

‘Million Dollar Arm’ Misses the Strike Zone

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 16, 2014 - 7:17am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Million Dollar Arm” harkens back to a period of shameless family friendly schmaltz that used to play to families in theaters and then run in perpetuity on “The Wonderful World Of Disney” on television. But this treacly baseball drama throws nothing but balls.

Although slightly more believable than a story about a football-kicking mule who wins the big game, its ambitions are the same. It yanks at the heartstrings by whatever means necessary while largely ignoring the sport the redemption tale is ostensibly about.



JB (Jon Hamm) and Aash (Aasif Mandvi) in ‘Million Dollar Arm’

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

Jon Hamm (“Mad Men”) stars as a failing sports agent just barely getting by. When his big NFL recruit leaves him, he’s left in dire financial straights. But one night while watching singing phenom Susan Boyle he gets that far away look that signals inspiration in movies like this. He heads to India to organize a reality competition show to turn a cricket player into a major league pitcher.

Director Craig Gillespie (“Lars and The Real Girl”) and screenwriter Thomas McCarthy (“The Visitor”) have created a movie about overcoming big odds, but it takes its shot of adversity with a racism chaser. The film takes a patently White American view of India and its culture. Although the culture clash fish-out-of-water elements are supposed to be comic relief, they come off as gently condescending instead.

India comes off less as an untapped marketplace of highly-skilled workers and more like a chaotic circle of hell where the accomplishment of even the most menial of tasks can be considered something of a miracle. The film veers wildly from schmaltz one minute to scatological the next with vomit and funny accents as frequent go-to punchlines.

I can't fault the game cast. Hamm is watchable in just about anything, while Daily Show alum Aasif Mandvi makes what he can of a purely reactive nothing role. He's the overstressed family man drowning in babies, vomit and financial worries, compared to Hamm's financially strapped agent who still beds models in his off time. Suraj Sharma (*Life Of Pi*) and Madhu Mittal fare better as the two young ballplayers Hamm plucks from poverty in India and brings to Los Angeles for their big tryout.



Lake Bell Portrays Brenda in 'Million Dollar Arm'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

But the movie isn't really about them, it's really about Hamm's own redemption, and the script never gives him that proper redemptive arc. He's still the same selfish jerk, who's only too eager to leave his new players the second something better might come along. He's only contrite when he has no other option, and his big grand movie gesture setting up the climax is phony to the core. The film talks a good game but doesn't really deliver.

"Million Dollar Arm" opens everywhere on May 16th. Featuring Jon Hamm, Aasif Mandvi, Lake Bell, Alan Arkin, Bill Paxton, Suraj Sharma and Madhu Mittal. Screenplay by Thomas McCarthy. Directed by Craig Gillespie. Rated "PG"



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