

The Fighter: Raging Bull meets Rocky meets Million Dollar Baby meets Cinderella Man meets...

Despite being based on the true story of Irish boxer Micky Ward, David O. Russell's latest film "The Fighter," on DVD and Blu-ray tomorrow, feels like the sum of a very long and very illustrious boxing-film math equation. It's true that boxing is the most commonly covered sport in film, even greatly outweighing films about America's pastime...*soccer*, so it makes sense that the film itself is reminiscent of others like it. What sets it apart from these other movies is David O. Russell at the helm. First really reaching his full potential with 1999's "Three Kings," we haven't heard much from Mr. Russell, except for an almost invisible cameo in Spike Jonze's brilliant film "Adaptation." and "I Heart Huckabees," also with Mark Wahlberg. I Heart Huckabees was not worth the name Russell made for himself with Three Kings, which is one of the most artistically satisfying Hollywood films of the last twenty years. So, now's he's back with the above average film The Fighter. Mark Wahlberg is great here, doing what he does best, playing a slightly altered version of himself. What should really be looked for is the performance by Christian Bale. He is a chameleon, a modern Peter Sellers, but on the dramatic end of the scale. He literally becomes the role, creating voices and physical appearances which mask the actor, hiding him in plain sight. His ability for transformation became evident in Brad Anderson's unsettling 2004 film "The Machinist," where Bale played an anorexic suffering from insomnia. Bale became more bone than flesh, elevating The Machinist from impressive to memorable. What's even more astounding, the next Bale film was Christopher Nolan's "Batman Begins," which featured a thick, muscular body from the actor, making it hard to believe it was the same person. This dedication to his craft served him well yet again in The Fighter, for he was truly the best part of the picture. He commanded attention and evoked a plethora of emotions, well deserving his win at the 2010 Academy Awards for Best Supporting Actor.

When The Fighter was announced it was said that Darren Aronofsky was attached to direct, following his success with 2008's "The Wrestler." At first this seemed to be the logical choice; however it felt a bit unnatural, for Darren Aronofsky is never one to repeat himself. This is not to say The Fighter is similar to the Wrestler in any way, they are very different films, but David O. Russell rose to the occasion and did the best he could with a film that is just shy of great. The story focuses on the beginning years of the real-life boxer, Micky Ward (Wahlberg), who became known as "Irish Micky Ward," and his tormented, past-his-prime brother (Bale). The film follows Micky to his dubious shot at the world light welterweight title, all competently shot by cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema. In the end, The Fighter has moments that transcend the majority of Hollywood drivel, but eventually proves to not equal the sum of its parts. Some math equations end with a beautiful round number and others end with a bothersome, uneven decimal. On a scale from 1 to 5, the Fighter earns a 4.9999999...