

Movie Review: 'Pride'

by David_Elliott

"Pride" is one of those film titles, like "Victory," "Gold," "Winning" and "Perfect," suited to a movie of very obvious purpose and delivery. Not much thinking required.

'PRIDE' - Terrence Howard plays a determined swim team coach in the sports drama 'Pride.' CNS Photo courtesy of Lions Gate. As with those, so again with "Pride," a sincere and plodding treatment of Philadelphia swimming coach Jim Ellis. Terrence Howard, who came to some fame and justified acclaim with "Hustle & Flow," plays Ellis, again uniting soft-eyed charm with harder textures.

As a teen, inflamed by racism at a swim meet, Ellis socked a cop. So he has a police record, and since (10 years later) he can't get the job he wanted teaching math, he becomes a coach at Marc Foster Recreation Center, though its slum dilapidation is sized up by the sign: Mrc Foser Recation Cent.

The center is a dump, ruled by a veteran janitor (Bernie Mac) who has lazy pride in the place, but unaccountably has a spiffy indoor pool full of pristine water. This inspires Ellis, and later a sexy councilwoman (Kimberly Elise), whose earrings are practically an Olympic flag, reverses her decision to close the place - evidently to keep the new, small team going.

Ellis recruits local boys, a muscular, engaging bunch, plus a slight, sparky girl (Regine Nehy). And there's a shrimpy boy with a stutter, as go-for-it mascot. There is a ghetto thug for tension, and sweaty workouts alternate with urgent Ellis speeches like, "You either work as a team, or you're nothing."

For more inspiration, consider such song lyrics as: "Close your eyes and visualize / Nothing is impossible." Nothing, that is, but a clean break from cliché. The worst may be the racist coach of a very winning school called Main Line, which might as well be called White Power, given its function here.

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) Tom Arnold, who always seems an actor paid in beers, plays the smug whitey. He must be one of the very few performers who can deliver, straight, a swim meet speech like this: "We win this relay, and we're champions. We lose, and they're champions."

It certainly beats that old rouser about winning one for the Gipper. Even as the black swimmers improve and become competitive, the movie tends to dog paddle. Not even Howard's genuine appeal, or his can-do kids, can keep "Pride" out of the shallow end of the pool.

A Lions Gate Films release. Director: Sunu Gonera. Writers: Kevin Michael Smith, Michael Gozzard. Cast: Terrence Howard, Bernie Mac, Kimberly Elise, Tom Arnold, Regine Nehy. Running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Rated PG. 2 stars.