

The Fighter : Review

☒ To make a boxing film without referencing Rocky or Raging Bull, is as difficult as avoiding sports clichés in a review of said film. So when I say that The Fighter stumbles over familiar punches, or hits many of the same points as either of the previously mentioned films, I hope to be afforded similar critical restraint as that shown by many to David O. Russell's latest offering starring Mark Wahlberg and Christian Bale.

The Fighter casts Wahlberg and Bale as boxing half brothers Micky Ward and Dicky Eklund. While Micky (Wahlberg) finds himself a stepping stone for fighters on their way up, his brother/trainer Dicky (Bale), is a relative has-been whose career high was knocking down 'Sugar Ray' Leonard, an event from which neither he nor the town of Lowell, Massachusetts, has ever seemed to recover. At the beginning of the film we are introduced to Dicky as the subject of a documentary that he believes, or at least leads others to believe, is charting his comeback. However, the real subject of the documentary is his current addiction to crack and the circumstances in which he finds himself living. Things begin to change for Micky when he meets Charlene, played by Amy Adams, a local bartender and college dropout. After his brother is arrested, she insists that he distances himself from his family, especially Dicky and his manager/mother Alice (Melissa Leo).

The plot is predictable, and perhaps because Russell is aware of this, the film works hard to remind the audience that it is 'Based on a true story' with interview segments, actual footage of Dicky Eklund vs. 'Sugar Ray' Leonard, and what is fast becoming the must have for any 'real events' based film, footage of the people whose lives are being dramatised playing over the end credits.

This is more mainstream fare from director David O. Russell,

best known for *I Heart Huckabees* and *Three Kings*, and produced by Darren Aronofsky, who was at one stage attached to direct but instead opted to make [Black Swan](#), a wise move considering his previous film *The Wrestler* dealt with a similar subject matter. As far as sports movies go it ticks all the boxes and is certainly entertaining throughout its nearly two hours of runtime. However, being aware of its recent spate of nominations and awards left me questioning whether they were truly deserved.

Christian Bale is strong but his performance is huge and scenery chewing, an element which as he admitted in his Golden Globes acceptance speech works only by the virtue of Wahlberg's relatively understated performance anchoring his own, which at times verges on ostentation. Melissa Leo is both terrifying and often strangely comic as the matriarch and ring leader of Micky Ward's swarm of siblings, who when arranged in a single shot look like the AGM of pantomime ugly sisters.

It is David O. Russell's nomination in the Oscar's Best Director category that is slightly troubling. Though this is in no way poorly directed, it just isn't particularly sophisticated or innovatory in terms of the sports movie genre. Nominated in a category that omits Christopher Nolan for *Inception*, Russell's inclusion draws attention to the film as solid but in no way groundbreaking work by a director known for tackling more existential, difficult and controversial material.

However, to criticise a film for its nominations is probably quite unfair and has more to do with its release date and Oscar buzz than the substance of the film itself. Though its portrayal of the underdog boxer is in no way revolutionary, the ring sequence and final ten minutes are as exciting as any of its kind, and its realism in these scenes may even allow the most hardened Rocky fan to accept that at no point is Wahlberg going to scream 'Adrienne!'

Catch The Fighter at the Cameo, click here for [showtimes](#) and watch the trailer below.