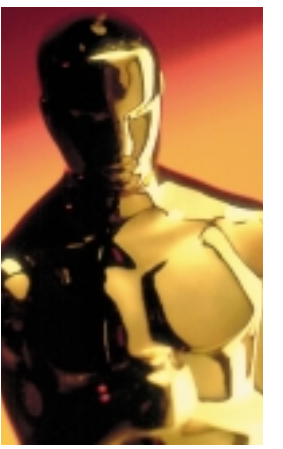
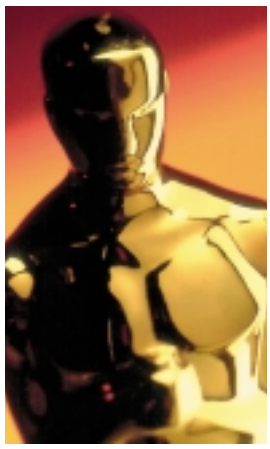


FRIDAY FOCUS

# Reel March Madness

## How the contenders match up for Hollywood's big night

By Erin Podolsky ■ Daily Arts Writer



The missing statuettes were found early this week in a Los Angeles dumpster. The wayward ballots showed up in postal service hell after replacements had already been mailed. Goodbye Gonzaga and Seton Hall, hello Paul Thomas Anderson and Alexander Payne. It's Oscar time — and this March, Hollywood's answer to the NCAA basketball tourney ain't nothin' but madness.

Airing this Sunday on ABC with host Billy Crystal, the 72nd annual Academy Awards are just two days away. Slated to begin at 8 p.m., it's guaranteed to be a star-studded event.

And, yes, the nominees will be around as well. Some races are probably tighter than others, some categories you've never heard of and some you'll wish you'd never heard of by the tenth time Gwyneth Paltrow quivers her way to the stage. The only sure thing is that Robin Williams' rendition of "Blame Canada," the resounding responsibility anthem from this summer's "South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut," will

probably offend many. The Academy folk also missed a golden opportunity to have uber-Oscar songstress (and Quebecois) Celine Dion belt out the tune backed by a symphony dressed in "South Park" costumes.

What about the stars who didn't get invitations to the dance? Regular Oscar favorites are here as usual, leaving a great number of more worthy candidates out in the cold. It's less a question of who's hot and who's not than a question of the nature of default and habit. Like anyone else, we've got our list of shoulda-coulda-woulda-beens. Here's a run down of the main categories and the nominees' chances.

**Best Actor:** Denzel Washington ("The Hurricane") and Kevin Spacey ("American Beauty") are running neck and neck for the prize. Russell Crowe is a dark horse third for "The Insider." Remaining nominees Sean Penn ("Sweet And Lowdown") and Richard Farnsworth ("The Straight Story") have no chance. Who got left out? This makes two years in a

row that Jim Carrey has been cruelly snubbed for his work in pictures that don't fit the "Ace Ventura" mold. While his lack of a nomination last year for "The Truman Show" could be considered a fluke, the fact that Carrey was passed over again this year for "Man on the Moon" is a true slap in the face. Winner: Kevin Spacey. Alternate: Denzel Washington.

**Best Actress:** Reese Witherspoon's razor-edged, sugar-sweet turn as goody two-shoes with a heart of depravity Tracy Flick in "Election" was discarded in favor of YAMSON (Yet Another Meryl Streep Oscar Nomination). It's small consolation that Streep is undoubtedly fifth in the field of five nominees. The gradual accumulation of awards for Hilary Swank ("Boys Don't Cry") places her at the front of the race. Swank picked up nearly all the major film critics awards in addition to winning a Golden Globe — but lost the Screen Actors Guild contest to Annette Ben-

ing ("American Beauty"). This leaves Streep, Julianne Moore ("The End of the Affair") and Janet McTeer ("Tumbleweeds") out in the cold. Winner: Hilary Swank. Alternate: Annette Bening.

**Best Supporting Actor:** As usual, this category had the deepest pool of potential nominees — and as usual, the wrong ones were nominated. As much as I'm loath to admit it, Michael Caine has emerged as the likely winner — and I'll go to my grave maintaining it's because Tom Cruise's woman-eating Frank T.J. Mackey of "Magnolia" and Haley Joel Osment's haunted little boy of "The Sixth Sense" split the vote and allowed Caine to sneak in the back door. Those on the outside looking in include Christopher Plummer ("The Insider") and John Malkovich ("Being John Malkovich"). Malkovich's pride-swallowing work was a wonder to behold. Ignoring Malkovich was a misstep for the Academy, as was failing to tap Chris Cooper of "American Beauty" and Philip Seymour Hoffman of "Magnolia." Nominees Michael Clarke Duncan ("The Green Mile") and Jude Law ("The Talented Mr. Ripley") will finish out the night without a trip to the podium. Winner: Michael Caine. Alternate: Tom Cruise.

