

Punchless biopic takes liberties with true story

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Hollywood has never been known to let the facts get in the way of an uplifting, overcoming-the-odds bio-pic, and "Resurrecting the Champ" is no exception. Based on the *Los Angeles Times* article of the same name written by J.R. Moehringer in 1997, the film revolves around an aspiring journalist who stakes his teetering career on a feature about a homeless ex-boxer while simultaneously learning a valuable lesson about father-son relationships in the process.

The picture stars Josh Hartnett as Erik Kernan, a sports columnist for the *Denver Post* who has a hard time avoiding invidious comparisons with his late father, a fondly-remembered radio personality from the Mile High City.

Not only is he getting grief from his boss (Alan Alda) who complains that his submissions "lack personality," but his wife, Joyce (Kathryn Morris), the paper's star reporter, has just asked him for a divorce.

Though disturbed by this state of affairs, Erik is motivated by a fear of being separated from his 6-year-old son, Teddy (Dakota Goyo), to do whatever it takes to establish himself in the profession. An unlikely opportunity at redemption arrives the day he crosses paths with Champ (Samuel L. Jackson), an alcoholic hobo rumored to be Bob Satterfield, a former

heavyweight contender whose heyday was way back in the 1950s.

Seeing the story as a scoop, which could establish him as a writer to be reckoned with, Erik pleads with his reluctant subject to cooperate, explaining, "This article is my title fight."

Bribed with beer and ring-side seats to a local boxing bout, Champ miraculously transforms into a spiritual soul-baring sage sharing life lessons about marriage, childrearing, and fulfillment, even though he's apparently been unable to follow his own advice or do anything about his own dire straits.

Tinseltown has enjoyed a long love affair with this sort of down-and-out Black character blessed with an endearing selflessness before, such as in "The Green Mile" and "The Legend of Bagger Vance." However, here, we have a slight variation on that familiar theme, and it is that deviation that dooms "Resurrecting the Champ."

[Spoilers to follow. So, stop reading this review at this juncture if you plan to see the movie.]

For, only after Erik publishes his piece does he learn that he had been hoodwinked, because the real Bob Satterfield had died in 1977.

Nonetheless, the picture has been packaged as a feel-good flick, as the audience is expected to be tweaked emotionally by the notion that Champ has still, somehow, provided a noble service by inspiring Kernan to focus on

mending fences with his estranged son.

However, this credulity-testing development is portrayed in an utterly unconvincing fashion and leaves one wondering how a big city paper could fail to fact check whether the subject of a cover story was dead or alive. For this reason, it is not surprising to learn that the movie script bears little resemblance to the source material.

In real life, author J.R. Moehringer was not duped and disgraced by any impostor. Quite the opposite: his "Resurrecting the Champ" article was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Furthermore, he had no famous father's shadow to worry about, since his dad had abandoned the family when he was just 7-months-old.

Plus, instead of having ever been a struggling writer, Moehringer was a very-promising boy-most-likely, who after graduating from Harvard, enjoyed a meteoric rise and won a Pulitzer early in his career. Even the touching father-son plot point was purely a dreamed-up fabrication, as the unmarried Moehringer apparently has no offspring.

Pardon me for being offended when a flick revolving around the question of journalistic ethics takes so many liberties with the truth simply to spin a tall tale designed to tug on the heartstrings.

Fair (1.5 stars). Rated PG-13 for violence and brief usage of profane language.

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Photo special to the Sentinel-Voice by Marty Frierson

The MAGIC International Clothing convention being held in Las Vegas this week brought together two heavy hitters in the business, Sean Diddy Combs, founder of the Sean John Clothing line, and Jonas Bevacqua, co-founder of LRG. The combined revenue of these two powerhouse clothing lines nets in the millions of dollars annually.