

Escape from Lake Placid: Russell attempts to conquer Commies

review by Chris Hvizdak
contributing writer

Sports films can easily transcend a number of different tonal genres. One might classify "Cool Runnings" as a comedy with twangs of drama whereas "A League of Their Own" might be considered a drama with hints of comedy.

"Miracle," the story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team's victory over the fearsome forces of U.S.S.R., can be best identified as a mild drama with periodic moments of light amusement.

Although the far-reaching political implications of the team's victory are certainly noteworthy and skillfully illustrated by the film, as the picture's central character, coach Herb Brooks (Kurt Russell), frequently indicates "it's just a game."

The actual events, despite having grand ramifications and while depicted in an adequately captivating manner, are simply not as thrilling as those viewers may recall from both fictional and factual sports films of the past. This is not to say the film doesn't provide the inspirational rush associated with the gratification of perseverance. Depending upon the viewer that rush may be a little less full bodied than what's likely yielded from "Rocky" or "Rudy" or "Rollerball" (the 1975 anti-corporate classic, not the 2002 Stamos-fueled nightmare).

Russell ("Escape from New York," "Overboard") does a fantastic job of portraying Brooks. Brooks is the top-notch hockey coach whom having been cut from the last hockey team to defeat the Russians 20 years prior burns with intensity in his efforts to recapture that momentous victory. However, beyond Russell, the film falls flat in terms of magnetic per-

formances.

The most interesting characters after Coach Brooks wind up being a trio of players who become known as "The Coneheads" because "they don't quite fit."

Perhaps less entrancing are the events of the first two acts of the film: team practice, opposition to Brooks' intense coaching style, dramatic cutting of players, tension in Brooks' marriage related to who will "pick the kids up," victory over Norway.

Interspersed with these sufficiently attention-pulling albeit pedestrian events the film does a fine job of highlighting major events of the era such as the gas shortage and Iran-Contra thereby heightening audience recognition of domestic malaise and Cold War tension.

In doing so the perception of the late '70s / early '80s era is quite effectively transmitted, far beyond the impact of simple wardrobe choices that many "period" films rely on as their primary indicator of time.

Once the actual Olympic games begin the film jumps upward many magnitudes of intensity until reaching the thrilling and hard-fought climax.

These last 45 minutes are a satisfying, if somewhat mild, conclusion to what had previously been a rather luke-warm picture. Worth a watch-it will entertain—but don't expect too much.

ChrisHvizdak
(toastmaster@iname.com, http://viztron.tripod.com) is currently undertaking a massive film study analysis to approximate just how many more times Disney can repackage "The Mighty Ducks" / "Cool Runnings" dynamic. Follow his production of the big-budget epic "Beetlejuice vs. Ghostdad" at www.livejournal.com/~hviz.

Female filmmakers have become more independent

by Daniel J. Stasiewski
managing editor

The war being waged against the Hollywood mainstream by independent filmmakers may be an arduous battle, but thanks to the growing number of female warriors, indie film's army is getting a little bigger.

Take Megan Holley, for example. The female director has gone around the country screening her cloning drama, "The Snowflake Crusade," at festivals and was at Penn State Erie last October to participate in the Screen Visions Independent Film Series. Since then, Holley has been actively preparing for the production of her second feature film.

In her travels, Holley hasn't run into many other female filmmakers, but she thinks the traditionally male-dominated profession is just "something women don't think of going into."

Holley, who currently lives in Richmond, Va., didn't originally think of going into it, either. A long-time love affair with the cinema lead to her joining an alternative film club while working toward her Bachelor of arts degree in mass communication, but she ended up going to graduate school for sociology. Holley said it wasn't until many years after college that a film series inspired her to make her own short films.

"I started going to a local film series called Flicker," said Holley.

Flicker is a Richmond based, bi-monthly film series that presents the Super 8 and 16mm shorts of Central Virginia filmmakers for the local audiences. Holley said it only took a few screenings to make her think she could make a film.

"It's an amazing feeling, creating something and then having people there watching," said Holley. "That's kind of what propelled me further."

It propelled her far enough to make "The Snowflake Crusade," a sci-fi drama about a clone whose struggle for individuality leads to his inevitable self-destruction. It's that type of unusual story that makes the indie female filmmaker stand out.

