



PHOTO: NBS PHOTO: MICHAEL MULLER

Above: Scene from *Friday Night Lights*, shot by DP David Boyd.

Creating Compelling

The Super 16 film format is enjoying a resurgence in the world of television production. Lightweight cameras, improved film stocks, higher quality lenses and advanced postproduction equipment provide creative freedom, along with an ability to move quickly and efficiently. Four cinematographers who are using the Super 16 mm format to create compelling television programs tell their stories:

Friday Night Lights

Friday Night Lights is a television series based on the successful 2004 feature film of the same name. When discussing the right visual aesthetic for the series, David Boyd, writer/producer Peter Berg and their collaborators envisioned a documentary realism. "I thought of the documentary *Gimme Shelter* and docu-drama *Medium Cool*," says Boyd. "Also, the work of D.A. Pennebaker, Frederick Wiseman and Rickey Leacock. We want to give the impression we're observing something that's happening. We let things happen, rather than make them happen."

The decision to use the Super 16 format was made to support that aesthetic. Boyd usually shoots with three ARRI SR cameras, although in some situations he uses as many as six. The cameras are almost always handheld. Each episode is usually accomplished over eight 9-hour days. The negative is transferred with a Spirit DataCine at Universal Digital Services in Los Angeles.

The approach to coverage is unusual. "We let scenes run in real time from beginning to end with no rehearsals," says Boyd. "If we need something tighter or more specific, we capture that on the second or third run-through. The actors get to perform in continuity, and we can cover a lot of ground quickly. It's a delight for directors. The other day we had six pages of dialog to shoot in a coffee shop with 12 characters talking, and we were finished in three hours."

The lack of rehearsal adds to the feeling of reality, Boyd says. Sometimes the frame arrives on the shot or focus sharpens a moment late, and those "mistakes" are included in the final edit. "We deny ourselves that luxury," he says. "By keeping our eyes and ears open, we might have an

idea of where the actors might go, but the things they do and when they do them are a continual surprise to us. On the first crack, we may get something that's worth 63 percent of a good take, but the second crack is 110 percent. The operators are making sure it's in focus, and camera assistants are doing the best they can with onboard monitors."

The images are composed and displayed in 16:9 aspect ratio. Boyd says the shape of the frame plays an important part in the storytelling.

"The 16:9 aspect ratio means everything to our approach," he says. "If it's a close-up in profile, we can put the actor far enough off to the left or right to not see their ear. It's just an eye, a nose and a mouth. That stretches the frame, and you start to see so much more into the emotion of what's happening than you would otherwise."

"It's like that legendary shot by Bill Fraker (ASC) in *Rosemary's Baby*, where you see half of Mia Farrow as she's talking on the phone, and the whole audience is leaning over to try and see around that corner." ■