

‘Uncle Drew’ Scores Points as a Feel Good Film

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Sometimes, you just want to escape to the surreal “Land of The Feel Good,” where all relationships work themselves out and all results are victorious. “Uncle Drew” is that film for this pre-holiday weekend, and although this basketball comedy is not a slam dunk, it certainly hits several heart-and-soul points.

Chicago comedian and actor Lil Rel Howery is the glue of the film, portraying the coach of a team old guys from the 1960s – actually current and ex-NBA/WNBA stars in old folks makeup – and taking them to the Rucker Classic, an actual playground tournament that is the stuff of legend. The film is loaded with classic African American culture... the barbershop, going-to-church and the playground b-ball court... but it also works as a sports comedy, as the old dudes play at a pro ball level behind their makeup, which makes the on-court action as strange as a fairy tale. Props to those b-ball stars for their acting ability, as off the court they did seem like old men and women. This is the fun, non-dinosaur alternative for July 4th.

Lil Rel Howery is Dax, an orphan who grew up with a passion for basketball, who ends up coaching a high octane team headed to the Rucker Classic, the top playground tourney. He runs up his credit debt keeping the team and his girlfriend Jess (Tiffany Haddish) happy, but still ends up without a team and Jess when his rival Mookie (Nick Kroll) steals both away weeks before the tourney.



The Title Character (Kyrie Irving) Got Game in ‘Uncle Drew’

Photo credit: Lionsgate

Enter Uncle Drew (NBA star Kyrie Irving behind old age makeup), a Rucker legend whose team mysteriously disappeared right before the tourney finals in the 1960s. When Dax sees he can still ball, they go on a journey to collect the rest of the squad (portrayed by Shaquille O’Neal, Chris Webber, Reggie Miller, Nate Robinson and Lisa Leslie), and bring them back to the NYC playground for the big game.

The Uncle Drew character started as a series of ads for PepsiCo, starring Kyrie Irving as the old man icon, and the film begins with a rundown of Drew’s legendary 1960s b-balling, with an overview by ex-NBA stars including David Robinson, Bill Walton and Jerry West. Kyrie obviously loves his character, because he conscientiously is honorable in his performance. He’s even asked to do a touch of emotion while mourning an old girlfriend – in a scene with Shaq – and pulls it off.

He had to inspire the rest of the crew, because all the ballers had fun with their characters. Standouts include Chris Webber as Preacher, who had to translate some church guys he has seen over the years. Reggie Miller is “Lights,” a sharpshooter who is now legally blind, and his attention to detail was highly comedic. And of course, Shaq needs no acting coach... he was the title character in “Kazaam” back in 1996.



Lil Rel Howery Leads the Crew in ‘Uncle Drew’

Photo credit: Lionsgate

Lil Rel Howery comes off his scene stealing role in “Get Out” by portraying the standard Den Mother character to the rag-tag crew, but he has a natural comic appeal and has some good scenes with Nick Kroll, Tiffany Haddish and the old guys... the baptism scene by the Preacher is a slapstick highlight. The film’s toughest parts was the road trip to find the team – it’s a drag – but once they’re back for the tourney it comes to life again. Will they win? What do you think? But you still can’t help but cheer for them.

“Uncle Drew” joins the pantheon of basketball comedies like “White Men Can’t Jump,” “Semi-Pro” and “Space Jam.” Maybe an Uncle Drew sequel will pair him with the Looney Tunes and Michael Jordan in “Space Geriatric.” Hyyyyy-oooh. That joke could get me eaten by dinosaurs. Happy 4th of July.

For an interview with Lil Rel Howery about “Uncle Drew,” with Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, [click here](#). [22]

“Uncle Drew” opens everywhere on June 29th. Featuring Lil Rel Howery, Tiffany Haddish, Nick Kroll, Kyrie Irving, Shaquille O’Neal, Chris Webber, Reggie Miller, Nate Robinson and Lisa Leslie. Written by Jay Longino. Directed by Charles Stone III. Rated “PG-13”



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