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TURKEY BOWL

Written, Directed and Produced by Kyle Smith

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TURKEY BOWL

Written & Directed by Kyle Smith

SYNOPSIS:

A group of ten friends gather in a Los Angeles park for an annual game of touch football where the prize is a frozen turkey. As the game unravels in real time, a little friendly (and funny) competition reveals deeper truths about life post-college.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

"We went through 1,400 bottles of water during the course of the shoot. There was lots of hydration." – Kyle Smith

When *Turkey Bowl* premiered at this year's SXSW, it prompted IndieWire to dub Kyle Smith the next Robert Altman. The filmmaker considers it high praise, given Altman was the master of real time cinema. For Smith, *Turkey Bowl*, was more of an opportunity to combine his three passions into one project: filmmaking, friendship and football.

In June of 2009, Kyle Smith was cast on an ABC reality game show called *Crash Course* along with his roommate Morgan Beck. Why two luckless guys were cast alongside "Team Blonde" and "Team Girlfriends" will remain the best kind of mystery. The two approached the show's premise—normal people doing dangerous stunt driving—with intense focus and preparation that, luckily, their opponents lacked. And so it came to pass that they won a \$50,000 grand prize. After their car (which was on fire) went off a ramp and slammed into a concrete barrier on the final stunt, Morgan told hosts Dan Cortese and Orlando Jones that he would get Lasik eye surgery and Invisalign for his teeth with his half of the bounty; Kyle was ridiculed by Jones for saying he would use the money to make a Western set in Missouri.

A year later, Morgan got a slick new pair of glasses and 9 painful months of braces (his teeth look great), and Kyle made *Turkey Bowl*—not exactly what they said they'd do, but close enough.

In conceiving of a low-budget movie, it's funny the things that seem like solutions become their own set of problems. To wit: *Turkey Bowl* is set in one location, an obvious way to keep a budget down. But that location happened to be a field, and due to the stringent filming rules in Los Angeles (and the professional obligations of the cast and crew in LA, which prevented Smith from taking them elsewhere), it was very difficult to locate a quiet, convenient, and empty filming location that they could secure for 10 days.

Smith settled on the first park he saw—a hidden gem on the south end of LA's Debs Regional State Park northeast of downtown, one of the mountainous stretches that the movies tend to overlook in their depiction of Los Angeles as concrete and sprawl.

Then there was the matter of finding 10 actors to work 10 days in the late August heat. The film was shot in story order, allowing for slight redirections of the individual scenes in case Smith captured something special, and usually had all the actors on set at all times. Without any true lead characters, it also seemed like a bit of a challenge to request this time from the actors for just a supporting role. Since *Turkey Bowl* is a movie about friendship, it also made sense to cast Smith's friends.

Smith started writing the film in February of 2010—the week he received the check from ABC—for a July shoot date. Smith chose to name the characters after the actors playing them in order to build cohesion and a form of familiarity amongst friends. He drew from the actors to improvise quirks and personality traits for the characters.

From the outset, a character was written specifically for Morgan—braces and all—as well as Smith's old friends Kerry Bishé and Bob Turton. Zeke Hawkins, a friend who is also a talented director, came onboard and brought his singular roommate, Tom DiMenna. Troy Buchanan, an old collaborator and newer friend, flew out from Miami to be in the film. Adam Benic, a screenwriter with no previous acting experience, filled in a role that opened at the last moment. There were other 11th hour fiascos, too—Smith doesn't know many girls, so it was an incredible surprise when he met Zoe Perry and she agreed, on 3 days notice, to rearrange her schedule to make the film. Jon Schmidt did the same, and Sergio Villarreal came from nowhere to walk on his first movie set in any capacity.

Jeff Powers, a friend of Smith's from graduate school, agreed to shoot the movie. Like many low-budget productions, they used the Canon 7D; with so little money, they could only afford one camera assistant. Jeff held a 50lb mount for 10+ hours a day and pulled his own focus on the delicate camera – a superhuman achievement, given that the temperature on the shoot rarely drifted below 95 degrees (and peaked at 105). The tanlines created by the shoot were fantastic; so was the fatigue, and ultimately, so too is the film, *Turkey Bowl*.

**A Q&A with Filmmaker Kyle Smith
Writer/Director**

What gave you the idea to make an entire film, in real time, around a touch-football game with a group of friends?

