

**Darren Schwartz**

What Happens Next – 06.19.2022

Larry Bernstein:

I'm now with Darren Schwartz. I don't mean to make a big deal out of this, but he's the official What Happens Next movie critic. We've never had this position. It has been unfilled for over two and a half years. Darren, welcome aboard. There are no benefits in this job.

Darren Schwartz:

First of all, Larry, thank you for having me.

Larry Bernstein:

You saw Maverick. You rewatched Top Gun in preparation-

Darren Schwartz:

Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

... for today's call. Thanks for the effort.

Darren Schwartz:

My pleasure.

Larry Bernstein:

We'll start off with what are your thoughts on Tom Cruise? Where are you on, on Tom?

Darren Schwartz:

Tom Cruise was a seminal part of my adolescence growing up. I know there's the whole Scientology thing. Whatever. I'm thumbs up on Tom Cruise.

Larry Bernstein:

... you saw Maverick.

Darren Schwartz:

I did.

Larry Bernstein:

Did it move you?

Darren Schwartz:

It did move me. I thought it was an excellent film.

Larry Bernstein:

Can you articulate that message? You're a movie critic, Darren.

Darren Schwartz:  
Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:  
Come on.

Darren Schwartz:  
(laughs) Okay.

Larry Bernstein:  
(laughs)

Darren Schwartz:  
As of today, I am a movie critic, which is wonderful.

Larry Bernstein:  
That's your title.

Darren Schwartz:  
Thank you.

Larry Bernstein:  
What Happens Next movie critic. You forgot your title?

Darren Schwartz:  
I thought it was excellent.

I thought the character evolution of Tom Cruise's Maverick Mitchell and the relationship between him and Val Kilmer was wonderful.

Larry Bernstein:  
Tell us a little bit about the backstory. Why is the Val Kilmer character important to you?

Darren Schwartz:  
Well, first of all, he was the antagonist in Top Gun, the original movie.

Larry Bernstein:  
Iceman.

Darren Schwartz:  
He was Iceman Kazansky. He was a cool, by the book guy. Maverick was the maverick. Like, figure that out, you know.

Larry Bernstein:  
(laughs)

Darren Schwartz:  
Hopefully people can figure that out by now after 27 years. He was the maverick. Or however many years it was.

Larry Bernstein:  
36 years.

Darren Schwartz:  
Is it 36? There's no way it's 36.

All right. Fair enough. So, they clash because Iceman thought you're going to put your wing men in jeopardy if you keep leaving your wing men. So that was the lesson that Maverick had to learn.

But outside the movie, what I read is that Val Kilmer in real life, kept that character going and had that animosity present off stage.

Fast forward to about five years ago, Val Kilmer developed horrible throat cancer and he was not going to be in the movie. The producers either weren't going to put him in the movie, because he really can't talk, and he looks pretty haggard from the cancer.

But Tom Cruise put his foot down. He said, "I want him in the movie. We're not doing the movie without him." And I thought that was pretty cool.

Larry Bernstein:  
So, he refused to leave his wing man from Top Gun?

Darren Schwartz:  
That is what's so interesting, is that in real life, he didn't leave his wing man. He learned the lesson. It transcended from the screen to real life.

Larry Bernstein:  
He doesn't have many lines in the film.

Darren Schwartz:  
He's unable to speak. Yeah. The lines that he has were AI generated. So, I'm not going to give anything away, I guess. (laughs)? This is not a huge spoiler.

He was communicating by text, meaning they were together, face to face, and Iceman was typing on his computer one line at a time. And there was one line he actually said verbally, but actually it was AI generated from his previous voice. It was not really him speaking.

Larry Bernstein:  
You rewatched Top Gun.

Darren Schwartz:  
Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:  
What were your impressions, after 36 years, rewatching that important classic?

Darren Schwartz:  
First of all, Tom Cruise looks the same.

Larry Bernstein:  
It's unbelievable. How is that possible?

He's the Dick Clark of action films.

Darren Schwartz:  
... I think it's grapefruit juice. There's been no surgery. (laughs)

Larry Bernstein:  
Is that true?

Darren Schwartz:  
No. I have no idea. I don't know if it's grapefruit juice. But he's for sure had something done.

Larry Bernstein:  
Well, he had his teeth done. I don't know if you focused on that.

Darren Schwartz:  
He looks phenomenal. I love the hair in general. It's from the mid '80s, the fashion and the hairstyles and everything else.

I thought the acting quality was inferior in the original. Or just maybe it was just dated.

Larry Bernstein:  
Darren, I read the original Roger Ebert review of Top Gun in '86, and he gives it two and a half stars.

