

TV Review: Beaten, Battered ‘Community’ Finally Returns to NBC

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 7, 2013 - 11:41am

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CHICAGO – Rarely has a low-rated show survived as much off-screen drama as NBC’s “Community,” returning tonight to the network bruised, battered, and slightly damaged but still funnier and smarter than most of the alternatives. Where do we begin? First, the network barely renews it, penciling it in on Friday nights as a partner to the show on NBC with the least-common fan base, “Whitney.” It was like agreeing to go on another date with someone you don’t really like but it’s not a show or a nice dinner, it’s breakfast at a greasy diner. It counts as a date, but just barely, and it doesn’t bode well for the future.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

Then it got really complicated. Showrunner and creator Dan Harmon was unceremoniously fired, finding out via the press that he would just be a consultant on the show and not the man in charge. He didn’t take that well, understandably. He walked away in a Twitter firestorm, leaving fans to wonder what the show would be like without him. They’d have to wonder for awhile as the program’s return was indefinitely delayed as the net worked through some other comedy failures like “Animal Practice” and tinkered with “Up All Night.” It would be back in February, which gave Chevy Chase plenty of time to bitch about the quality of the show that is the only reason young people still know who he is and get fired should the show go further than this shortened season.



Community
Photo credit: NBC

Has all of this drama led to better comedy? The short answer is no. While there are some clever references to the show’s off-screen nonsense in the season premiere (the show has always been self-referential), there is a definite sense that the shake-ups, especially the departure of Harmon, have impacted the program creatively. The writing is not as crisp as the program’s best in season two. The pacing isn’t as tight. There were signs of creative sag at the end of season three and they continue into four. Would Harmon have stopped the decline? Would some support from the network done so? We’ll never know.



Community
Photo credit: NBC

One can sense a new hand guiding the show. The pop culture references to “The Hunger Games” and “Doctor Who” don’t feel as organic or from a place of true love as they feel like something efforted to come off that way. “Oh, this is that reference-heavy show I have to work on now — what are the kids watching these days?” Harmon’s geekery came from a place of truth and didn’t feel as forced as it does here. Pudi, being the King Geek of TV, does an amazing job of selling it but the deal doesn’t quite close.

However, a less-than-stellar “Community” is still better than most comedies on TV. While the writing has sagged, the ensemble continues to deliver in the two episodes sent for review (and still tagged as premiering in October, indicating how little the net cares about the program...not enough to update the press materials). Joel McHale, Danny Pudi, Donald Glover, even Chase — they all get moments that truly work even if the plots of these two episodes feel like they’re trying too hard to play off pop culture.

Will this be the last season of “Community”? Somehow, I doubt it. I feel like NBC has so many holes on their schedule and general failures in their comedy line-up that the press surrounding this show is a good thing and could lead to stronger-than-expected ratings tonight. It’s certainly done more to promote the show than NBC ever did.

“Community” stars Joel McHale, Gillian Jacobs, Danny Pudi, Yvette Nicole Brown, Alison Brie, Donald Glover, Chevy Chase, Ken Jeong, and Kim Rash. It returns on NBC on Thursday, February 7, 2013 at 7pm CST.



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