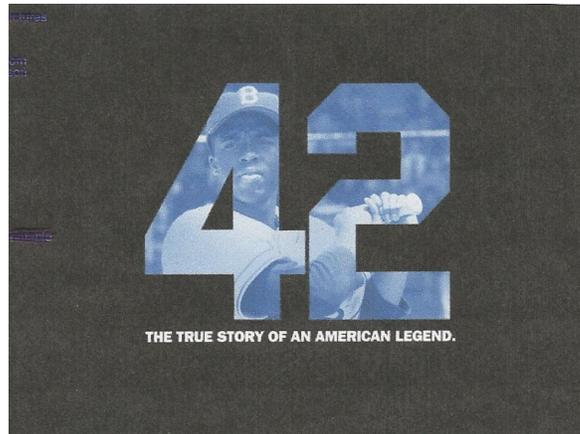


THE CLASSIC CORNER

At the Movies

We Review the new Jackie Robinson Movie - 42



The Cast:

Jackie Robinson – Chadwick Boseman
Branch Rickey - Harrison Ford
Rachel Robinson – Nicole Beharie
Leo Durocher - Christopher Meloni
Wendell Smith - Andre Holland
Ben Chapman - Alan Tudyk

Directed by: Brian Helgeland

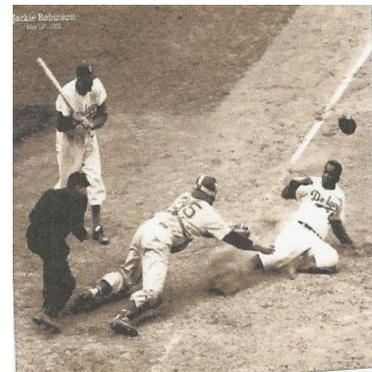
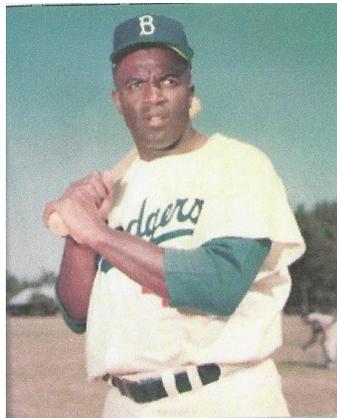
Distributed by: Warner Bros.

Run Time: 128 minutes

It was somewhat perplexing to me that Hollywood chose to only focus on (3) years of Jackie Robinson's historic forage into the All-White Fraternity known as Major League Baseball when there was so much more. The story begins in 1945 when Jackie is playing for the Kansas City Monarchs in the Old Negro Leagues. Brooklyn Dodgers GM Branch Rickey (Played by Harrison Ford) , an innovator in his own right, is keenly aware of the untapped talent that lay hidden behind the impenetrable walls of Jim Crow America. Advance scouts tell Rickey that *"there's a player named Robinson who might be the perfect fit"* to integrate the Game. Robinson's initial meeting with Rickey is awkward and uncomfortable but the blueprint is cast for the Great Experiment to begin. Jackie starts in the lower Minors in Florida and is subjected to every indignity imaginable from being repeatedly called a "Nigger" to being forced to use the "Colored Only" Restroom. Not only do the fans and opposing players despise him, but his own teammates don't want anything to do with him. Other than

his wife (played by Nicole Beharie) and Branch Rickey, Jackie's only immediate supporter is a Black Sportswriter named Wendell Smith (played by Andre Holland). Commissioned by Branch Rickey **"to help ease the transition along,"** Smith is a scribe for the Pittsburgh Courier (A Black Owned Newspaper) and helps Jackie find adequate Housing with the "right Black Folks" in small towns and oversees his Daily Routine to make sure he gets a fair shake. Jackie is wary of the bespectacled Sportswriter, but lets his guard down when Smith confides in him **"that I have to sit along the 3rd Base Line during the Game and write my Story because I'm not allowed in the Press Box with the other Writers."** With Jackie's ascension to Montreal a success, it becomes readily apparent that his call to the Big Leagues is imminent. Harrison Ford is magnificent as the cigar smoking, patriarchal Branch Rickey. He admonishes Robinson that **"I need someone who has the Guts to not fight back."** Ford is so utterly convincing in his role that he should be given serious consideration for an Oscar. He's that good. Best line of the movie is when Jackie, acutely aware of his Legacy and the daunting challenges he faces, asks Rickey, **"why are You doing this?"** Rickey looking every bit the paternalistic arbiter confides in the African-American Ballplayer that when he played Ball at Ohio Wesleyan College **"there was a Black Ballplayer (Charlie Thomas) who was treated with contempt and utter disrespect (paraphrasing)."**

