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## Big screen debut

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## Big screen debut

*Athletic skill helps student earn part in Radio*

**A** personal assistant. A salary. A membership in the Screen Actors' Guild.

Evan Aldrich '04 never anticipated these perks when he answered the call for movie extras in his hometown paper, the *Savannah* (Ga.) *Morning News*, in September 2002. However, after landing the role of the high school quarterback in the film *Radio*, he got to enjoy the "star" treatment and the benefits that go with a speaking role in a major motion picture.

*Radio*, released in October by Sony Pictures, is the true story of the special relationship between a high school football coach in Anderson, S.C., and a mentally challenged man, after whom the movie is named.

Aldrich, a business administration major at Furman and a member of TKE fraternity, had no previous acting experience. But he seems to have had no problem working alongside such Hollywood veterans as Academy Award winner Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Ed Harris, and he is quick to praise their down-to-earth attitude.

Aldrich, along with nearly 150 others, actually auditioned for a part as a basketball player, but he landed the role of the quarterback, Danny, after catching the attention of casting director Mark Ellis. Ellis, known for his work on such football movies as *Jerry Maguire* and *Varsity Blues*, introduced Aldrich to director Mike Tollin, who then asked Aldrich to read for the part of the quarterback.

Aldrich beat out 10 other actors for the role, becoming the movie's only contracted actor with no previous acting experience. He appears in a number of game scenes and has a few lines, although several scenes in which he had major speaking parts were left on the cutting room floor.

While acting was new for him, Aldrich was no stranger to athletics. He played quarterback for St. Andrew's School in Savannah and was recruited to play both football and basketball at Furman. Possessing an athletic build and standing 6-3, he played on the Paladin basketball team during the 2000-01 season.



**Now that he's had a taste of acting, Evan Aldrich is ready for more.**

After being cast, Aldrich, who was well into the fall term of his junior year, took "Incompletes" in all of his classes and moved to the rural town of Walterboro, S.C., 40 miles south of Charleston, where filming took place. From October to December 2002 he lived in a studio-provided apartment, rehearsing lines and learning choreographed football plays.

When not working on the film, Aldrich says the cast and crew hung out together, frequently meeting at Walterboro's few gathering spots ("the bar or the bowling alley"). Aldrich says they became a tight-knit group on and off the set. He admits that he was intimidated by the stars at first, but they grew closer as filming progressed, and he fondly recalls going out for an evening in Charleston with Gooding.

"We spent a lot of time together at the end of filming, just hanging out, cracking jokes," says Aldrich. "Cuba was one of my favorite people I met during this experience."

During the three months of filming he enjoyed many perks that came with the job, including a generous salary, cast parties and two catered meals a day. However, everything was not all fun and games — Aldrich dislocated his shoulder during filming.

In addition, preparations for the football scenes were strenuous. October and November were filled with rehearsals for the game scenes, which weren't actually filmed until the last two weeks of November and the first two weeks of December. Filming would begin at 6 p.m. and run until 6 a.m. "The temperature was sometimes below freezing," says Aldrich, "but the players and fans had to act like it was early fall."

In spite of his newfound celebrity, Aldrich is self-deprecating and humble about his role in the movie and cringes when fellow students jokingly call him "Radio." But the opportunity has whetted his appetite for movie-making, and after he graduates in June he will move to Los Angeles to pursue an acting career. He plans to live with Riley Smith, an actor he befriended while filming *Radio*.

Aldrich acknowledges that his chances of making it big are uncertain, but he wants to explore the possibility before going to law school. With his Southern manners and laid-back attitude, he is likely to be a refreshing addition to the Hollywood community.

— Mary Brannon

*The author is a senior English major from Atlanta.*