

‘Battle of the Sexes’ Parallels a Fight That’s Going on Today

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on September 22, 2017 - 4:57pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Since the time of early hominids, there has been a battle raging with your side being chosen before you’re even born. It all began when men claimed they were superior to women, forcing women to fight for the right at equality. Unfortunately, it remains as alive in the 70’s, when “Battle of the Sexes” takes place, as it is now.

We all know what a battle of the sexes entails. Most people think that it is men against women, but they would be wrong. In most of the world, especially in the US, we live in a patriarchy. Essentially, men hold most of the positions of power and therefore make most of the rules, usually to their direct benefit. What that translates into is that in America, a battle of the sexes is actually a one-sided battle with women fighting to prove to men that they are their equals and deserve to have the same rights and get the same pay for the same jobs they do. Yes, it is as frustrating as it sounds, and is what happened in the tennis world in the 1970’s.



Emma Stone and Steve Carell face off in ‘Battle of the Sexes’

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

Overtly, the “battle” we are promised happens less on the tennis court and more in the public arena. Screenwriter Simon Beaufoy is no stranger to underdog tales, especially those involving strong female characters with a filmography that includes “Slumdog Millionaire”, “Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day”, and even “The Hunger Games: Catching Fire”. He takes the fairly straightforward story of Billie Jean King and her fight for pay equality and turns it into a comment on society that also highlights the unfortunate parallels we are facing during the Trump administration. Beaufoy spotlights King’s personal life, giving the film title another meaning as she faces the tough decision of staying with a supportive man she loves, or being true to herself and being with a woman who can fulfill all of her physical, emotional, and sexual needs. Oh, also her hair styling needs, which I, personally, consider to be an important one too.

Beaufoy blends a historic event with a personal struggle, both of which were only issues because of antiquated societal notions. He highlights America's fetish for the nostalgic by showing how many of the social/political problems of the 70's have resurfaced, with a vengeance, recently. First, there's the battle for female equality and how the current emergence of hate groups like Men's Rights are looking to stop measures being taken to balance disparities by ironically claiming discrimination. Then, we see how times have changed, with same-sex marriage being legalized only to have opposition regain power and threaten to undo. The most powerful parallel that "Battle of the Sexes" draws is the one we witnessed during the 2016 presidential election. Leading up to their epic match, Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs had to do a lot of press, and while King was the consummate professional, Riggs put on a performance meant to entertain and turned into a comedic character instead of a professional tennis player. It was Clinton versus Trump all over again, except the outcome of our "match" was much less positive, favoring regression to progress.



Emma Stone and Andrea Riseborough explore their relationship in 'Battle of the Sexes'

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

A balanced representation is something that is hard to accomplish in many of these films, mostly because it is much easier to set a clear hero and villain. Directing team Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris are perfectly suited to establish a tone or understanding rather than pure demonization. Obviously, we will all side with Billie Jean King and her fight for equality, but we also sympathize with Bobby Riggs (to an extent) and his complicated life. The real enemy was the male-dominated tennis establishment, and we are always aware of that. Dayton and Faris do a great job blending the dramatic elements with the comedic sequences, never letting one overwhelm the narrative. This dramedy knows when to push King's emotional moments and when the almost parody-like humor Riggs should be presented. That extends to the pacing of the film, emulating that of a tennis match by showing that it knows it is an exercise in endurance so precision is important.

A vastly important aspect of the film comes in the shape of all the actors. Emma Stone gives all due respect to her portrayal of Billie Jean King. Stone accurately portrays not just her athletic prowess but also her emotional complexity and the many struggles she faced on and off the court. Her opponent Bobby Riggs, a perfect foil to her, is given a depth you don't often see, thanks to great writing and a nuanced comedic performance from Steve Carell. This film is full of fantastic performances from King's romantic partner Marilyn, played by Andrea Riseborough, to her manager, Gladys, played by Sarah Silverman, and even Fred Armisen who essentially plays Fred Armisen selling "vitamins". All of these performances help "Battle of the Sexes" delivers a powerful story about perseverance that is still, unfortunately very relevant even today.

"Battle of the Sexes" opens everywhere on September 22nd. Featuring Emma Stone, Steve Carell, Andrea Riseborough, Natalie Morales, Sarah Silverman, Alan Cumming and Bill Pullman. Written by Simon Beaufoy. Directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris. Rated "PG-13"



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By [JON ESPINO](#) [18]
Film & Video Game Critic
HollywoodChicago.com
jon@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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