Every year I play a Turkey Bowl back home in Missouri, but it's nothing like the Turkey Bowl in the movie. Some years only two of us show up, some years 15 of us show up, but it's not highly competitive. No one gets mad. My friend who organizes it is the guy who stayed home and he's always excited for everyone to come back each year. He inspired the Jon character in the film that brings everyone together.

I like the format of real-time because it forces where the story has to go and makes it a little easier to conceive of things. It's obviously good for low budget. I'm interested in the little moments that happen in between larger events, and real-time is just filled with that, capturing those little moments. And so I like that, and I always like to work with large ensemble casts, and I'm also a huge sports fan, love football, and I'd never seen this type of movie.

The film all takes place on the field and watching friends play football, you don't see anything but that.

Yeah, I had a friend who knew about the movie and when we watched it together it got to the first kickoff where Morgan kicks the ball out-of-bounds and she just starts laughing and was like, "You actually did this, they're just going to play football aren't they?" She laughed so hard at the idea that we'd actually done this.

Did you find that these constraints actually freed you up as a director?

Absolutely. When I've written other scripts that are more action-based, you have to keep the plot moving and keep things going and I just don't know where to go because life isn't like that. Life isn't convenient. Real-time makes it so that I don't have to worry about moving to the next location, which makes it easier to become totally consumed with character.

There's great continuity in the film, even the lighting looks the same, did you shoot in one location over a period of time?

Initially we wanted to shoot in my hometown Missouri because it's not expensive to permit. But my actors were based in Los Angeles and for a while I toyed with getting everyone to Missouri, but you can't really count on the weather in Missouri, just to get a

storm one day that would tear through the movie. I knew the actors needed to be in LA in for auditions and their day jobs. So we picked LA and shot in the late summer over ten days August 16th to the 27th. And it got so unbelievably hot. I think it never got below 95, but as a result, nobody ever came to this park. It was totally empty.

The film shows how the game brings out the competitive nature in people. Things that are seemingly fun and innocent bring out our anxiety and competitive drive.

It's definitely about how we express ourselves through competition. Are we so competitive that winning is everything? Or is it like the character Jon, who is more about everyone being there? Everyone has a different approach to the game, which are all things that I've felt at some point in my life playing sports.

Did you ever toy with the idea of showing these characters before and after?

Never. And when the movie came out running a little over an hour, I thought about it for a hot minute, but it's totally against the whole attitude of the movie.

Was there a lot of improvisation in the film, because there's a lot of overlapping quick conversations throughout the film?

It actually all depended on the actor. Tom's character was almost completely improvised. We'd block a scene and then do one or two takes with my lines, and then make a few adjustments, and then the actors would do their own thing if they wanted. I don't know how many times we had to film a huddle and it was like—how do we do this in a creative way? It was also hard to make interceptions and fumbles look natural, which I didn't anticipate, so improvising helped.

Did you have a script supervisor with you to make sure things were consistent?

I initially had one, but it became such an impossible challenge for us (and for her) that it didn't make sense. No one person could track where and what all ten actors were doing shot-to-shot, and shooting in story order rendered it moot as well. I would just trust the actors to remember where they were in the play and what they were doing.

Did you have a football expert?

I guess it was me? We didn't rehearse, no one played beforehand. The whole thing is kind of crazy looking back.

How did the actors survive in 95 degree heat?

It was really hard. There are great pictures of people sleeping in the shade. We went through at least 1,400 bottles of water during the course of the shoot.

Can you talk about the financing of this film?

In 2009, I was finishing graduate school, and my roommate Morgan saw a casting call for a reality game show called *Crash Course* that was about stunt car driving with normal people doing stunts. It was supposed to be pairs friends or brothers, so we tried out for it. And 2, or 3 rounds later we got cast on the first episode of the show and flew out to Detroit to shoot in July. We spent three day crashing cars and doing car stunts, and the last stunt we hit a concrete wall at 40mph. Morgan has lingering back problems. But we won! The whole thing is crazy, because ABC shot six episodes of the show and aired three. Our episode was never aired. Morgan used the money to get braces (which he's wearing in the film), glasses and a Moped. I was able to finance the film with that money, because I knew it'd be hard for to get anyone else to agree to finance this movie, other than me just going out there and doing it.

What is the story about for you?

It's about what I told the actors before we started shooting—it's simply about friendship and hanging out with friends. I hope an audience feels like they're watching friends that love each other and are trying to work in the parameters of a game.

