Semi-Pro a slam dunk for Ferrell
The funnyman lets his team handle the plot and scores baskets of laughs

filmreview
Semi-Pro
Opens 29 February
Directed by Kent Alterman
Starring Will Ferrell, Andre Benjamin, Woody Harrelson, and David Koechner

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Oh, Will Ferrell. Your wacky voice slinks through our ears, like the ecstatic love-child of a papaya and a box of silicon gels. Or at least that’s the impression we’re supposed to get of Jackie Moon, the character you play in your newest film, Semi-Pro.

Unfortunately, for those of us who have no opinion of this opinion, the first ten minutes of the movie might be a little jarring: Jackie Moon isn’t just a local basketball star—he’s also the owner and coach of the semi-professional basketball team on which he plays. And not to squander any talent, he’s also the singer and writer of ‘70s one-hit wonder “Love Me Sexy,” featured prominently throughout the movie.

Semi-Pro is the story of the Flint Tropics, an American Basketball Association (ABA) team from Flint, Michigan. Composed almost entirely of misfits, with the exception of Clarence “Coffee” Black (André Benjamin), the team is comfortable with mediocrity and flashy halftime shows until they find out the ABA will soon be absorbed into the NBA. While this opens up a door of opportunity for the players, only select teams will be allowed to advance.

Predominantly, these teams are to be selected based on performance, and only the top four will proceed to NBA glory. Fierce competition ensues, and the new guy Moon (Woody Harrelson), a talented but anger-fraught veteran, is brought in to help the team bring home the championship—or at least fourth place.

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Of course, Jackie Moon isn’t all that different from Ferrell’s other characters. He has all the boisterous bravado of Ricky Bobby from Talladega Nights, all the salacious jokes of Anchorman’s Ron Burgundy, and all the athletic prowess of Chazz Michael Michaels from Blades of Glory.

But typecast though he may be, Ferrell still manages to keep his jokes fresh and funny while romping through the afro-crazy antics of ‘70s basketball culture. The movie has a solid helping of his comedic stylings from start to finish without irritating the coma’s previous successes too closely.

The movie’s biggest surprise is the performance from the rest of the cast—Ferrell doesn’t rely heavily on his set of B-list frauds. Standards like David Koechner, Bob Odenkirk, and Will Arnett make steady appearances throughout the film, but the majority of action is focused on Harrelson and Benjamin. In fact, by Semi-Pro’s halfway point, the majority of plot and development are focused on Harrelson, leaving Ferrell to sling jokes comfortably from the sidelines. By putting Harrelson and Benjamin in charge of carrying the sense of the movie, Ferrell’s free to take care of the nonsense.

With Ferrell on the sidelines, Semi-Pro manages to avoid a Blades of Glory-esque disaster.