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Warrior: In the 'zone' as a transcendent experience

by Sr. Rose Pacatte



Tom Hardy, left, and Nick Nolte in "Warrior" (©Lionsgate)

"Warrior" is the first feature-length film I have seen about mixed martial arts. Paddy Conlon (Nick Nolte) has two sons, Brendan (Joel Edgerton), a high school physics teacher, husband and father, and Tommy (Tom Hardy), an ex-Marine. Both sons are estranged from their recovering alcoholic father, a boxing coach -- and there is great enmity between the brothers. Tommy has gone so far as to take his mother's maiden name, Reardon.

When Tommy shows up at his father's house to ask him to train so he can fight in a mixed martial arts event, Paddy accepts. He demands discipline and both sons reject all his attempts to make up for his failures when his sons were young.

Meanwhile, Brendan, a former boxer, learns that his home is going into foreclosure. He starts to train, and wins a mixed martial arts fight in a parking lot of a strip club. He is suspended from teaching, and against his wife's wishes, goes into training full time.

Sports films and faith part 1: Sr. Pacatte's review of the documentary "Senna"

"Warrior" is a good title for the film, for the three main characters are all struggling and fighting for something. The interesting thing is that redemption and forgiveness are at the top of the list. Paddy is the most overtly religious and he's been sober for 1,000 days, but his demons, including guilt, are alive and well.

Gavin O'Connor shows considerable skill in direction, but kudos to cinematographer Masanobu Takayanagi ("Babel") for capturing the action in the cage. O'Connor directed "Miracle" in 2004, about the breathtaking 1980 Olympic ice hockey match between the United States and the Soviet Union. Mark Isham composed the score for both films.

"Warrior" is not a "Christian" film, though it is being heavily marketed to the faith-based audience. This could be a brilliant marketing move, but it could also hamper the film's success, too tightly niching the market. There is a deeper, universal human meaning here that is well-portrayed. Having said this, "Warrior" is one of the most brutal films I have ever seen. Mixed martial arts is a hybrid sport with aspects of martial arts, wrestling, boxing and street fighting. Whether or not it is really a sport is still contested.

"The Mighty Macs" has been in the can, awaiting release for at least two years and is due to hit theaters on Oct. 21. It is a fact-based story about Cathy Rush (Carla Gugino) who led Immaculata College's basketball team to victory in the 1970s. I like the film very much because it shows that sports work as a metaphor for life for women, too. The film's gentle humor supports the strength of character shown by the coach, unlikely team members, and a young nun (Marley Shelton) who works out her own calling while serving as assistant coach.

Upcoming sports films I have not yet seen include "Moneyball," a biographical comedy based on the 2003 book by Michael Lewis, with Brad Pitt playing real-life Oakland Athletics manager Billy Beane; and "Real Steel," a futuristic robot boxing story based on a 1956 short story by Richard Matheson and starring Hugh Jackman.

"The Perfect Game" was released on DVD Aug. 2 and it tells the amazing story of a gritty Little League team from Monterrey, Mexico, that won the Little League World Series in 1957. Based on the book by W. William Winokur, it focuses on pitcher Angel Macias who, so far, has thrown the only perfect game in Little League championship history (a "perfect game" is when no hitter is allowed to reach first base.) The same team won again in 1958.

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The local priest, played by Cheech Marin, plays a significant role in the story. The filmmakers should have hired a priest consultant because his celebration of Mass, meant to be cute, is fairly disrespectful.

However, the film succeeds in the sports genre, and inspires. The film did poorly at the box office but could do well for the home market, and for schools, youth ministry programs, and churches with projection licenses.

[Daughters of St. Paul Sr. Rose Pacatte, director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Los Angeles,

reviews movies for *NCR*.]

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