

Woody Harrelson Guides a Basketball Team in ‘Champions’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 10, 2023 - 12:40pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Champions” is a predictable and formulaic, but it’s ultimately a good natured trip into a world of sports comedy clichés. It’s never particularly laugh out loud funny, but its heart is in the right place, which makes it hard to root against the film.

Woody Harrelson is Marcus, a minor league assistant basketball coach who lost his shot at the big time and is now toiling in Des Moines, Iowa. After an altercation with his head coach, and a drunk driving arrest he’s fired from the team and ordered to do community service by coaching a rec center team called the “Friends,” full of players with intellectual disabilities played by real actors with intellectual disabilities, some of whom are part of the well regarded national “Best Buddies” program.



Woody Harrelson and the Friends are ‘Champions’

Photo credit: Focus Features

The coach with a grumpy-exterior-but-ultimately-warm-heart fits Woody Harrelson like a glove, and he manages to enliven the predictable material with some off kilter line readings. “It’s Always Sunny In Philadelphia” star Kaitlin Olson provides some solid support as the sister of one of the players ... who also serves as the grumpy coach’s love interest of mutual convenience. Cheech Marin mostly shows up to talk about how the program is broke, and to cheer on the team.

I didn’t laugh a lot during Champions, but I did smile. The film succeeds as an agreeable time killer that will serve to reasonably entertain those who see it. This underdog story has absolutely no surprises, but its message of inclusivity still kind of shines through.

“Champions” opens everywhere on March 10th. Featuring Woody Harrelson, Kaitlin Olsen, Ernie Hudson, Kevin Iannucci and Cheech Marin. Screenplay adapted by Mark Rizzo. Directed by Bobby Farrelly. Rated “PG-13”



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