The film also speaks to that time in people lives when they've finished school where you've had structured time and when it goes way, and you don't see people. It asks the question, "How do maintain those relationships with in your early to mid twenties?"

I think because I'm at that point in my life, it's hard to articulate. I think as friends they will continue to grow apart because time and space will take them different places. I think there is some sadness in that this may not happen again. But I think that's what's key about the Sergio and Troy characters. That it allows for the film not to be just about a certain type of demographic going through this, but how you make new friends who are outside of your world.

All of the characters have the same name as the actor playing them. Were you looking for archetypes, the characters seem to hit those marks?

I kept their names the same to keep them more comfortable on the set, so that it was more natural. And every character has a bit of me in them.

Can you give us a breakdown of each of the characters, and the actors from your perspective?

JON: I went to college with him. A week before I started shooting, the character wasn't cast. I went to his birthday party and he was a little drunk and I started egging him on to see what kind of guy he was. He's cocky, and it seemed to fit the character really well. Jon's most like me, I am nice but when I am with my friends, I can be annoying. Jon wants to make everyone feel involved. He's obviously very lonely. I find that Jon's character is the most subtly funny with the biting asides, but he's definitely the most emotional. He's closest to how critical of myself I am.

KERRY: In the beginning it looks like she is the object of desire for a couple of them. I knew Kerry from college as well, and she and Jon actually dated in college, so we worked it into the movie a bit because there was a natural chemistry between them already. She's happy go lucky and flirting, but you never know what's up.

BOB: Again... I went to college with Bob as well. He's does a lot of theater. I knew he would be intense, and I think audiences latch on to him because they know someone like him, someone so intense. And so I went to him for humor, and built everyone else around him.

ADAM: He was one of the last roles I cast. In real life, Adam is a screenwriter from Long Island who has never acted before. He has this quiet goofiness mixed with sadness which was appealing to me. His character is one of those guys who is always on the periphery of the group.

TROY: He is a friend of mine, a rapper and musician, who lives in Miami. He and Sergio turn the race thing on its side a little. What if the African American guy is not the best athlete? This comes directly from experience playing a pickup game, where we stereotypically assumed, "Oh, these guys will be great," and they were picked first for teams. But they weren't really that good. I wanted Troy to be working really hard and the

dynamic between Troy and Sergio to be about the gulf in talent between them and how they assimilated with strangers.

SERGIO: He takes the approach of, "If I'm dominant, I can integrate better." Everyone in the movie knew each other in some way before filming except Sergio. He had never been on a film set before. And you can tell; at the beginning of the movie he is tense and shy. And at the end of the film, he was friends with everyone in the cast.

TOM: The character of Tom is inspired by the film's editor Brian Wessel. He seems goofy but actually really smart and a great friend. You don't realize the subtle things he's doing. In real life Tom played football in college and then in Europe. He seems to me like the person who most understands friendship. I like that he enters the game walking one way, and then walks off the field at the end of the film the other way. He seems like a fool, but really is the genius in the group.

ZOE and ZEKE: They're the couple of the film. Zoe and I went to college together, and Zeke is an extremely talented director I went to grad school with. Zeke in real life is a really competitive person and takes things very seriously. The whole thing with Zeke became, "How is someone who is so competitive going to deal with not living up to playing a good game?" The whole movie for Zeke was leading to that section at the end when he takes over at quarterback, which was such a joy to watch.

MORGAN: He's been my roommate for the last few years. I once dated a girl Morgan hated. He would be kind of cutting toward her, and the character is based on the tension that existed between my ex-girlfriend and him. He never yelled at us, but there was that tension where a girl brings a guy away from his group of friends.

TURKEY BOWL

Cast Biographies

Morgan Beck – “Morgan”

Morgan Beck grew up in South Carolina. He attended college at Northwestern University. Upon graduation he moved to Los Angeles where he has been involved in several projects including appearing in the cult TV show "Dollhouse."

Adam Benic – “Adam”

Long Island native Adam Benic graduated with an MFA in Screenwriting from the AFI Conservatory in Los Angeles, California . Turkey Bowl is his first film.