Darren Schwartz:  
Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

And what he says is that the action scenes are fantastic. Loves it. But the relationship with Kelly McGillis is just ridiculous and drivel.

Darren Schwartz:

Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

Where are you on the Kelly McGillis - Tom Cruise relationship from the original Top Gun?

Darren Schwartz:

Well, first of all, let me just say this about Roger Ebert. For sure, a bleeding-heart liberal.

Larry Bernstein:

Yeah. For sure.

Darren Schwartz:

I'm not criticizing. Anti-war.

Larry Bernstein:

It is what it is.

Darren Schwartz:

Anti-plane. Anti-Maverick. I think you have to put a pin in that. The Kelly McGillis relationship, there was definitely some evolutionary steps in the relationship that didn't happen. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, she was like, "Here's my address. 5:30 PM, don't be late."

Larry Bernstein:

Does that ever happen in real life?

Darren Schwartz:

No.

Larry Bernstein:

(laughs)

Darren Schwartz:

No, of course. And then (laughs) also, it's 5:45, 5:50, and he's on the beach playing volleyball.

Larry Bernstein:

Where's his priorities?

Darren Schwartz:

Well, his priorities are to Goose, and he wants to beat Kazansky and that other guy no one knows. And so, he's on the beach. They're all greased up.

Larry Bernstein:

Right.

Darren Schwartz:

Okay? I mean, these guys probably put four or five layers of Crisco on them just for the sex appeal. And they're wearing tight shorts. Goose, no shirt, also wearing shorts. What's Tom Cruise wearing? No shirt, glistening, in tight jeans. And it must've been 100 degrees. How do you even move?

But they won. Gets out on the motorcycle. And he shows up. It must've been 6:15. The food's cold. He walks in. What does he say? "I want to take a shower."

Power move. Strong move. Ridiculous.

Larry Bernstein:

Yeah. (laughs)

Darren Schwartz:

And she says, hurled back, "No. I'm hungry."

Larry Bernstein:

(laughs)

Darren Schwartz:

And I was like, "Yes. Yes, Kelly McGillis. Absolutely." You know, call sign Charley. So, after dinner, he says, "I'm going to take a shower." Then he said, "It's going to be complicated." Acknowledging we now have a relationship. No kiss. No hug. No handshake. He leaves to take a shower. I think on face, yes, I agree with Roger Ebert.

Larry Bernstein:

The volleyball scene which you referenced is considered the finest homoerotic scene in movie cinema in the 1980s.

Larry Bernstein:

What did you think of the Jennifer Connelly relationship in Maverick?

Darren Schwartz:

I think it was great. I love Jennifer Connelly. I think she is a wonderful actress. I think she's got a beautiful mind.

Larry Bernstein:  
Yeah.

Darren Schwartz:  
That's an Easter egg, because she was in  
... A Beautiful Mind with Russell Crowe.

In the beginning of Top Gun, they referenced that one of the things that Tom Cruise got written up for was being with the admiral's daughter. She was the admiral's daughter.

Larry Bernstein:  
I love it. Brilliant.

Darren Schwartz:  
Very few people know that.

Larry Bernstein:  
Yeah. I missed that.

Darren Schwartz:  
And it's amazing. Yeah. Great actress. Great writing.

Larry Bernstein:  
You went to the movie theater to see Maverick.

Darren Schwartz:  
I had the choice, Larry, and I really struggle with it. Do I see Top Gun in IMAX, do I see it normal, or juiced up, with the sound and the sights and everything else, risk of paralysis, whatever happens?

And I said, "You know what? I'm not ready for IMAX." And I said, "I'm going to go to the regular theater." And, I saw it there.

Now, I'll also tell you this. It's been such a long time. The logistics of, you have to get a ticket ahead of time.

Larry Bernstein:  
Yeah.

Darren Schwartz:  
You have to go in. You have to look at that map, and you choose where you want. And I strategically chose C10, C11. Obviously, that's my go to, because there's a little bar there and you can put your feet up on it, and no one's in front of you. And I get there. There's seven people in the theater.

Larry Bernstein:  
Right.

Darren Schwartz:  
They were in groups of three, so some lonely guy was by himself. Okay?

Larry Bernstein:  
Yeah. I get it.

Darren Schwartz:  
So we walk in, and I look, and I'm in like, D4 and D5, so I screwed something up. I'm thinking, "Well, there's seven people here. It doesn't matter."

So where's C10, C11? Well, C10, C11 happens to actually be four down from the guy who was a single who apparently doesn't realize that when you have your phone on, it's completely bright. It's ruining the experience for everybody. So, he and I had a little thing, we can talk about later. And then I say, "We're in the wrong seats. Well, it's no big deal. No one's here. 10 minutes in-

Larry Bernstein:  
Yeah.

