

THE LOST BOY

Philip Seymour Hoffman Interview

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If you've seen *Boogie Nights*, then you might remember Philip Seymour Hoffman. He was the furtive, poolside chump with the soiled tank top who makes a crushing pass at Dirk Diggler, and spends the rest of the film skulking in the shadows. For Hoffman, lurking just out of consciousness is something to which he's become accustomed. Do you remember him in *Twister*? *Leap of Faith*? *Scent of a Woman*? Not easy, is it?

The 30-year-old Hoffman's time may have come now, though. This month he appears opposite Jeff Bridges and John Goodman in the rambunctious, noir-tinged bowling comedy *The Big Lebowski*, Joel and Ethan Coen's follow-up to *Fargo*. For his role as the beseeching, well-bred Brandt, he reprises the edgy obsequiousness of *Boogie Nights*' Scottie Jay, this time swapping tank top and Southern California drawl for blue blazer and Republican whine. It's still a small role, and Hoffman knows you're unlikely to see his name in four-inch film-poster type just yet.

"I'd like to be a leading man," he sighs, "but I don't think people see me as that." Such is the plight of the character actor: the roles are often so radically disparate that it's easy to get lost in the Hollywood shuffle. Is that Skeet Ulrich or Billy Crudup? Michael Rapaport or James LeGros? Phil Hoffman or Chris Farley? "That Chris Farley thing never goes away," bemoans Hoffman over his frequent comparisons to the late *Saturday Night Live* comedian. "Is it because I have a gut? I suppose there was a lot of Farley in Scottie Jay: both were needy fellows; ten-year-old boys trapped in men's bodies."

In addition to *Lebowski*, Hoffman has more projects in the can for 1998. There's Brad Anderson's *Next Stop, Wonderland*, Jennifer Leitzes' *Montana* and Todd Solondz's follow-up to *Welcome to the Dollhouse*. "My character's in love with his next-door neighbor, but he's inept with women," Hoffman says. "He's got a lot of sexual problems."

"I'm easily distracted, easily bored," says Hoffman of his career swings. "If I don't create something unique each time, then I don't feel fully engaged. I have to do something different or I'm just not going to act as well." ■