersonating a woman but dialing the wrong number.

The guy on the other end happened to be an owner of a comedy club. He thought Nelson was so funny he invited him down to his place for an audition.

After performing the comedy club circuit for a few years, Nelson ended up hosting a children's television show in Philadelphia "Double Moppets, Hold the Onions." The show won an Emmy from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 1983.

From the comedy stage to television, Nelson is diving head first into film with "Lame Ducks."

The grueling part was the filming, which took place November through March. Nelson has to wait until August to see how the final film turns out.

"If this movie bombs, I'm up the creek without a paddle because this is what I want to do. I'll have to find another niche. I'll always have stand up."

Bob Nelson will appear for one show only 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 25, at Chaplin's West Comedy Club, Telegraph Road, near Six Mile Road, Detroit. Tickets are \$15. For information, call 533-8866.

COMEDY CLUBS

Here are listings of some comedy clubs in our area. To let us know who is appearing at your club, send the information to: Comedy Listings, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

● CHAPLIN'S EAST

Mac King will appear Keith Ruff and John Thalia Tuesday through Saturday, June 25-29, at Chaplin's East, 31244 Groesbeck, Fraser. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday; 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 792-1902.

● CHAPLIN'S WEST

Bob Nelson will perform a special engagement Tuesday, June 25. Steve Baird will appear Scott Wyler and John Hefron Wednesday through Saturday, June 26-29, at Chaplin's West, 16850 Telegraph Road, one block south of Six Mile. Detroit. For information, call 533-8866.

● CHAPLIN'S PLYMOUTH

Kirk Noland will appear with Pete George Wednesday through Saturday, June 26-30, at Chaplin's Plymouth at the Radisson, 14707 Northville, Plymouth. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday; 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 454-4880.

● COMEDY CASTLE

Norm Stolz will appear with Tom Frank Tuesday-Saturday, June 25-29, at the Comedy Castle, 269 E. Fourth, Royal Oak. Show time is 8:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 542-9900.

● JOEY'S ALLEN PARK

Michael Blackman will perform Wednesday-Saturday, June 26-29, at Joey's Comedy Club and Sports Emporium, 15246 Southfield Road, Allen Park. Show times are 9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday; 8:30 and 10:45 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For information, call 382-7041.

● JOEY'S LIVONIA

Jeff Nease will perform with Mark Raope Wednesday-Saturday, June 26-29, at Joey's Comedy Club, Stoyan's Seafood & Steakhouse, 35671 Plymouth Road, Livonia. For information or reservations, call 261-0555.

● JOEY'S AT THE ROXY

Ted Holum will perform Friday-Saturday, June 28-29, at The Roxy, Haggerty Road, near I-94, Belleville. For information, call 659-1829.

● HOLLY HOTEL

Ted Norkey will perform with Lisa Gulch and Steve Billnitter Thursday-Saturday, June 27-29, at the Holly Hotel, 110 Battle Alley, Holly. Show times are 8:30 p.m. Thursday; 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For reservations, call 634-1891.

● MISS KITTY'S

Richard Chassler will perform with Jason Dixon Friday-Saturday, June 27-28, at Miss Kitty's Comedy Club, Long Branch, 595 N. Lapeer Road, Oxford. For information, call 628-6500.

● MAINSTREET

Dennis Wolfberg will appear Friday-Saturday, June 28-29, at Main-Street Comedy Showcase, 314 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. Friday and 7, 9 and 11 p.m. Saturday. For information, call 956-9080.

● BEA'S COMEDY CLUB

Downtown Tony Brown Mark Still and Beeny Archer will perform Friday-Saturday, June 28-29, at Bo's Comedy Club, 541 Larned, Detroit. Show times are 8:30 and 11 p.m. For information, call 961-2581.

● LOONEY BIN

Mike Green will appear with Gil-

● DUFFY'S

The Bob Posch Comedy Show will

perform 9 and 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays during June at Duffy's Waterfront Inn, 3635 Cooley Lake Road, Union Lake. For reservations, call 363-9469.

● PINE KNOB

The New Pine Knob Music Theatre Series No. 1 will feature Red

Skelton, June 30; Don Rickles with Tom Teandle, July 9; and Alan King with Paula Poundstone, Aug. 7. Series No. 14 features Budd Friedman's "Night at the Improv" with

Lois Anderson, Joe Nipote, Mike Blider, Bobby Collins and Ron Pearson, July 1; Jay Leno, July 24; and George Carlin with America, July 25. For information, call 377-8200.



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