The fireworks begin on April 15, 1947 at Ebbets Field. Many of Jackie's teammates refuse to shake his hand in the Locker Room when he dresses for his 1st Game. There are exceptions. Pee Wee Reese, Ralph Branca and a few others show their support, but they are more the exception. Robinson is showered with taunts and racial epithets from every corner of Ebbets Field. His bunt single and subsequent stealing of Bases helps the Dodgers win in his Big League debut. The degradation and humiliation are non-stop on the road. Fans in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, etc. all voice their displeasure at the newly integrated Game. Perhaps the worst "dressing-down" comes in Philadelphia (The City of Brotherly Love) where Phillies Manager, Ben Chapman (played by Alan Tudyk), a Southerner, takes it upon himself to become a one-Man crusade against Robinson with a steady stream of racially-laced vitriol every time he comes to bat.



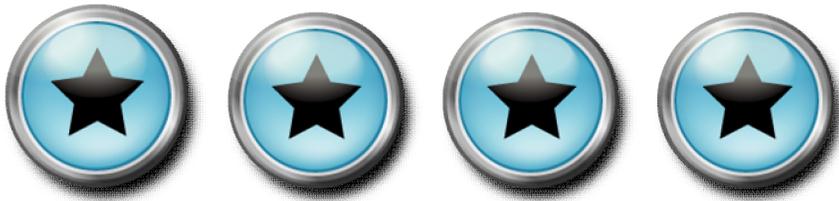
Leo Durocher (played by Christopher Meloni) is suspended prior to the start of the 1947 by Commissioner Happy Chandler for his alleged adulterous liaison with Actress Lorraine Day (actually Durocher was suspended for consorting with Underworld Types(like Bugsy Siegel) Meloni gives a rousing performance as the Fast-Talking, Hard-Living Brooklyn Manager who confronts his players when it is brought to his attention (and Branch Rickey's) that a "petition" had been passed around the Clubhouse in hopes of getting rid of Robinson. Durocher's replacement, Burt Shotton, is mostly ineffectual and typecast as a "mild-mannered sort" who just wants to fit in and not disrupt anything. As the 1947 Season unfolds, Jackie Robinson showcases his athletic skills and starts to gain the respect of his teammates. Shortstop and future Hall of Famer, Pee Wee Reese, in an unrequited show of solidarity, puts his arm around Robinson's shoulder at Crosley Field in Cincinnati and tells the beleaguered Ballplayer (on the field and in full view of the hostile Cincinnati crowd) that **"I'm from Kentucky and my Family's sitting up there. I want them to Know."** The Dodgers win the 1947 pennant and much of their success can be attributed to Jackie Robinson.

Jackie's wife played by the beautiful Nicole Beharie is a little too Cosmopolitan for my taste. Sure, she looks good, but when I think of Rachel Robinson, I think of a Woman who is more proactive in her convictions and a little more outspoken on the Arrival of African Americans in the Major Leagues. Rachel Robinson is Jackie's wife, confidant and "the glue that holds it all together." Other than being his wife, Beharie doesn't exhibit any of those things – at least not convincingly.

Chadwick Boseman is a graduate of Howard University and the man picked to play Jackie. I see a bright future for this young Actor. He doesn't have any profound lines or catchy rhetoric in the Movie that would make me remember him, but his non-verbal actions alone (sliding hard into a base, etc.) were good. It's not fair to compare his portrayal of Jackie Robinson with the star of the original **1950 The Jackie Robinson Story** (Jackie Robinson played himself) because no one knew the "real life script" better than Jackie. Different time period, different set of circumstances.

4.2 was about as good as Hollywood can muster in 2013. A thoroughly enjoyable Motion Picture that can be viewed by the Whole Family. Don't go to see it if you like to pick apart every subtle nuance or inaccuracy that pops up in Sports Movies all the time. Rather, it's a fun way to spend (128) minutes and help celebrate the historic breaking of the Color Barrier (66) years ago. And don't forget, remember to champion Harrison Ford for his outstanding performance. His "*Oscar-Worthy*" performance, that is.

We Rate this Movie:



4 Stars out of 5