Darren Schwartz:  
... 10 minutes in-

Larry Bernstein:  
Hey, hey. You're in my seat. Hey.

Darren Schwartz:  
... (laughs) these people are walking down. First of all, who comes 10 minutes late to a movie? And we're in their seats. How ridiculous is that? So that's on me.

Getting back to the logistics, buying tickets and the choosing of the seats is new, but I'm very happy to be back into the flow.

Larry Bernstein:  
Where were you on food and beverage in the theater?

Darren Schwartz:  
Food and beverage, we brought our own.

Larry Bernstein:  
You can do that? I thought they have a strict policy against that. You hide it?



Darren Schwartz:

It's an easy. You put it in your side pocket, and you kind of limp in. They don't say anything.

Larry Bernstein:

(laughs) Do you recommend Maverick to friends?

Darren Schwartz:

I do.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you view it versus the original?

Darren Schwartz:

I, first of all, 100% recommend people go see it. It represents the reemergence into society of movies. We're back.

He put his foot down. I've read on the Internet. People can look it up on the Google. He said, "We're not doing this on home video."

It's a summer blockbuster. I think it was his first \$100 million opening weekend, which is odd, because Tom Cruise is such a movie star.

Larry Bernstein:

Mission Impossible, I would've thought, was a-

Darren Schwartz:

Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

... blockbuster.

Darren Schwartz:

Maverick is 100% better than the original Top Gun.

Larry Bernstein:

Before you decided to be the movie critic for What Happens Next, you were 19 years old when Top Gun came out, and at that part of Darren's life, you actively quoted films. You quoted Stripes.

Darren Schwartz:

Mm-hmm.

Larry Bernstein:

Uh, you quoted Risky Business.

Darren Schwartz:  
Mm-hmm.

Larry Bernstein:  
What did you quote from Top Gun? And do you still quote it now?

Darren Schwartz:  
Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:  
Like what?

Darren Schwartz:  
Talk to me, Goose.

Larry Bernstein:  
(laughs)

Darren Schwartz:  
That's it. I say it constantly.

Larry Bernstein:  
(laughs)

Darren Schwartz:  
Talk to me, Goose. I said it to my younger son the other day. I said, "Hey, you need to get up."

Larry Bernstein:  
So, he's lying in bed. It's 3:00 in the afternoon, right?

Darren Schwartz:  
It's exactly 3:00 PM in the afternoon, and I'm like, "You're supposed to be somewhere in a half hour. It's an hour away. I think it was his graduation. "We should leave." And I said, "Talk to me, Goose."

And when he got up a half hour later, I said, "You know where that's from?" He said, "Yeah. Top Gun." Which was amazing. I had no idea he'd even seen it- I said, "You've seen Top Gun?" He goes, "Yeah. Of course."

Larry Bernstein:  
So, you're saying it's intergenerational.

Darren Schwartz:

Yes. Yeah.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism. Darren, what are you optimistic about as it relates to Top Gun Maverick?

Darren Schwartz:

Well, Top Gun Maverick is a story about family. Tom Cruise, Maverick Mitchell, was always trying to live up to his father who got shot down in Vietnam. And as far as growing up, Maverick, knew that his father didn't do it right.

You remember Goose. They were in their free fall. Right? And they had to punch out. Tom Cruise couldn't do the punch out. Goose, punch us out. They eject. Goose breaks his neck upon ejection on the canopy. By the way, cleared by the tribunal.

Larry Bernstein:

He was totally clear. No fault of his own.

Darren Schwartz:

So, he quits. He's like, "Goose is dead." Talk to me, Goose. By the way, Goose is not talking to him then. He's dead. He's holding him in the water. He's dead. He's crying. He's dead.

And, he goes to see Viper, which is Tom Skerritt, and he said, "I knew your father. I flew with your father, what happened was not his fault. We were shot down behind enemy lines in Cambodia. The press doesn't want to know about that, so it was all swept under the rug."

And Tom Cruise says, "So he did it right?" And Viper says, "He did it right." Now it's a game changer. His father did it right. And now he says, "I'm going to show up to graduation."

He's called to go to the Gulf, because there's some stuff going on. We've got to bomb and kill some people. Now it's real life. You're not playing around. You're not shooting for points. You're shooting for life.

He is inspired because he now knows that his father did it right.

When Val Kilmer was diagnosed with throat cancer, he originally rejected treatment.

After several years, his children finally talked him into getting treatment, and it saved his life. Unfortunately, left him with damage that he really can't speak anymore.

The children, they didn't leave their wing man. They didn't leave their father. And on Father's Day, I think those things are important to recognize, because as fathers, we all know that we've got a very special job.