

Blu-Ray Review: Excellent 'Win Win' With Paul Giamatti, Amy Ryan

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 30, 2011 - 8:17pm

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CHICAGO – The best film of the first quarter of 2011 was a sublime little gem from the great Thomas McCarthy (“The Station Agent,” “The Visitor”) called “Win Win.” The clever, character-driven dramedy with Paul Giamatti and Amy Ryan was recently-released on Blu-ray and DVD, and it deserves to find (and very likely will with word-of-mouth) a loyal audience on the home market. This is a great movie.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Mike (Giamatti) is an everyman for the days of the economic crisis. He struggles to keep his business together in the face of rising bills, pending expenses, fewer clients, and even an about-to-explode hot water heater. He worries every day about losing the financial backbone of his family (which includes two daughters and his wife Jackie, played in another lovely performance from the always-great Ryan). Mike sees an opportunity in Leo (Burt Young), an older client on the edge of dementia. He agrees to take care of the likable old guy and collect a sizable stipend to do so. But he puts him in a home. This questionable act brings Leo's grandson Kyle (Alex Shaffer) into Mike's world and, with hints of an abusive home life and a mother who doesn't care he's missing, Kyle becomes a part of the family.

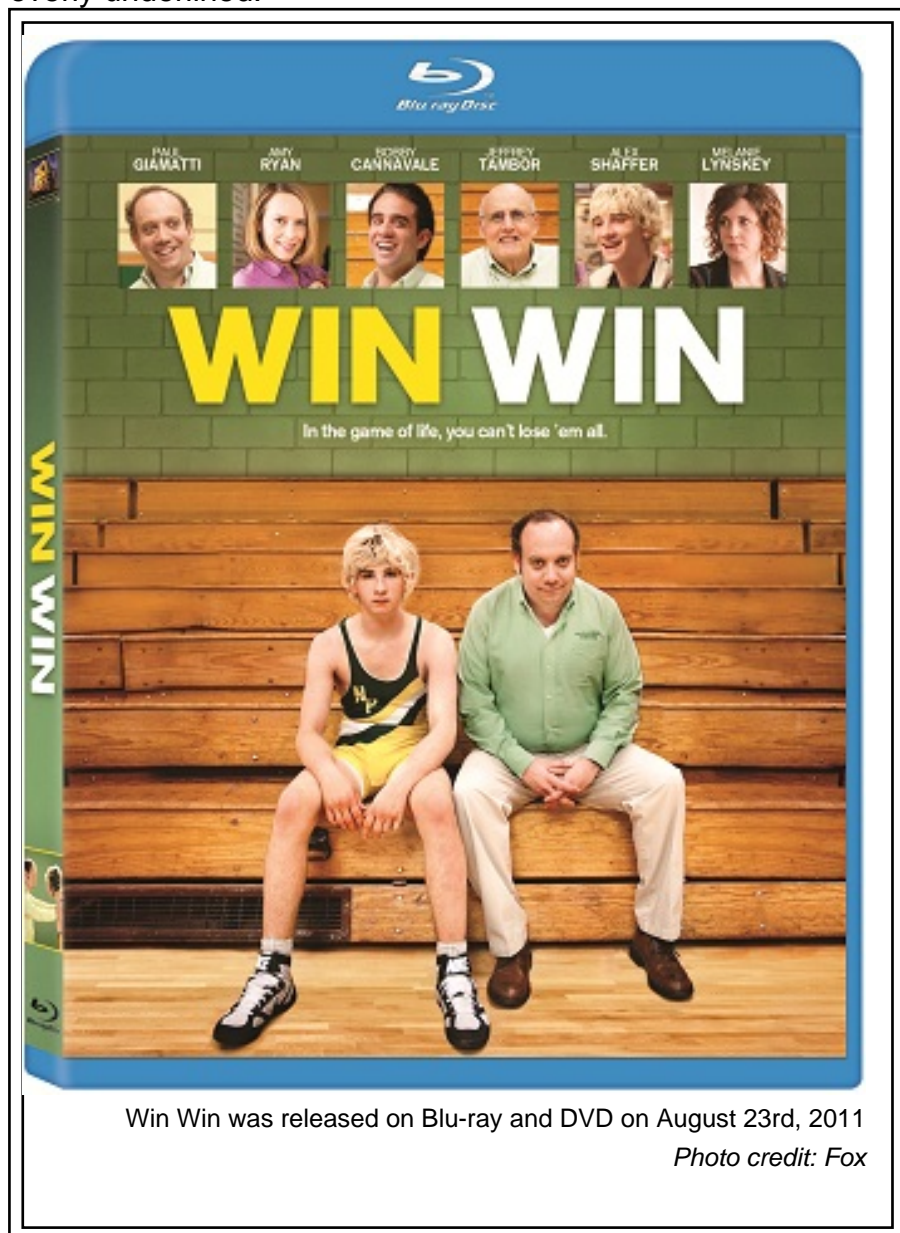


Win Win

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight

But “Win Win” is not just a family dramedy. As you might expect looking at the cheesily-photoshopped picture on the back of the Blu-ray case (which is a horrendous misrepresentation of the film that makes it look like a teenage “Rocky” with wrestling and Giamatti in the coach role),

it's also a bit of a sports movie. Mike coaches a pretty awful wrestling team at the local high school and serendipity kicks in when he figures out that Kyle is a world-class athlete. With the help of his friend Terry (Bobby Cannavale), Mike adds Kyle to the team, although they really don't need to do much more than cheer him on. The boys jokingly have a move called "whatever the f**k it takes," in which they summon all the strength they have left to not get pinned. The metaphor for doing the same in life to keep your family and business together is clear but not overly underlined.



This is one of the funniest movies of the year but it's also, most importantly, one of the most genuine. There are dramatic turns in the story but they feel organically borne of the characters, not mere contrivances of a writer. The pitch line of "Win Win" — struggling businessman finds success in the wrestling ring with a runaway kid — could have been the basis for a horrendous Disney movie of the week, filled with manipulative moments and life lessons. "Win Win" is almost more remarkable for what's it not than what it is. It's not heartstring-pulling, merely moving. It's not cliched. It's not overly familiar. Writing this good is as impressive for the pitfalls it avoids as for the fact that it's much harder to pull off than it looks.

And so is acting. Giamatti and Ryan never strike a false note. They ground nearly everything they do in believability and these performances stand among their best. While Giamatti and Ryan shine brightest, credit should go to the entire ensemble, including newcomer Alex Shaffer, a young man who conveys a deep well of emotion created by a dark past but doesn't overplay it. Jeffrey Tambor, Margo Martindale, Bobby Cannavale — none of them hit a false note.

I am increasingly drawn to characters that feel lived in and stories that feel genuine. Tom McCarthy makes those movies. "Win Win" should not be missed.

Special Features:

- o Deleted Scenes
- o Tom McCarthy and Joe Tiboni Discuss Win Win
- o David Thompson At Sundance 2011
- o In Conversation with Tom McCarthy and Paul Giamatti At Sundance 2011
- o Family
- o "Think You Can Wait" Music Video by The National

"Win Win" stars Paul Giamatti, Amy Ryan, Bobby Cannavale, Jeffrey Tambor, Burt Young, Margo Martindale, and Alex Shaffer. It was written and directed by Thomas McCarthy. It was released on Blu-ray and DVD on August 23rd, 2011.



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