**Best Supporting Actress:** The first award of the evening to whet our appetites for the majors is nearly as tough as the supporting actor category. While Angelina Jolie is the favorite after picking up both a Golden Globe and a SAG trophy, every nominated performance save Samantha Morton in "Sweet And Lowdown" was superior — and every performance, period, was in a better movie than Jolie's "Girl, Interrupted." The two wrecked women of "Magnolia," Melora Walters and the ubiquitous Julianne Moore, were left out of the running, as was Cameron Diaz's homely turn in "Being John Malkovich." If Jolie doesn't take it, Catherine Keener ("Being John Malkovich"), Chloe Sevigny ("Boys Don't Cry") and Toni Collette ("The Sixth Sense") will be waiting to snap up the Oscar. Winner: Angelina Jolie. Alternate: Too close to call.

**Best Original Screenplay:** It's been a plum year for screenwriting, with not a weak nomination in the original field (okay, so Mike Leigh didn't actually write but improvised "Topsy-Turvy" — we all make mistakes). Alan Ball's "American Beauty" should have no trouble destroying the competition as it's likely to be an evening full of awards for the film. But the rest of the



Courtesy of Touchstone

nominees are daringly original as well: Charlie Kaufman's tripped-out "Being John Malkovich;" M. Night Shyamalan's spine-tingling, heart-wrenching "The Sixth Sense;" and Paul Thomas Anderson's magnum opus "Magnolia." Winner: Alan Ball. Alternate: Charlie Kaufman.

**Best Adapted Screenplay:** Not as strong as the original screenplay category, the adapted race has a clear deserving winner in Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor's "Election" — and a clear undeserving one in "The Cider House Rules." The latter was adapted by author John Irving from his own novel, a trick that the Academy loves to recognize. Also in the race but lagging far behind are Frank Darabont for "The Green Mile," Anthony Minghella for "The Talented Mr. Ripley" and Eric Roth and Michael Mann for "The Insider." Not much to complain about since it's a weak field to begin with. Winner: John Irving. Alternate: Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor.

**Best Director:** The choices in this category are almost perfect — until you run your finger down the list and get a paper cut when you see Lasse Hallstrom for "The Cider House Rules." Recognizing Hallstrom not only plays directly into Miramax's grubby marketing hands, it insults the work done by the likes of Alexander Payne ("Election"), Paul Thomas Anderson ("Magnolia"), Kimberly Peirce ("Boys Don't

Cry") and even Stanley Kubrick's swan song, "Eyes Wide Shut." What's next, nominating Joel Schumacher? At least we're safe with Sam Mendes ("American Beauty"), Spike Jonze ("Being John Malkovich"), M. Night Shyamalan ("The Sixth Sense") and Michael Mann ("The Insider") rounding out the noms. Winner: Sam Mendes. Alternate: M. Night Shyamalan.

**Best Picture:** We're going to keep our mouths shut on "The Cider House Rules" for this one. You know the drill. Dreamworks and Miramax repeat last year's best picture high noon showdown, but this year Dreamworks will walk away the winner. "American Beauty," despite Harvey Weinstein's best efforts, should have no problem taking home the gold. "The Sixth Sense," "The Insider" and, for some bizarre reason known only to the Academy, "The Green Mile" make up the rest of the nominees. This means no "Being John Malkovich," no "Magnolia" and no "Boys Don't Cry." But that's not the worst of it. The worst is the complete Oscar dis of "Toy Story 2," one of only two sequels in history to be better than the original (for the record, the first was "The Godfather: Part II"). Hey howdy hey, Academy, what's your beef? Winner: "American Beauty." Alternate: "The Sixth Sense."

And so ends another year of rash predictions and rationalizations. Check back Monday morning to see how it all went down.

