

TV Review: 'Friday Night Lights' Continues Stellar Storytelling

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 7, 2010 - 4:01pm

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CHICAGO – Why has a seemingly ordinary tale of an oil patch town in Texas and their high school football obsession conquered books, film and television? Because the folks telling the story continue a tradition of beautiful, significant truth.



Television Rating: **5.0/5.0**

The television version of "Friday Night Lights," premiering its fourth season May 7th on NBC-TV, has followed the excellence of the 1990 non-fiction book and the essential 2004 film version of that book by establishing its own exceptional style. This 'FNL' is the fictionalized rendering of the same basic concepts in the book and film, but because of that fiction the producers are able to take the Texas way of football and life and apply it to the fading American Dream.

The centerpiece of the TV show is Coach Eric Taylor (Kyle Chandler), who has carried the burden of trying to satisfy the football lust of the fictional Dillon, Texas. He began the series as the head caretaker of the Dillon Panthers, the high school team whose reputation as yearly contenders for the state championship feeds the town's life and obsessions, from the players to the families to the booster club.

Coach Taylor's family includes wife Tami (Connie Britton), who is moving up the ranks of the Dillon High School administration chain and daughter Julie (Aimee Teegarden), who despite disliking both football and Texas, manages to connect with Matt (Zach Gilford), a shy athlete thrust into the spotlight as quarterback on the team. Buddy Garrity (Brad Leland) is the influential football booster in town, and represents the power role behind the image of Texas sports.



Friday Night Lights

Photo credit: Bill Records/NBC

Season four opens as Coach Taylor faces new challenges. At the end of last season, he was summarily dismissed as head coach of the popular Panthers, due to a wealthy booster creating a backlash against him. Due to redistricting, he is able to secure another head coaching job on the “other side of the tracks,” with the woeful East Dillon High School Lions.

The first episode deals with the transition, and portrays an honest challenge that won’t be easily met. Taylor’s wife Tami is also just been named principal of the Dillon Panther high school, and has to deal with the politics of divided loyalties between her husband and her career.

One of the reasons that producer/actor Peter Berg wanted to translate his film version to television was to explore the issues of the source non-fiction book – racial attitudes, grown adults concern for 16-year old players and football, football, football over everything else. The series has delivered on that translation and hints to most of that territory in the season opener.

Another brilliant methodology that Berg put into practice is a one-take, multi camera scene structure that creates an atmosphere of immediacy, as if they are shooting a documentary. Coupled with the authentic Texas landscape (it is filmed in and around Austin), the show has a character that bleeds directly from that earth and attitudes.



Don't Mess With Texas: The cast of Friday Night Lights

Photo credit: Justin Stephens/NBC

One of the more intriguing elements of the new model of network television is the multiple “seasons” that have developed from simple experimentation. Although Friday Night Lights has been thrown around the dial and spectrum of the modern business of media (appearing on NBC’s sister cable station Bravo, appearing on the DirectTV Network) it has maintained its integrity and promise throughout its three season run. This fourth season will be its last.

This show deserves its accolades and attention because it simply delivers its promise – a television program that is a mirror of American society, a reflection of everything that seems to hold us in a firm grasp. Whether that grasp cradles us or strangles us is the answer to everything that the Friday Night Lights flash before us.

"Friday Night Lights" fourth season premiere airs on NBC-TV, May 7th, 8pm ET/7pm Central Time. Check local listings for channel locations. Featuring Kyle Chandler, Connie Britton, Taylor Kitsch, Brad Leland, Aimee Teegarden and Zach Gilford, Season four premiere directed by Peter Berg.



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