



Semi-Pro a slam dunk for Ferrell

The funnyman lets his team handle the plot and scores baskets of laughs

filmreview

Semi-Pro
Opens 29 February
Directed by Kent Alterman
Starring Will Ferrell, André Benjamin,
Woody Harrelson, and David
Koechner

SEAN STEELS
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Oh, Will Ferrell. Your satiny voice slinks through our ears, like the exotic love-child of a jaguar and a box of silken q-tips. Or at least that's the impression we're supposed to get of Jackie Moon, the character you play in your newest film, *Semi-Pro*.

Unfortunately, for those not of this opinion, the first ten minutes of the movie might be a little jarring. Jackie Moon isn't just a local basketball star—he's also the owner and coach of the semi-professional basketball team on which he plays. And not to squander any talent, he's also the singer and writer of '70s one hit wonder "Love Me Sexy," featured prominently throughout the movie.

Semi-Pro is the story of the Flint Tropics, an American Basketball Association (ABA) team from Flint, Michigan. Composed almost entirely of misfits, with the exception of Clarence "Coffee" Black (André Benjamin), the team is

comfortable with mediocrity and flashy halftime shows until they find out the ABA will soon be absorbed into the NBA. While this opens up a door of opportunity for the players, only select teams will be allowed to advance.

Predictably, these teams are to be selected based on performance, and only the top four will proceed to NBA glory. Fierce competition ensues, and the new guy Monix (Woody Harrelson), a talented but anger-fraught veteran, is brought in to help the team bring home the championship—or at least fourth place.

But typecast though he may be, Ferrell still manages to keep his jokes fresh and funny while romping through the afro-crazy antics of '70s basketball culture.

As far as sports film go, *Semi-Pro* is a shameless spoof. But the hilarity that ensues from Jackie Moon's efforts to keep the team in accordance with ABA regulations and meet the ridiculous attendance numbers demanded of the league underdogs are enough to make you forget you were even watching a competition.

Of course, Jackie Moon isn't all that different from Ferrell's recent characters. He has all the boisterous bravado of Ricky Bobby from *Talladega Nights*, all the salacious jokes of *Anchorman's* Ron Burgundy, and all the athletic prowess of Chazz Michael Michaels from *Blades of Glory*.

But typecast though he may be, Ferrell still manages to keep his jokes fresh and funny while romping through the afro-crazy antics of '70s basketball culture. The movie has a solid helping of his comedic stylings from start to finish without imitating the comic's previous successes too closely.

The movie's biggest surprise is the performance from the rest of the cast—Ferrell doesn't rely heavily on his set of B-list frat-packers. Standards like David Koechner, Rob Corddry, and Will Arnett make steady appearances throughout the film, but the majority of attention is focused on Harrelson and Benjamin. In fact, by *Semi-Pro's* halfway point, the majority of plot and development are focused on Harrelson, leaving Ferrell to sling jokes comfortably from the sidelines. By putting Harrelson and Benjamin in charge of carrying the sense of the movie, Ferrell's free to take care of the nonsense.

With Ferrell on the sidelines, *Semi-Pro* manages to avoid a *Blades of Glory*-esque disaster.



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