

Film Close-Up: Will Ferrell

by Joey_Berlin

Will Ferrell is finally putting his college education to good use. One of the biggest recent megastars to graduate from the ranks of "Saturday Night Live," Ferrell first graduated from the University of Southern California with a degree in sports information. And for the past four years, Ferrell has been poking fun at the sports world on the big screen.

WILL FERRELL - Will Ferrell is Jackie Moon, the owner-coach-player of a basketball team in the comedy 'Semi-Pro.' CNS Photo courtesy of Frank Masi. After heaping abuse on NASCAR, soccer and figure skating, Ferrell has found a particularly ripe target in the ABA, the funky and now-defunct basketball league. "Semi-Pro" is not about the glory days of the ABA's high-flying Julius Erving and company. Instead, Ferrell leads a rag-tag team of misfits called the Flint Michigan Tropics. His character, a self-centered dimwit named Jackie Moon, plays for the uniquely sorry team and is also their coach and owner.

Some of the supporting cast, including Andy Richter, Rob Corddry and Will Arnett, are holdovers from Ferrell's other movies, but Woody Harrelson and Andre Benjamin are new to this machine-tooled comedy ensemble.

Ferrell, a 40-year-old native Californian and father of two, will soon film an adaptation of the cult favorite sci-fi television series "Land of the Lost."

Q: How hard was it to shape that beautiful body of yours into a basketball player's physique for "Semi-Pro"?

A: Well, I pretty much stereotypically have a basketball physique to begin with. So it didn't take that much sculpting. But you know, Jackie Moon is a player from a different era when players were a little more voluptuous. He's a voluptuous player. Curvy.

Q: How does your improv background work into a film like this?

A: Wow. I was not expecting that question. Will and Andy got to sit at the scorer's table and just improvise, so they were kind of in a contained situation where you could just roll the camera and they could come up with 8,000 things that we'd cherry-pick, as to what worked for the scene. I mean, this was kind of the typical pattern where we'd start filming the scene as written and then slowly throw some zingers in there. I really try to change it up whenever I can in my personal life.

Q: Were there any problems on set with the short shorts?

A: I think Andre and I had the shortest shorts, which a lot of our fellow teammates refused to wear. He wore his shorts during the two weeks of practicing. That's how dedicated Andre was. But I did have to wear a special pair of underwear because when I went into a defensive stance, there was a potential for things to happen.

Q: When you saw yourself in the costume and hair and makeup, what did you think?

A: I felt completely at home. No, in looking at a lot of the reference photos of the league and the period it obviously looks funny, but it's not that far from the truth. I mean, I love the fact that it really is sort of historically accurate and humorous looking all at the same time.

Q: Would you be caught dead wearing anything from the movie?

A: You know what? I might start wearing neckerchiefs now in my personal life. I think that's a nice piece of

accoutrement. It's beautiful. And it covers the neck if you have any unsightly blemishes or a weird Adam's apple.

Q: What was your favorite scene to shoot?

A: Luckily it's hard to say. It's hard to pick one. If I had to pick one right now, it would probably be the Russian roulette poker scene, just because that was insane. We had a good time. That was fun.

Q: Who wrangled the bear for the wrestling scene?

A: We did something unusual that's never been done before. We went wild. There was no bear trainer. We captured a bear. In fact, that's why this was a nine-month shoot. Six of those months we had to trap a bear up in the Sierra Nevadas. Well, the first one wasn't big enough. We didn't like it so I think we released it in Burbank somewhere. And we finally found our hero bear, and that day we just rolled film and just let it do its thing.

Q: What is your favorite NBA team and how do you like its chances this year?

A: I am a Laker fan. Born and raised in Southern California, right here, and we just made the deal of the season. We just got Pau Gasol from the Memphis Grizzlies.

Q: By now, you are becoming well-known for making comedies with sports themes.

A: It is actually just coincidence that these movies lined up the way they did. I love combining sports and comedy together, but only one of those was my idea, that was the NASCAR movie. Otherwise, I was asked to be a part of these. So, that having been said, it's a great framework to do comedy in. You can parody the sport, in this movie you can parody the era, and at the same time you have a built-in arc that's fun for the audience to watch, this team of losers trying to attain the lofty goal of fourth place.

Q: Were there any sports injuries during filming?

A: There was a full-time training staff. It was pretty intense so we were always getting worked on and stuff. I faked several injuries. I actually faked an appendectomy at one point to get out of filming.

Q: For "Land of the Lost" you are going to change the tone from the old TV show, but are you going to keep the creatures?

A: You know, everything is going to be kind of ramped up a little bit. The kitsch of the physical production of the TV show was kind of thrown out the window. The dinosaurs and everything are going to look very realistic, or as realistic as we think dinosaurs should look. But even the sleestaks and things like that, they are all going to be real creatures as opposed to in the show where you saw a guy with a costume and a zipper running up his back.

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