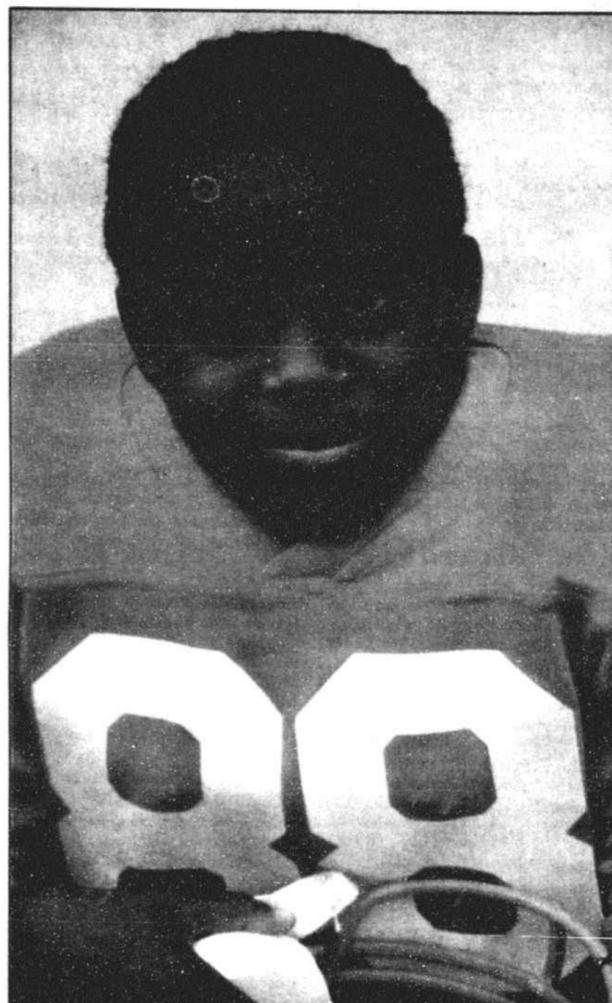




A DESIRE TO PLAY FOOTBALL brings together Little Giants (left to right) Shawna Waldron (Becky "The Icebox" O'Shea), Danny Prichett (Tad Simpson), Simmons and Michael Zwiener (Rudy Zolteck).



RASHEED "HOT HANDS" HANON, better known locally as Supply Elementary School student Troy Simmons, dons jersey No. 88 in the comedy film "Little Giants".

Happy, But Homesick Nine-Year-Old Troy Simmons Discovers Life In Movieland

BY SUSAN USHER

Call it a long, hot, adventurous summer for 9-year-old Troy Simmons, one destined for permanent engraving in memory as his season with the stars. Sightseeing trips to landmarks such as the La Brea Tar Pits, but not Disneyland. Falling on his bike. Flying on new in-line skates up and down the halls of Oakwood, the studio corporate apartments where he lives temporarily.

Making his first full-length movie. He's Rasheed "Hot Hands" Hanon in the Warner Brothers Family Entertainment/Amblin Entertainment's production of "Little Giants." You'll see him on the big screen when the comedy is released sometime this fall.

"He's a little boy who can't catch. I like that, sometimes it's fun not to be able to do something. He's kind of a spaz," said Troy in a long-distance interview granted with reluctance. "There's one scene where instead of spraying a half can of sticky stuff on his hands he uses it all. He tries to wipe his hands and they stick to his shirt. He goes out to catch the ball and the ball hits him in the head and he falls."

There's a routine of sorts to Troy's life in movieland, shaped around 14-hour days and early or late calls to the studio. Accompanied by his mother, Troy takes the studio car to the set for wardrobe, hair, makeup (sunblock only), breakfast, review of the day's drill—and sometimes daily rewrites—with the dialogue coach, then work on scenes.

While his former classmates in Debra Noble's third-grade room might not understand, Troy's quick to explain that the life of a budding child star isn't Hollywood glitz and glamour. At times it even borders on the tedious. He may be only a little boy whose polite "Yes, sir" manners enthrall the adults he meets, but this is work.

