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Four Days in October

"They are down, 3-0, after last night's 19-8 rout, and, in this sport, that is an official death sentence. Soon it will be over, and we will spend another dreary winter lamenting this and lamenting that,” Bob Ryan Boston Globe reporter stated. It’s baseballs biggest rivalry and it seemed as if it was going to end before it had even started. With the Boston Red Sox staring a 3-0 series deficit in the face all hope had been lost. It was a mountain that no team in baseball history had climbed and one that looked virtually impossible with the star power of the Yankee roster and the weight of the curse of The Great Bambino (an 86-year curse that was brought on when Babe Ruth was traded to the Yankees). However, the next four days would produce arguably four of the greatest baseball games to be played with an outcome that no one expected. Four Days in October, a documentary produced by ESPN’s 30 for 30 studio presents a chronological and breathtaking short film that communicates an argument that this series was the greatest in the history of the sport, establishes that their purpose for this message is to relive and bring the 2004 ALCS back to life, and to provide the relatable theme of overcoming to their audience.

 Four Days in October, directed by Major League Baseball Productions with the ESPN 30 for 30 studio, tells a chronological story using game film, player interviews, and questions posed by two contributors throughout the film, “…to take fans back in time and place them in the bubble that was October 17th-October 20th…” so they could relive the moments of arguably the greatest baseball series in history ("Four Days in October - ESPN Films: 30 for 30"). The film strategically used extensive archive coverage in order to produce a real time effect on their viewers. Using the broadcast calls from the games and tossing in locker room footage from the players gave viewers their first in depth look at this series and allowed them to connect on a deeper and more personal level. The directors also focused on particularly important elements of the series that each and every baseball fan wanted to relive. Recognizing the importance of Big Papi’s clutch moments, the infamous bloody sock, and the famous phrase “Why not us?” gave the documentary an authenticity that could not be paralleled. Joe Buck’s famous call of Big Papi’s walk off home run in game four is an example of this authenticity. This authenticity allowed viewers to feel as if they were enjoying this historic moment again while providing new insight that may not have been previously known. The producers of Four Days in October did a superb job in the description stage by creating a documentary that uniquely presented the events of the 2004 ALCS in order to recreate the viewer’s emotions they originally had during the series.

 In Four Days of October the producers included several reoccurring patterns to emphasize the theme of overcoming and remind viewers that this series was the greatest in baseball history. The reoccurrence of pre and post-game shots of Red Sox player Kevin Millar allowed viewers to create a personal connection with a specific player and in turn, a deeper connection to the series and film as a whole. Kevin Millar’s never changing positive attitude and witty remarks add a humorous element that you do not often find in documentaries. Another pattern in the film was the switching between archived game footage and the casual interview with Boston Red Sox super fan and legend, Bill Simmons. Simmons is a Red Sox Nation icon and his interview with reporter and comedian Lenny Clarke provides insight into the thoughts and feelings of a die-hard fan during this stressful and historic series. The production style and quality of Four days in October created unique patterns that set the documentary apart and helped establish their argument that the 2004 ALCS was the greatest series in the history of baseball.

 These eccentric production processes the producers included to create this documentary have different meanings that help to establish the overall argument which can be observed in interpretation, the third step in the media literacy process. The placement and purpose of the archived footage can be interpreted by the viewer in several different ways. The first purpose the viewer may reach a conclusion on for the game footage is the producers attempt to bring the viewer back to the special moments of this series that had all baseball fans emotions on a roller coaster. The game footage puts the viewers back into their shoes and helps them relive the moments of watching this series live back in 2004. This interpretation supports the producers overall purpose and argument for the documentary. The beautiful thing about film and media in general, is that each individual viewer interprets what is produced differently. While the purpose of the archived game footage was most likely to take the viewers back in time, some viewers may have seen the game footage in a different light. Another interesting addition to this documentary is the addition of footage of trash talking sports writers bashing Red Sox Nation. One way that viewers may interpret this is that the producers included sports writers “…making predictions that would turn out to be wrong…” to remind Red Sox fans of the immense passion they felt after proving the entire world wrong (Tobias). The insertion of the sports writers quotes served as reminder to baseball fans just how much the Red Sox had to overcome in this series. Another way viewers may have interpreted the purpose of the soundbites from sports writers is to show just how improbable the comeback they made was. The soundbites reminded the viewers of the talent of the Yankee roster, the fact that no team had ever come back from a 3-0 deficit, and the lackluster efforts of the Red Sox in the first three games in order to emphasize the improbability of what they would come to do. Either way that this can be interpreted the strategic inclusion of these soundbites are an eccentric part of this film that adds to the overall viewing experience.

 Evaluation, which can be defined as arriving at a judgment about the media message relates to the overall purpose of the documentary and the overarching and relatable theme of overcoming. The overall judgment reached by the viewer of the media message usually relates to the purpose of the production. Through a chronological and orderly film with touches of humor, unique elements, and baseball history the producers of this documentary created a positive viewing experience for all who watched it while fulfilling their purpose to argue that the 2004 ALCS was historically baseballs best series. The producers not only provided a sound argument for their assertion but they also provided a relatable and overarching theme of overcoming that connected to all of their viewer’s baseball fans or not. The constant reminder of the improbability of this comeback and the underdog coming out on top showed viewers that no matter their circumstances, they can overcome. It may seem far-fetched to say that viewers found comfort and encouragement from a baseball team crushing a historical feat but sports have a more meaningful impact than most think. Everyone likes to walk away from a film feeling positive and encouraged and Four Days in October does just that for their viewers. Walking away from the film viewers feel as if they can take on the world after seeing a band of misfits overcome an improbable deficit and crush an eighty-six-year-old curse to make baseball history. Leaving their viewers with a positive feeling walking away from the film in turn gives the viewers an overall good perception of the film as a whole. Everyone likes a comeback story and the underdog overcoming all odds and Four Days in October does this by showing that the Sox “…faced insurmountable odds…” but still overcame and proved the whole world wrong (Jackson). Overall, the producer’s unique additions and creative style created a positive viewing experience and did an impeccable job at articulating their argument and purpose for their film while providing a relatable and overarching theme for all.

The viewers of Four Days in October can come to a conclusion that the film produces an overall positive viewing experience while emphasizing the producers purpose and argument that the 2004 ALCS was the greatest in baseball history. Through eccentric touches, archived footage and film of players and fans Four Days in October brought all baseball fans back to those four historic fall nights. It is a documentary that is informative, unique, and one that relates a positive theme and message. The insertion of several unique elements in the short film allowed viewers to recreate their experiences in a new found light and reignite the passion they had during that historic fall. By looking at Four Days in October through a critical lens with the five steps to media literacy the conclusion can be reached that the producers of this documentary created a film that brought passion to their viewers and provided a solid argument for their overall purpose.

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