Kerry Bishé – “Kerry”

Kerry Bishé is a theatre, film and television actor. She has appeared in a number of plays including My Name Is Rachel Corrie, The Hairy Ape at the Irish Repertory Theatre and the Roundabout Theatre Company's production of Pygmalion on Broadway. Kerry appeared in season 9 of the TV show Scrubs. Her film work includes Kevin Smith's "Red State" and Edward Burns' "Nice Guy Johnny" and "Newlyweds". Kerry is a graduate of Northwestern University and lives in Brooklyn NY.

Troy Buchanan – “Troy”

He wanted an adventure, and so far he's gotten one. Born August 7, 1985, Troy Buchanan was the first of two children to Sharon and Ben Buchanan. Being a child bred from parents of Caribbean sun, Troy was always grounded by his Jamaican roots. He was described as a talkative, mischievous, and witty child, but his personality was often overshadowed after he fell victim to a illness at age 3, that deeply affected his childhood. Despite a colorful personality, traumatic early years forced a more shy, quiet, and introspective young man in adolescence.

Troy grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida and attended mostly Magnet Schools. He fell in love with music at a young age and discovered an ability to rap at age 14. At that same age, he started attending Suncoast High School where he was accepted into the International Baccalaureate Program, but soon had to withdraw in his sophomore year due to his illness and continue taking general classes. Barely graduating High School, Troy was accepted at University of Central Florida where he found his savior -The Arts. His discovery of music and film allowed him to find the individual that he felt he lost touch with as a child. Troy triumphed in his college years, beating his illness, finding a relentless work ethic, and a newfound love for film, with career plans to write and direct.

Music became a constant battle for Troy, and he found limits in Florida. So he decided to spread his wings and embark to Los Angeles to focus on film in 2009. LA proved to be a scary start. Luckily, he met AFI Graduate director Christy Rubenstein who introduced him to another AFI fellow director, Kyle Smith. Kyle would become an important person during Troy's time in LA. The two became good friends, and Troy started stoking his musical fire once again. Though he was barely paying his way in LA he fought a year and a half before he made the decision to leave for New York City.

Troy's career has seen many twists, turns, progressions, and back-steps, but every single year he has managed to stay consistent and never give up in his endeavors to find his place in music and film. Passion consumes him. That is why no matter how rough the path gets, he never gives up.

Tom DiMenna – “Tom”

After a brief stint as a professional football player in the Italian-American Football League, Tom DiMenna has since devoted himself to being a comedic actor and writer. The former Penn Quarterback-turned-comedian was forged in the Italian city of Bologna, where he played for a distinctly Italian pro-football team called the Bologna Warriors; a team that literally served tea, cookies, and cigarettes at half time. He has written a screenplay about his experience entitled *The Bologna Warrior*.

After Italy, DiMenna studied improvisation at Second City in Chicago. He later moved to NYC and performed in various improv shows at the P.I.T., MAGNET, and U.C.B theaters, before joining the indie improv team, SMIRK. While in New York, he found a few gigs doing character voices for *The Onion*, enrolled in the Scott Freeman Acting Studio, and created a series of critically-acclaimed music videos (SXSW, Edinburgh). *The Godfather Musical*, directed by Zeke and Simon Hawkins (AFI/Tisch), is a musical satire on the iconic death scenes in the *Godfather* trilogy. Each chapter of the trilogy features DiMenna inhabiting such unlikely characters as Fredo Corleone, Moe Greene, and Luca Brasi.

DiMenna then went to London where he studied Shakespeare at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. And soon after, re-located to Los Angeles. He has since been performing his surreal, traveling lounge act “Who Loves You, Baby?,” a comedy show featuring the ghost of 70's icon, Telly Savalas. The show is an homage to the fiercely heterosexual men that dominated the culture way back when, with DiMenna giving an overtly-dramatic, pitch-perfect, re-enactment of Savalas' minor singing career in the 1970's. The show is written by fellow SMIRK member, Hunter Nelson, and directed by veteran actor/comedian, Taylor Negrón; who has been working with DiMenna since the two met at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

He is also currently underway on a web-series for *Funnyordie.com* called “The Purists.” Teaming up with Bob Turton (F.O.D., Actor's Gang), the series is about two legendary old-time football coaches determined to restore honor and glory to the game they love.

