

The Screen Savor: 'Flies Like an Eagle'

by Kimberly_Gadette

Movie Review of 'Invincible'

Right before the opening of the 2006 NFL season, Disney has tackled a "Cinderfella" story with enough heart to thrill the most hardened of sports-satiated movie fans—including the two guys sitting to my right in the theater, alternately arguing and cheering for every gripping, gridiron moment.

100-yard story short: In 1976, in bleak economic times, schoolteacher Vince Papale (Mark Wahlberg) finds himself deserted by both the job market and his wife. Meanwhile, to get the city energized, new coach Dick Vermeil does a bit of PR by holding open tryouts for the Philadelphia Eagles. Among a throng of pudgy, pigskin-playing wannabes, Vince gets invited to training camp, giving renewed hope to his South Philly 'hood. And what a 'hood it is: With the blue-collar men of Max's bar, the filmmakers treat us to great big swigs of camaraderie, hope and fear right along with the beer.

Serving as both the film's director and the DP, Ericson Core fills the screen with pictures of a Philadelphia in desperate need of a facelift. Even the television sports guy is old and tired, his dyed, jet-black hair an unnerving contrast to his aging face. When he tries interviewing Papale in front of the bar, a patron wanders out and starts urinating in the background, unaware of the television crew—now there's a picture that's worth the proverbial 1,000 words. No stranger to action (he was DP for *Daredevil* and *The Fast and the Furious*), Core is master of the backfield in motion, able to shoot a 22-man ballet without confusion. Back on the home turf, with the scenes of friends playing tackle football, ostensibly only lit from the headlights of their rusted-out cars, Core reveals a depth of character through their actions that mere words couldn't explore half as well.

Speaking of words, screenwriter Brad Gann avoids cliché—there are no gooey relationships between the oldtimer teaching the rookie the ropes, nor does Papale get adopted by some loveable assistant coach. Instead, Gann draws a smart parallel between the rookie seasons of both Papale and Greg Kinnear's Dick Vermeil, both waging individual wars with their demons of self-doubt. The scene before the first big game, both of them sick to their stomachs, is priceless.

Well-acted relationships are key, especially given the ghosts of hundreds of heartfelt sports movies swirling around in the collective heads of a cinematically savvy public. Wahlberg's Papale is completely believable as he falls for diehard Giants fan Janet (ably played with great spirit by Elizabeth Banks), or turning to his father for support (the under-appreciated Kevin Conway, gruff on the outside, but with eyes frequently on the brink of tears). Though Kinnear's Vermeil is not as well-realized as Papale, it's in his scenes with Wahlberg that his heart and humor comes through.

This isn't the first time that Wahlberg has played the character of an average Joe touched by fame (Rock Star, Boogie Nights). But his 30-year-old part-time bartender "done good" is a performance of great humanity and humility, Wahlberg's face reflecting every blow, both physical and emotional. Sitting on his cot fully dressed, luggage packed, waiting for the final cut from the Coach, the audience roots for the good guy who, just like all of us, deserves that one lucky break.

From the pre-dawn "Rocky" shots of Papale jogging through gritty neighborhoods to the cars that can't limp a

block without needing a charge, it is in this 1976 world, with its striking factory workers and its comatose families recovering from Vietnam, it is in this football-loving city, at this time of crisis, that the beautifully common Vince Papale meant so much. And perhaps it is in this 2006 world as well, in this country, at this time of crisis, that a movie like "Invincible" might mean something too.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: B-plus

"Invincible" Directed by Ericson Core Screenplay by Brad Gann Cast: Mark Wahlberg, Greg Kinnear, Elizabeth Banks, Kevin Conway Rated: PG Running Time: 99 minutes Grade: B-plus

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