



## Top Spot of the Week

Type: Screenwork

June 20, 2008, Christine Champagne ---

Has anyone emailed you a link to that awesome footage of the ball girl making a stunning catch in foul territory during a minor league baseball game between the Fresno Grizzlies and the Tacoma Rainiers?

The video has been making the rounds on the Internet and likely fooling a lot of people, but what we are seeing is, in fact, staged. It is actually a viral video for Gatorade titled "Ball Girl" that was created by Chicago's **Element 79 Partners** and directed by Baker Smith of harvest, Santa Monica.

In a cluttered environment full of viral work that isn't really viral (too many agencies are just slapping TV commercials up on YouTube these days and expecting them to go viral), "Ball Girl" stands out as being a true viral video, a seemingly authentic piece of compelling footage that looks like it was cut right out of a real ball game.

Meanwhile, "Ball Girl" hits a homerun for product integration. In a subtle but certainly noticeable case of product placement, there is a bottle of Gatorade on the ground next to the chair the ball girl sits in after making her great play.

*SHOOT* sought an interview with the creative team from **Element 79** responsible for conceptualizing "Ball Girl," but as of press time, the agency had not gained permission from its client PepsiCo to speak about the thinking behind the viral. As you may recall, PepsiCo pulled creative duties on Gatorade from **Element 79** this past April, awarding the account to TBWA\Chiat\Day, Los Angeles. **Element 79** had handled Gatorade for six years.

Smith was able to discuss the production end of the project, of course, explaining that he and DP Eric Trembl shot "Ball Girl" on location during and after an actual game between the aforementioned Fresno Grizzlies and Tacoma Rainiers that took place in Fresno.

Essentially, they shot coverage of the game on HD and later pieced it together to look as though one of the Grizzlies batters had whacked a ball of homerun distance out past the left field foul line.

"The big shot, the one that follows the ball out [from the plate to left field], was completely choreographed for lack of a better word," Smith said, explaining that a motion control shot followed what would have been the trajectory of the ball, and the artisans at New York's Framestore CFC later inserted a ball in post.

### Golden glove

As for how the ball girl (played by stuntwoman Phoenix Brown) made the spectacular catch that is the highlight of the video, she got a little help from rigs and Framestore CFC.

Smith and his crew shot the big catch right after the game they were shooting concluded, attaching the ball girl to wires and having two stunt men off to the side literally yanking her up the wall.

"It was so low-tech," Smith said of the stunt. "We had her run, and she would jump, and they just gave her a little extra oomph. It was really very, very simple."

That said, there was choreography involved. Smith had marks for the ball girl to hit.

We were trying to have her emulate those Parkour guys in France," Smith said, making reference to a street sport and art form that has participants moving about various environments—from apartment buildings to public parks—propelling their bodies off of walls, stairs and railings.

### **Keeping it simple**

"Of all the effects stuff I've ever done in my life, this was the biggest no-brainer as far as how to do it," Smith said, crediting Framestore CFC with not pressuring him to go more CG and hi-tech with his approach.

"They were just fantastic," Smith said of the visual effects shop. "They are of the mind that you figure out how you want to do it, then they'll make it look good as opposed to certain places that say, 'You have to do it this way.' That can be a bit stifling. But [Framestore] said, 'Tell us how you want it to be, and shoot it the way you want, and we'll make it work.' "

From a visual effects point of view, the job was straightforward, according to Framestore executive producer James Razzell. "The main challenge was rig removal for us," Razzell said. As previously noted, Framestore also created an animated ball. Crowd enhancement was also required.

Was Razzell disappointed that the job didn't involve more CG elements?

"Baker's goal and the agency's goal was for it to be something that looked like it actually happened rather than it being some house of flying daggers with her leaping forty feet in the air," Razzell said laughing.

"I think [the realism] is what really sells it. It really feels like she has scaled the wall even from the alternative, slo-motion angle."

Paul Martinez and Charlie Johnston of Lost Planet, Santa Monica, cut "Ball Girl," which, appropriately, ends abruptly. Smith noted that someone taping this game at home and then posting it online likely wouldn't have the tools to do a fade out, so the sudden end made sense. Furthermore, it added to the pulled-from-TV quality of the video.

Reflecting on the job, Smith remarked, "It's funny. Having done this from twenty years, it's gone from the ultimate compliment to a director being, 'That's so cinematic' to it being, 'Hey, that looks kind of crappy like a viral video!' "