Zeke Hawkins – “Zeke”

Zeke studied at the American Film Institute and Brown University. He worked as the director's assistant to Bennett Miller on the Oscar winning film ‘*Capote*.’ For his short film, ‘*Equestrian Sexual Response*,’ Zeke was nominated for a Student Academy Award and won AFI's Franklin J. Schaffner Award for Excellence in Directing. He often collaborates with his brother Simon and Tom DiMenna. As an actor, Zeke draws inspiration from Peter O'Toole, both on screen and off. www.thehawkinsbrothers.com

Zoe Perry – “Zoe”

Zoe starred in the Los Angeles premiere of Martin McDonagh's award winning “*The Lieutenant of Inishmore*” opposite Chris Pine at the Mark Taper Forum. Film and TV credits include: “*The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond*” (starring Bryce Dallas Howard and Chris Evans), “*Deception*,” “*Private Practice*,” “*Cold Case*,” “*My Boys*,” “*Conviction*,” “*Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.” She most recently received an LA Weekly Award nomination for her work in Lillian Hellman's *The Autumn Garden* with the Antaeus Theater Company in L.A. Perry is a graduate of Northwestern University.

Jon Schmidt – “Jon”

After finishing up at Northwestern University, Jon Schmidt moved back to his native Los Angeles from the cold streets of Chicago in 2007. Since then he has been creating funny stuff for the likes of Sony, FOX TV Studios, and EPIX. He can be seen improvising around Los Angeles with his team Murdercliff.

Bob Turton – “Bob”

A native of Columbus, Ohio, Bob is a graduate of Northwestern University and The School At Steppenwolf. After several years walking the boards in Chicago and around the country he relocated to Los Angeles. He is a company member of The Actors' Gang theatre in Culver City and appears often on FunnyOrDie.com.

Sergio Villarreal – “Sergio”

Sergio grew up in Boyle Heights and El Sereno, California. *Turkey Bowl* is his first feature film.

TURKEY BOWL

Cast Biographies

Jeff Powers – Cinematographer

Jeff Powers grew up in eastern Pennsylvania and graduated from the American Film Institute in 2009.

Kyle Smith – writer/director

Kyle grew up in Columbia, Missouri. *Turkey Bowl* is his first feature film.

Brian Wessel – Editor

Brian is a graduate of the Editing program at American Film Institute. Since then, he has enjoyed working on an array of projects from features, shorts, music videos and commercials. His most recent feature, *Turkey Bowl*, premiered at South By Southwest 2011. He recently finished editing “Death of a Cemetery,” a feature documentary based in the Philippines.

TURKEY BOWL - FULL CREDITS

Written, Directed, & Produced by	Kyle Smith
Produced by	Stephen Paratore
Cinematography by	Jeff Powers
Edited by	Brian Wessel

CAST

MORGAN	Morgan Beck
ADAM	Adam Benic
KERRY	Kerry Bishé
TROY	Troy Buchanan
ZEKE	Zeke Hawkins
TOM	Tom DiMenna
ZOE	Zoe Perry
JON	Jon Schmidt
BOB	Bob Turton
SERGIO	Sergio Villarreal
Co-Producer	Krystal Quinones
First Assistant camera	Daniel Chapman
Production Sound Mixer	Canaan Triplett
Boom Operators	Ben Templin Sabi Tulok
Production Assistants	Lindsey Bahr John Berkowitz Brendan Maghran
Key Make-up and Hair Stylist	Daniela Richardson
Still Photographer	Patrick Wells
Legal Services	George M. Rush
Assistant Editor	Matt Coleshill

Music Supervisor	Lauren Marie Mikus
Sound Editor	Andrew Tracy
Digital Intermediate	Prehistoric Digital
Executive Producer, Prehistoric Digital	Will Adashek
Colorist and Visual Effects Artist	Kevin Cannon

MUSIC

“Firefly Nights”

Written by Bruce Chianese and Geoff Levin
Performed by Bruce Chianese and Geoff Levin
Courtesy of Tone Row Music

“Nashville Moon”

Written by Jason Molina
Performed by Magnolia Electric Co.
Courtesy of Secretly Canadian
By Arrangement with Bank Robber Music

“So Go”

Written by Lauren Marie Mikus
Performed by Lauren Marie Mikus
and Hanan Townshend
Courtesy of Lauren Marie Mikus

Special Thanks

Andrew Baldwin
Matthew Clark
Jason Groth
Peter Kahn
Jon Lefkovitz
Rafael Palacio Illingworth
Eric Schoen
Martin Stitt
Steven Taylor

Filmed on location in
Montecito Heights, Los Angeles, California

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