

## MOVIE REVIEW

# Good Luck

## Loose, Irreverent Quality Helps Keep 'Luck' Afloat

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FOR THE TIMES

Mar 7 1997

Friday March 7, 1997

A black guy, a white guy--one maimed in a car crash, one blinded playing NFL football; one prodding the other to get off his self-pity and into a white-water race so they can prove they're still men. Is this the stuff of nauseatingly upbeat melodrama or what?

You have to give director Robert LaBrie credit for biting off such a large chunk of standard-issue tar pit like this and then spitting out "Good Luck"--which is just what you'd tell him. Certain audiences, and they're not necessarily right, of course, would emit a low moan of discomfort at the mere mention of the plot synopsis. Buddy movies, triumph-over-adversity movies, moral-indignation movies, they're all wrapped up here like a rapidly ripening fish.

But it's not so simple. From the outset, LaBrie establishes a certain goofy freedom that keeps the film from imploding, and it actually surprises you--not always, but often enough. And Vincent D'Onofrio and Gregory Hines, never known for restraint, are precisely what they should be.

Tony "Olee" Olezniak, for instance, played by D'Onofrio, is a nationally recognized tight end for the Seattle Seahawks, the type of player police like to escort to games when he's late and speeding. When a vicious tackle leaves him blind because of a spinal injury, his life takes the predictable downward trajectory. When he learns his Penthouse model girlfriend is on television promoting her tell-all book about life with a washed-up, impotent football star, he throws the TV and everything else out the window (it's D'Onofrio, the frequent Orson Welles look-alike, doing the tantrum scene from "Citizen Kane"). He ends up in jail. His life in the toilet, Olee chooses not to bail himself out.

Injured in an auto accident eight years earlier, Bernard Lemley (Hines) sees Olee's story and, remembering that he'd tutored the ballplayer years before, goes to the jail. He has this dream of entering the rigorous Gold City Regatta, a raft race on Oregon's Rogue River, and wants Olee's

strength to fight the white water. They meet, they butt heads, they bond.

Clearly, the whole premise is absurd, and at this point you're wondering if they'll run into Meryl Streep while bobbing along the Rogue. But there's a loose, irreverent quality about the fact-based "Good Luck," an ability to do an end-run around the plot conventions, that gives the film a fresher than expected feel. There are also little bits of tossed-off comedy (I heard something about "Murder in the Cathedral" starring Pia Zadora) that keep the whole thing from becoming as maudlin as it could easily have been. And Hines and D'Onofrio work really well together, and separately.

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Hines makes Lemley a cross between Stephen Hawking and Steve Urkel. D'Onofrio, who possesses the ability to swing from sour to soulful in a heartbeat, turns Olee's bombast into a plea for help. The heart of the film isn't the race, of course, it's the interaction of the antagonist-pals--a game of chicken on a railroad tracks, a game of blackjack in a roadside casino, sex talk, childhood trauma, hopes, dreams and some unlikely feats by a blind man. Also, a little too much slo-mo in the climactic moments. But the remarkable thing is how well Hines and D'Onofrio make you forget their characters' disabilities, which is rather the point of the whole thing.

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**Good Luck**, 1997. R, for adult language, fleeting nudity, adult situations. An East West Film Partners release. Director Richard LaBrie. Producers Richard Hahn, Shirley Honickman Hahn, Andrzej Kamrowski. Screenplay Bob Comfort. Cinematographer Maximo Munzi. Editor Neal Grieve. Music Tim Truman. Production design Jane Ann Stewart. Running time: 1 hour, 35 minutes. Bernard Lemley as Gregory Hines. Olee Olezniak as Vincent D'Onofrio. Farmer John as Max Gail. James Bing as James Earl Jones.

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