

NCIS

TUESDAYS, 8 PM/ET, CBS

"Sorry, you can't ride in the van. It's only for the stars,"

says the driver who is supposed to ferry this reporter to the *NCIS* set in California's Santa Clarita Valley. But just as the half-mile trek begins, Mark Harmon suddenly appears—and saves the day. "Let the lady sit in the front seat," he says, as he opens the door of the SUV and grabs an arm.

It's a pleasure to ride along with a handsome series star who, from all indications, got over himself long ago. If there's a nail on the ground, Harmon stoops to pick it up because somebody on the crew might step on it and get hurt. If there's a line of dialogue that he thinks would be better for another actor, he rings up the boss. "No other actor I know gives away lines," says Donald Bellisario, the Hollywood (and U.S. Marines) veteran behind *NCIS*, *JAG* and *Magnum, P.I.* "For Mark, it's fine."

Maybe a team-first attitude is in Harmon's DNA. After all, Harmon, 53, was a starting quarterback at UCLA, following in a trail of athletic achievement blazed by his father Tom, who in 1940 was the University of Michigan's first Heisman Trophy winner. On *NCIS*, Harmon is Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs, a character not unlike the actor who plays him. "[Harmon's] solid, he's got a lot of integrity and he's a jock," says Bellisario. (He's also married to actress Pam Dawber.)

On the set, Harmon wears a "Team NCIS" jacket and an expression of pleasant determination. "Everybody reports to him," says Bellisario of his *NCIS* star. "He sets the tone. If somebody is sloughing off, he'll take care of it. We had an actor who shall remain nameless who showed up 15 minutes late one day. Mark took the actor aside and said, 'You know, if you are going to be late, maybe this isn't the show for you.'"

In a year's time, *NCIS* has grown from Son of *JAG* to a bona fide CBS hit on its own, despite formidable Tuesday-night competi-