Troy has one of the larger kid's roles, which keeps him on the set when other kids are already in the pool. In one version that's been filmed but may not make it through rewrite and editing, his slippery-handed charac-

ter is the wide receiver who catches the winning pass of the showdown game.

Riding the new wave of family movie popularity, "Little Giants" is another root-for-the-underdogs kid sport team movie. It combines top-notch professionals like Director Duwayne Dunham ("Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey") behind the cameras with mostly newcomer talent on the screen.

Five NFL greats, including coach and commentator John Madden and Dallas Cowboys running back Emmitt Smith, make cameo appearances in a wish fulfillment sequence. Coaches for the two opposing teams are played by Rick Moranis (of "Ghostbusters," "Honey, I Shrank the Kids," "Parenthood" and SCTV comedy troupe fame) and Ed O'Neill (Al Bundy in Fox's "Married...With Children").

Production began May 10 in the Los Angeles area and filming is expected to end later this month, possibly in time for Troy to begin school Aug. 23 with his classmates at Supply Elementary School.

Several weeks of intensive training and coaching by football advisor Darryl Smith prepared Troy and the other youngsters in "Little Giants" to appear in game close-ups. Another 55 kids, all child stunt actors, will actually play the climactic game.

Some scenes have been filmed at the Warner Bros. sound studio, with location shots inside a house in Pasadena and at a working cannery. When production moved to Arroyo Grande in the central California desert for some outdoor shots, Troy found the picturesque town both "cool" and "boring." So boring that one day he jokingly invited the likeable first assistant director to fire him, so he could come home.

"We had to wait around all day in a hot, stuffy classroom," Troy recalled. "We had to take three or four weeks of that dust."

Most of the guys entertain themselves on the set with Game Boy handheld interactive video games. Troy borrows one once in a while, but doesn't own one.

But getting to act makes up for most of the less en-

joyable aspects of the job. Troy likes being on stage or in front of a camera; he's got the acting bug.

That bug is what brought him to the set of "Little Giants" four months ago, before school let out for the summer.

Troy and his mom flew to California for a screen test after he made the cut in Wilmington as part of a nationwide search for new talent for the film.

Back home, they barely had 11 1/2 days to pack for the return flight to California for an indefinite stay. "We were able to pack clothes from home but that was about all, and mother (Elnora Mitchell) packed a tractor for each of the boys. That's what they play with when they're missing home," says Mrs. Simmons, who took leave from her teaching post at Supply Elementary to try to provide a homelike setting for Troy away from home, and monitor him on the set.

"The law says I can keep him in eye view at all times and I'm taking advantage of that, but trying to stay out of the way," she said in an interview over the July 4th holiday. "The glamour I'm still trying to find, but it's an interesting process to watch. It's going to be interesting to see how it all comes out."

"If he never gets to work again, we're trying to savor this, so we can say we learned something along the way."

Making the trip also were Troy's brothers Justin, 2, and Bryan, who's less than a year old, and their regular care provider, Irene Bryant, "a Godsend who's added some continuity to our lives," says Mrs. Simmons.

"Little Giants" was the break Troy had been preparing for since about kindergarten.

First there were acting classes with his mom at the Academy Foundation in Wilmington, followed by movement training in jazz, ballet, and gymnastics at Dance Showcase and The Brunswick School of Dance.

Then came the chances to play young Langston Hughes in the Celebration Theater production of "Langston," and a scene in the Public Broadcasting System special "Simple Justice." Last summer he

trained with The Negro Ensemble Company's Summer Theater for Children in Houston, Texas, appearing in their production of "You Can't Touch This." Along the way, in 1992, he signed with an agency, John Bonitz's Bontalent in Hampstead.

His latest character, Rasheed, is one of the "Little Giants," a band of youngsters rejected for the town's Pop Warner League junior football team, including the best player in town, simply because she's a girl, Becky "The Icebox" O'Shea (Shawna Waldron). She's also the niece of Coach Danny O'Shea (O'Neill), Heisman Trophy winner and town celebrity.

