



By Eric Butterman

# COOL RULES

*Didn't know Jeremy Ratchford before Cold Case? You're forgiven. Here's the story of how the Canadian actor landed his life-changing role on the CBS prime-time drama.*

"They know me as the guy with the 'booming voice,'" he laughs, his unmistakable voice, well, *booming*. "Or the guy with the one-liners. Or the heavy guy with the one-liners."

Jeremy Ratchford, as you can tell from that honest sentiment, doesn't seem to be suffering any delusions of grandeur. The 44-year-old, who plays Detective Nick Vera on CBS' hit drama *Cold Case*, knows how audiences view him, and will gladly keep on filling that role as long as they'll have him.

Ratchford's first "big break" came in 1992, playing a deputy in Clint Eastwood's Best Picture winner *Unforgiven*. On screen with acting titans like Gene Hackman and Richard Harris, he was about to gain the education of his life. "Clint Eastwood's directing the thing, and I'll never forget what he said to me when I introduced myself," he says. "He looked me dead in the eye, squinted in that Eastwood way and goes, 'Ah, another deputy I've got to kill.' Eastwood saying that to *me*? I loved it!"

Before that, Ratchford made his mark north of the border. Growing up in the Canadian town of Kitchener, Ontario—more known for hockey players than thespians—he found his mentor sitting right there in his living room. "My dad is a great storyteller," he says. "He always valued (that skill) and passed it on to me."

Although Ratchford had to work his fair share of jobs—doorman and construction worker among them—while waiting for his acting dream to take hold, he's the first one to admit he didn't pay a million dues. "I was making a



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living as an actor when I was 24 and had a lucrative career in Toronto,” he admits. “I was honored to be nominated for Best Actor in Canada for a 1993 film called *Small Gifts*, so I had thunder when I finally wanted to make the move to the U.S.”

Still, Los Angeles didn’t exactly swing its doors quite as wide. “I was playing the bad guy a lot,” he says. “But I was really looking to get that one part to put me over the top.” In 2003, the part came knocking, as Bruckheimer Productions asked him to audition for *Cold Case*. “All the weight I had gained (over the years) was perfect for the role of Nick,” he recalls. “I went and got myself a \$10 haircut—wanted to look the part. (CBS President) Les Moonves was supposed to interview me and two other guys, but it didn’t go that way.”

Instead, it would come down to sending Moonves tapes. “The Bruckheimer people sent him only mine,” he says gratefully. “They really liked me for Nick.”

For his first regular part on a network series, Ratchford had to adjust quickly to showing up every day to the *Cold Case* set for what’s now been six seasons. He attributes his strong work ethic to one thing—or actually, 4,500 of them. “They work it out that it costs around \$4,500 a minute to shoot TV,” he reveals. “A honking horn, a background noise, anything that screws up a scene costs money. When I’m on the phone and quickly

say, ‘Gotta go,’ they know it’s because I have a scene and I’m respecting all the investment put into the show.”

Ratchford characterizes the cast as tireless workers who keep it fun. “No matter who I’m working with, I know the day will be a little different depending on their style,” he says. “I’ve got to bring my best every time because everyone’s a pro here.”

Though Ratchford often jokes that many of his lines are similar—“Where were you the night of...” or “The gun was registered to a guy named...”—he found one episode really gave him a chance to break out of usual detective mode. “Nick has a scene with an old girlfriend where we talked about what might have been,” he recalls. “We both say we’re happy with our lives but the way we say it tells a different story. She’s married and implies that maybe we could be something on the side. My character won’t go for it because he doesn’t want to cheapen what they once had. That scene was so real and tender ... it made me feel good to be a part of it.”

Not to say he doesn’t relish the comedic opportunities to be found in his boxer shorts, shaving at the precinct because he’s been kicked out of his place, or ever-so-slyly convincing co-workers to invest in a long-shot lottery pool. “I love anything that gets a reaction out of the audience,” he says, his voice booming all the more. “Let me make them laugh or cry. Just let me keep working!” **L**