

Sandra Bullock, Strong Script Bring Clarity to ‘The Blind Side’

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Based on a True Story” films are difficult to pull off, especially those that are the improbable story of a white Memphis family adopting an African American football prodigy. Sandra Bullock is the mother, through it all, in “The Blind Side.”

The football-themed title refers to protecting the quarterback’s blind side, the area where he can’t see a defensive linebacker coming. Symbolically, it also describes the life of Michael Ohr (an exceptional Quinton Aaron), a Memphis teenager who is discovered to be homeless by the Tuohy family, and is taken in by the firecracker Mom, Leigh Anne (Sandra Bullock).

Michael’s blind side is his past, a difficult road of negative parentage and squalid conditions. The shelter that the wealthy Tuohy family gives him is almost too much for him, much as the private school a previous mentor managed to get him into.



Michael is an inwardly drawn soul, prone to randomness in his first football practices. But Leigh Anne’s intuition and stick-to-it guidance lights his path, and the blessings that fill his life begins to heighten his play. Soon the college recruiters come in, and getting a scholarship to a major school will prove to be one more difficult challenge for “Big Mike,” the child that society almost lost.

What could be incorrectly formulaic actually works for two reasons – Sandra Bullock and a script that has a little fun with the subject. The Virginia-born Bullock absolutely knows her modern Southern woman character, a hard charging matriarch who absolutely clutches the rudder in steering her direction. Despite some unnecessary wardrobe choices (appropriate for the character but still unlikely in some scenes), Bullock never wavers from the no-nonsense believer in Michael’s potential.

The script has some decent laughs, and is unapologetic – as it should be – about the family’s wealth, football passion and the process that pairs them with Michael. He is a huge presence, unlike anyone around him, yet the clan brings him in and transitions the frightened homeless kid to confident member of the family. And through it all, the narrative is not afraid to note the absurdity of it all.



Recruiters: Sandra Bullock (center, in sunglasses) as Leigh Anne Tuohy and Some College Coaches in ‘The Blind Side’
Photo credit: Ralph Nelson for Warner Bros. Pictures

The worthy supporting cast keeps the story afloat as well. Tim McGraw is the idly rich Dad Tuohy, providing Greek chorus commentary to his agreeability regarding the situation. Ray McKinnon provides some comic relief as high school Coach Cotton, not knowing what to do about Michael, but basking in the glory when Bullock’s Leigh Anne directs the course for his team’s use of the big guy. And Kathy Bates brings her usual flair to a small supporting role as a brassy tutor, believable without overdoing it.

John Lee Hancock’s direction is crisp and natural, and his decision to let Bullock run with her character was a good one. He even throws in a comic montage, with the middle age college coaches slobbering over an 18-year old offensive lineman like groupies over a rock star.

But some of the scenarios were a little too sharply drawn to work. The Tuohy children were perfect movie kids and were used as annoying props at times. The revisit to Michael’s housing project roots had a boyz-in-the-hood flavor that bordered on stereotype. The Bullock character’s defiance in those revisit scenes muddled any chance that some real human exchange would take place.

But these are small complaints in a well-done and persevering tale of football and a family’s purpose. This is simple entertainment that doesn’t pander to the usual expectations for this level of Hollywood product. The celebration of family, the American Dream and of course football doesn’t hurt either. The Blind Side adjusts the focus toward its own vision, and has the gumption to stick to it.

“The Blind Side” opens everywhere November 20th. Featuring Sandra Bullock, Tim McGraw, Quinton Aaron, Kathy Bates, Ray McKinnon and several real college coaches in cameos, and is directed by John Lee Hancock. Rated “PG-13”



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