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The Rock's gathering moss

The Gridiron Gang

Directed by Phil Joanou
Starring The Rock, Xzibit and Malcolm Moore
Opens 15 September
Empire Theatres

DANIEL KASZOR
Arts & Entertainment Staff

The Gridiron Gang is the second-best movie *The Rock* has starred in. And, to be quite honest, *The Rock* deserves better than that.

This isn't to say that *The Gridiron Gang* is a bad movie. On the contrary, it hits all of the right emotional notes, and does an adequate job of being a suitably passionate sports movie. Sure, it doesn't try anything interesting with the genre, like Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday* did, but it does an admirable job of manipulating the football movie formula. To put it on the high school football movie scale: it's better than *Varsity Blues*, about the same as *Remember the Titans*, but maybe not quite as good as *Friday Night Lights*. The twist, this time, is that all the kids are down on their luck because they're in juvie.

Anyway, back to *The Rock's* career. As I said before: *The Rock* deserves better than *The Gridiron Gang*. It's the kind of movie a person agrees to when they're coasting on their celebrity (see Denzel Washington in the aforementioned *Remember the Titans*). They do it as something that doesn't affect their status, but reminds people that they're here, all the while earning a handful of cash. By all accounts, *The*

Rock should be at that point in his career. But, somehow, his journey as a movie professional has gone off track.

He's had some measure of success, though: he's probably the only wrestler turned actor who will go down in people's memories as "that movie star who used to be a wrestler" as opposed to "that wrestler who tried to be a movie star," but that's sort of like being the ostrich who can fly better than the rest of his kin. He still isn't going anywhere.

The Rock deserves better than *The Gridiron Gang*. It's the kind of movie a person agrees to when they're coasting on their celebrity. They do it as something that doesn't affect their status, but reminds people that they're here, all the while earning a handful of cash.

It looked rosy for *The Rock* a while ago. Sure, *The Scorpion King* sucked, but it was a perfect launching point for the rest of his career. After that came *The Rundown*, which was a much better movie than it should have been. *The Rock* had blossomed as a per-

former, it was the only movie that Sean William Scott had been in where he wasn't painfully annoying, Chris Walken was his usual weird self and Rosario Dawson was hot. It should have been a great way for him to move up in the world. But, not many people saw it, and those who did were less impressed than I was. Things just got worse from there.

The Rock followed *The Rundown* with *Walking Tall*, which had a strange made-for-TV feel to it. Then he became attached to *Spyhunter*, a project that has been delayed for years, because, one presumes, it's terrible. All of this was followed up by *Doom*, which was one of the worst movies of 2005.

This isn't to say that the man once known as Dwayne Johnson has made absolutely terrible choices in roles. He had juicy bits in both *Be Cool* and *Southland Tales*, which probably would have earned him more praise if the both of those projects hadn't fallen apart around him.

I don't know. *The Rock* is 34 now. He should have made it already. He was supposed to be the second coming of the '80s action star. He's as charismatic as Arnie and Stalone, has at least as much presence, and is certainly a better actor than either of them. Perhaps the world doesn't want big, dumb action movies anymore. Maybe *The Rock* is a man come 20 years too late.

Anyhow, *The Gridiron Gang* is worth seeing if you like that kind of thing. And maybe *The Rock* will hit it huge next year.

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