

NBC's 'Babe Ruth' takes a swing at a legend

Small-screen effort hits the high points

By Suzanne Gill

"The book on Babe," says actor Stephen Lang, "is that he was a simple man, but I've never really met a simple man." First and foremost, George Herman "Babe" Ruth was a giant among baseball players. He shook the game to its foundations, and he personified the era in which he lived. Often, the forces that drove him sent him out of control. A man of lesser strength would have succumbed.

Born six years before the century, young George Ruth was left by his father at a Baltimore orphanage, and he never stopped being a kid. When he left Baltimore, his one thought was to play baseball, or, as the script of NBC's "Babe Ruth" puts it, to "have fun." His exuberance spilled over into his private life, which was largely

unreported in the press at the time.

He ate, smoked, gambled and womanized. And when he went to the ballpark, he hit home runs.

Lang's task in portraying Ruth in the movie, which airs Sunday, Oct. 6, began with the challenge of learning to play ball like Ruth. Ordinarily a right-handed hitter, Lang spent four weeks at Hall-of-Famer Rod Carew's California baseball camp, perfecting his Babe Ruth swing, as well as the patented Ruth trot as he circled the bases.

"The job was not to turn me into a left-handed slugger," Lang says with an ironic grin. "The job was to turn me into the greatest ballplayer that's ever played the game."

"Hitting seemed to me to be the central metaphor for his life. When the hitting began to fall into place, then playing the role began to fall into place." (Ruth himself modeled his swing after that of Chicago White Sox slugger "Shoeless" Joe Jackson. "He had the perfectest

swing I ever saw in my life," Ruth said.)

With Ruth, everything must be raised to a higher order of magnitude. He was not only physically big (Lang gained 35 pounds just to play the young, relatively slim Ruth), but he had a big heart as well. And, while many of his records have since been broken, no one player has equaled his performance on the field. As he said of himself, "I swing big, I hit big, or I miss big, and that's the way I live my life, as big as I can."

"Babe Ruth" paints its hero in broad, quick strokes. Lang gives the part his all, but he can't overcome the glibness of the script, which catches the flavor of the era, yet makes the movie a series of tableaux. Too many scenes are set up simply to shoehorn in a famous quote, either by the Babe or about him. Screenwriter Michael de

Please turn to Page 20

855-4870

"YOUR"
CLEANERS OF FARMINGTON HILLS

851-7172

Family Owned and Operated

13 MILE & ORCHARD LAKE ROAD
(Next to the New Arbor)

29571 ORCHARD LAKE ROAD

Mon-Thurs 7 a.m.-9 p.m.
Friday 7 a.m.-6 p.m.
Sat. 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

We Offer

- Complete Suede, Leather and Fur Cleaning
- Professional Wedding Gown Restoration
- Complete Drapery, Spread & Buffet Care
- We Own and Operate Our Own Shit Laundry, Bachelor & Bachelorette Laundry Service

Now This Old Way!



We clean clothes the modern way - all new electronic equipment that cleans "TOUGH" clothes efficiently

20% OFF

COUPON MUST BE PRESENTED WITH INCOMING ORDER, EXCLUDES SUEDES, LEATHER, LAUNDRY, WEDDING GOWNS & DRAPES

WYS COUPON EXPIRES 10-31-91

May Be Used Six Times

SHIRTS

ON HANGERS

79¢

WITH ANY INCOMING DRY CLEANING ORDER OF \$7.50 OR MORE

BOX SHIRTS EXTRA EXCLUDING SAME DAY SERVICE \$1.10 WITHOUT DRY CLEANING

WYS COUPON EXPIRES 10-31-91

May Be Used Six Times

BAG 'EM REDEEM COUPONS IN BAG FOR \$8.00

Ask us and gussy about our Fast Drop Off Bag Service!