In the world of studio film, only seven of the nearly 300 films to gross over \$100 million have been directed by women. The stereotypical "chick flicks" makes up five of the seven films.

Luckily Oscar knows where the real gold is, and in a historic year for female filmmakers the Academy Awards is ruled by the independent woman.

Sofia Coppola, daughter of famed director Francis



PHOTO COURTESY OF VA. FILM FESTIVAL

Megan Holley and other female filmmakers are taking independent film by storm.

Ford Coppola and director of "Lost in Translation," became the first American female to be nominated for the Best Director Oscar, while three lead actresses were all directed by women. With the exception of Diane Keaton, who was nominated for her role in Nancy Myer's "Something's Gotta Give," the lead actresses were primarily from independently produced features that were distributed in the art house theaters.

With the accolades starting to pile up for female directors, independent production companies are beginning to see a rise in the number of female directors that are prepared to go behind the camera.

One of the production companies Holley has been talking to told her that the last three films that the company produced were all written and directed by women.

Holley also said that the female filmmaker is providing an alternative to the independent films of the mid- to late '90s that were mostly directed by 20-something men.

Films like "Clerks" are what people have come to know as the model for independent films now a days. "Female filmmakers bring a sensibility to their material that's maybe a little different," said Holley.

While Holley isn't nominated for an Oscar yet, she does think her future and that of other female filmmakers, looks bright.

"I think the independent production companies are looking for the new voices," said Holley. "They want a new angle on material and a fresh voice."

As long as there continue to be female filmmakers like Sofia Coppola and Megan Holley, there always will be fresh voices to sound the war-cry of independent film that will shape the future of the industry.

Arts & Entertainment Highlights

Top 40 Singles

- "Hey Ya!" Outkast
- "The Way You Move" Outkast featuring Sleepy Brown
- "Someday" Nickelback
- "It's My Life" No Doubt
- "Here Without You" 3 Doors Down
- "Suga Suga" Baby Bash featuring Frankie J
- "With You" Jessica Simpson
- "Slow Jamz" Twista featuring Kayne West and Jamie Foxx
- "Yeah!" Usher featuring Lil Jon & Ludacris
- "Milkshake" Kelis

According to Billboard.com

Album Releases on Feb. 10

- Courtney Love- "America's Sweetheart"
JC Chasez- "Schizophrenic"
Kylie Minogue- "Body Language"
Melissa Etheridge- "Lucky"

New Movie Releases

- "Barbershop 2-Back in Business:" Eve, Cedric the Entertainer
"Miracle:" Kurt Russell, Eddie Cahill
"Against the Ropes:" Meg Ryan

DVD Releases on Feb. 3

- "The Lion King 1/2"
"Angel: The Third Season"
"In the Cut"
"Once Upon a Time in the Midlands"

The Jarvis File

MTV? or Porn TV?

If you thought that MTV's Las Vegas "Real World" was raunchy and nasty, then just stay tuned to the newest "Real World," in San Diego. According to cnn.com, one of the housemate's guests reportedly drugs a girl at a bar and brings her back to the house where he allegedly rapes her in the bathroom.

Convenient since cameras are prohibited in certain areas of the bathroom. The guest was heard saying "I hit that" as he pointed to the unconscious girl as he left the bathroom. Not sure if this is what the creators of the "Real World" had planned on back in the '90s when they first created the show.

Boob tube:

If you live under a rock then that's a semi-good excuse for missing Justin Timberlake exposing Janet Jackson's right breast during the Super Bowl Half Time show. Jackson has issued numerous public apologies for offending people and Timberlake has proclaimed that he was unaware that her breast would become exposed.

Now the punishments begin. The Grammys have stopped airing commercials that feature Jackson. As for Timberlake, his NSYNC buddy JC Chasez has been pulled from performing Sunday at the NFL's Pro Bowl. Chasez is only allowed to sing the national anthem.

Also, NBC has cut a clip out from its hit television show "ER" that shows a glimpse of an 80-year-old woman's breast. Actually, maybe that's a good thing. Who would want to see that?

Oops, she's doing it again!

A close friend of Britney Spears has spoken with US weekly magazine and has disclosed that the pop singer is once again dating her ex-husband. Both families have given the couple their blessings and hope that if they choose to get married for a second time, that they at least get invited to the wedding.



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