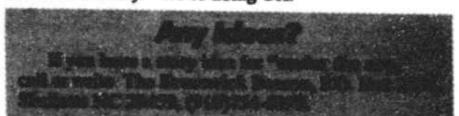
Becky talks her dad, Kevin O'Shea (Moranis), who has always lived in his older brother's shadow, into fielding a second team and going after the Pop Warner slot. He tosses the gauntlet before his older brother, and sets out to transform the unlikely "Little Giants" into winners.

Troy says making movies and acting are "cool" and "lots of fun," but he's acutely aware there's more to life. For the past several weeks he's been fighting a case of the homesick blues.

After a break, Troy will be ready for more film work. For now, asked if there's anything he'd rather be doing than making a movie, his voice dropped a notch and he admitted, "Be home."

His best buddies have written Troy, but he hasn't written them back, or called. He's reluctant to talk to anyone who calls from home, whether it's his dad or a newspaper editor and friend. It only makes him more lonely for home, and this fellow intends to hang on until filming ends later this month.

"We're really busy. We're moving on along," he mumbles bravely. "We're doing OK."



Small Sandpipers Hard To Distinguish

BY BILL FAVER

What are those little birds right at the water's edge following the waves in and out and what are they looking for?

That is a question I'm often asked by beach visitors who become fascinated by these small birds and their ability to keep one step above an incoming wave. The answer is more difficult than you might expect, for there are several possibilities along our beaches this time of year.

The most likely candidates are sanderlings, semi-palmated sandpipers, and knots. These species can be distinguished in spring by coloration and size. In late summer, fall and winter, the gray colors dominate. Size and few body markings are the best helps in knowing who they are.

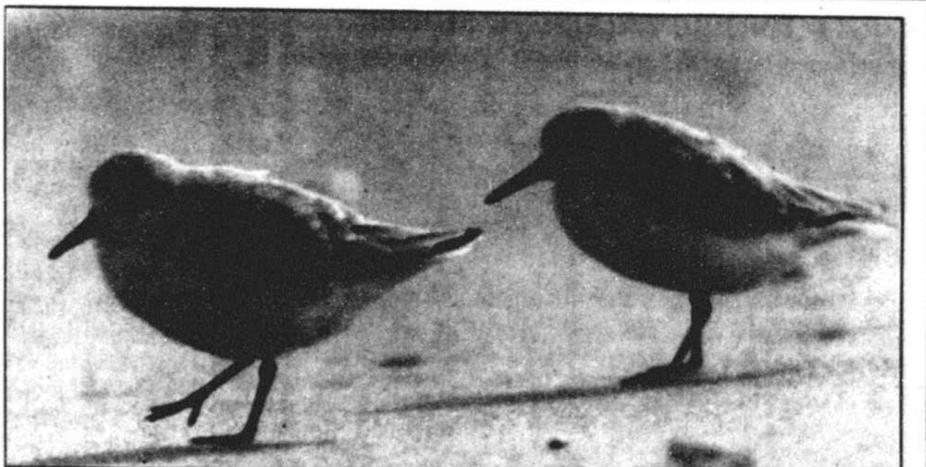
The semi-palmated sandpipers are small—about 5 to 6 1/2 inches—and have a sturdy, dark bill and black legs. This grayish bird likes to follow the waves in and out in search of mole crabs and coquinas. They are

most plentiful from September to May and vacate the beaches when the crowds come.

Sanderlings are a little larger and can get to be 8 1/2 inches in size. In spring, the head of this bird can be buffy to bright rusty, but later in the year, the characteristic gray is what we observe. In fall, this can be the whitest of our sandpipers. During flight there is a white stripe visible in the wing. Sanderlings also feed along the water's edge.

Knots usually feed in flocks and appear frequently from December to May. This 9- to 11-inch bird appears in winter as a nondescript gray with a whitish breast. In spring, the breast is pale robin red and the back is mottled gray and black. The bill is chunky, dark and rather short. The rump is whitish in spring and fall plumage. Knots also feed on the incoming waves, enjoying the same food as the other sandpipers.

Late summer and fall migration is a good time to look for the small sandpipers feeding along the water's edge. They are harder to identify this time of year, but the rewards are there for those who will take the time to look for them.



SANDERLINGS or Semi-palmated Sandpipers? Sometimes it's very hard to tell unless you see them together.