Film Close-Up: Will Ferrell

by Joey_Berlin

Will Ferrell is carving out his own niche in Hollywood: a specialty in sports comedies. And why not? Last year's NASCAR spoof, "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby" was a smash hit. The comic star took on kids' soccer in 2005 with "Kicking & Screaming." And Ferrell is currently filming "Semi-Pro," a comedy about the American Basketball Association in the 1970s.

WILL FERRELL - Will Ferrell is half of a same-sex figure skating duo in the comedy 'Blades of Glory.' CNS Photo courtesy of Suzanne Hanover. Right now, Ferrell is defending his spot as a top comic draw, starring as a studly figure skater in "Blades of Glory." Ferrell and Jon Heder ("Napoleon Dynamite") play Chazz and Jimmy, rivals skating on thin ice after they are banned from the sport for fighting. But the duo discover a loophole that will let them take to the ice together, as the sport's first same-sex skating pair.

"Blades of Glory" goofs on figure skating, yet it still lured stellar notables from the sport for cameos, including Nancy Kerrigan, Peggy Fleming, Brian Boitano and Scott Hamilton.

Ferrell's cocky character in "Blades of Glory" plays directly to his strengths. The California-born father of two, who turns 40 in July, honed his specialty in quirky, self-centered dimwits with the comedy group the Groundlings, before joining "Saturday Night Live" in 1995.

Q: Your most impressive ice skating tricks in "Blades of Glory" involve a lot of movie magic, of course. But how much of what we see is really you on the ice?

A: Well if you're talking about the first time that Chazz and Jimmy skate together, the fire and ice thing, actually the whole beginning part of that is us doing it. The coming together, the twirling around and then the skating off is us. That's probably the biggest continuous chunk of us actually doing the routines. So it's hard to give you a percentage. But all the spots that they could use us, they definitely did. And then in terms of any of the difficult moves or throws or that sort of thing, those were all the doubles.

Q: Was it a point of pride to say you could do some of it yourself without using a double?

A: Yeah, it was. We had a moment where we were going halfway through a routine and the director said to stop, but it was so magnificent we just continued it, and everyone actually applauded.

Q: Did you have some say in the casting of Jon Heder?

A: Actually I was the last one to be on the movie. Will (Arnett) and Amy (Poehler) and Jon were already doing it, so I was kind of the last-second person. So it actually worked in reverse. I wanted to make sure that they were in it. That was a big part of me wanting to do the movie, was being a fan of the cast they had and making sure that I got to do it with them.

Q: Who was your inspiration for this character? And why do you keep getting cast as these exaggerated sex symbols?

A: Well I think it's the animal attraction that other people have to me, which you can't deny. No, you know, he was kind of patterned after this one skater, Elvis Stojko, who's this "bad boy" of skating. And we watched other footage of routines, like there's a Russian guy, Evgeni Plushenko, and we saw other footage of, I think he's actually a French skater, who skated shirtless the whole time.

That's where we got the idea of Chazz kissing the lady, but I turned it into a lick. So he was kind of an amalgamation. But even those skaters that you see who try to act sexy, they still remain within the confines of being a skater. I think Chazz cares the least about skating. He just wants to make love to the audience.

Q: For all the film's comedy, there is also some surprising heart to the characters. Is that important for a film to have? What difference does it make to you?

A: I think it works really well in a big, huge, broad comedy like this if the heart of the movie can kind of sneak up on you. And that's what I think happened. We don't try to hit you over the head with it, but you find yourself, probably against your will, really liking these guys, really pulling for them in a sports-movie kind of way. And that's a whole other level that's hard to get without getting too cheesy. Because if you go too much that way, then it turns into a different type of movie.

Q: This is your third film with a sports story, and your fourth is on the way. Do you get a lot of love from the fans of these sports, or do they get offended?

A: It was kind of uncanny how much support we got from the skaters. We were expecting a lot of flak but they not only embraced it, they said it was so funny.

I don't know, there's something about ice skaters that they know how hard the sport is, and yet they have an incredible sense of humor about it, too. They were loving every joke we would tell them about.

So if anything, they were telling us to go even further with it. Plus, even if they were mad at us, I'm not really worried about getting beat up by a figure skater. Getting cold-cocked in the back of the head by, like, Michelle Kwan, I'm not in fear of. But I hope she doesn't. I hope she likes the movie.

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