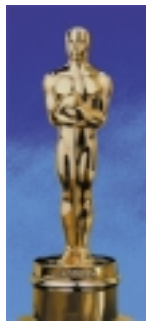


Courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox

## If we ran the show... Daily film writers pick their favorites

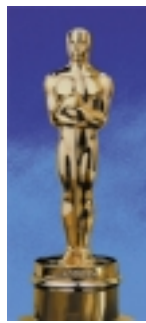
### Matthew Barrett

- 1) Magnolia
- 2) American Beauty
- 3) Three Kings
- 4) For Love of the Game
- 5) The Insider
- 6) Being John Malkovich
- 7) Toy Story 2
- 8) Election
- 9) A Map of the World
- 10) The Limey



### Leslie Boxer

- 1) Being John Malkovich
- 2) American Beauty
- 3) Three Kings
- 4) Election
- 5) Boys Don't Cry
- 6) Run Lola Run
- 7) Fight Club
- 8) Ben's Bar Mitzvah Video
- 9) A Map of the World
- 10) Notting Hill



### Chris Cousino

- 1) Magnolia
- 2) American Beauty
- 3) Boys Don't Cry
- 4) Election
- 5) The Sixth Sense
- 6) Toy Story 2
- 7) Run Lola Run
- 8) Three Kings
- 9) Man on the Moon
- 10) Eyes Wide Shut



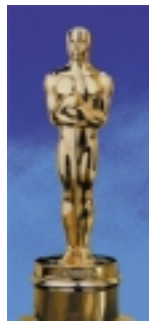
### Laura Flyer

- 1) All About My Mother
- 2) Being John Malkovich
- 3) Boys Don't Cry
- 4) American Beauty
- 5) Run Lola Run
- 6) Besieged
- 7) Toy Story 2
- 8) Sweet and Lowdown
- 9) The Insider
- 10) Go



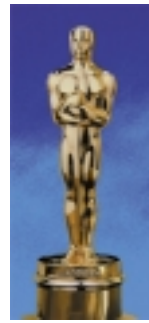
### Erin Podolsky

- 1) American Beauty
- 2) Magnolia
- 3) Boys Don't Cry
- 4) Run Lola Run
- 5) The Sixth Sense
- 6) Election
- 7) Toy Story 2
- 8) Being John Malkovich
- 9) Fight Club
- 10) Eyes Wide Shut



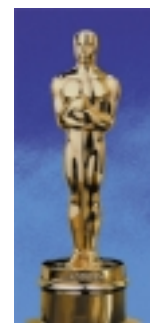
### Aaron Rich

- 1) Three Kings
- 2) The Insider
- 3) Mr. Death
- 4) American Movie
- 5) Magnolia
- 6) The Winslow Boy
- 7) Election
- 8) Twin Falls Idaho
- 9) Felicia's Journey
- 10) Cruel Intentions



### David Victor

- 1) The Matrix
- 2) American Beauty
- 3) Fight Club
- 4) Being John Malkovich
- 5) Magnolia
- 6) The Sixth Sense
- 7) Run Lola Run
- 8) Three Kings
- 9) Iron Giant
- 10) Splendor



And the winner will be ...	Matthew Barrett	Leslie Boxer	Chris Cousino	Laura Flyer	Erin Podolsky	Aaron Rich	David Victor
BEST PICTURE	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty
BEST DIRECTOR	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes
BEST ACTOR	Kevin Spacey	Denzel Washington	Kevin Spacey	Denzel Washington	Kevin Spacey	Kevin Spacey	Kevin Spacey
BEST ACTRESS	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Annette Bening	Hilary Swank
BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR	Tom Cruise	Michael Caine	Michael Caine	Michael Caine	Michael Caine	Michael Caine	Tom Cruise
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS	Angelina Jolie	Angelina Jolie	Angelina Jolie	Angelina Jolie	Angelina Jolie	Angelina Jolie	Catherine Keener
If we could vote ...							
BEST PICTURE	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	American Beauty	The Insider	American Beauty
BEST DIRECTOR	Michael Mann	Sam Mendes	Sam Mendes	Michael Mann	Sam Mendes	Michael Mann	Spike Jonze
BEST ACTOR	Kevin Spacey	Kevin Spacey	Kevin Spacey	Denzel Washington	Kevin Spacey	Russell Crowe	Kevin Spacey
BEST ACTRESS	Julianne Moore	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Hilary Swank	Janet McTeer	Hilary Swank
BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR	Tom Cruise	Tom Cruise	Tom Cruise	Michael Caine	Haley Joel Osment	Tom Cruise	Tom Cruise
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS	Catherine Keener	Angelina Jolie	Chloe Sevigny	Samantha Morton	Catherine Keener	Chloe Sevigny	Catherine Keener