JOCKEY races through Sundance and into the arms of Sony Pictures

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Larry Gleeson at Churchill Downs Racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky.

Being a horseracing (often referred to as the â??sport of kingsâ?•) fan, I felt compelled to see the premiere of 2021 Sundance Film Festival Dramatic Competition selection, *Jockey,* directed by Clint Bentley. And man, am I glad I did! Without much to go on besides the title, I settled in for what I imagined would be a similar storyline to one of my favorite horseracing films, *Seabiscuit.*

Jockey centers around Jackson Silva, a successful, well-known racehorse rider (a jockey) seeking a final championship to end his rather illustrious career. Silva is portrayed by the chameleon-like, veteran actor Clifton Collins, Jr., (*The Last Castle, Capote, Star Trek*). And much like *Seabiscuitâ??*s jockey, Red Pollard, portrayed by Tobey Maguire, the often unseen human elements of jockeying are on full display in *Jockey*.

In *Jockey* (and a major issue for Red Pollard in *Seabiscuit* as well) Silvaâ??s need for an optimal weight of 134 pounds and the challenges inherent in getting the targeted weight has serious complications. Over the years his loss of bone mass has decreased the protection for his skeletal structure and the exacerbated effects from the lack of caloric intake on his physical and mental energies are becoming more evident. The lack of skeletal protection comes to the forefront for an aging Jackson Silva as he already has suffered greatly with three broken back incidents from falls and is experiencing issues with his riding form from the early onset of ALS, a rapidly progressing neuromuscular disease affecting the limbs causing increasing weakness and muscle wasting.

Jockeyâ??s storyline doesnâ??t sugarcoat and Bentley doesnâ??t whitewash the struggles of being a jockey, let alone a famous jockey like Jackson Silva on the horseracing circuit. With a stellar, nuanced performance from extremely talented Canadian Molly Parker as stable owner Ruth Wilkes, the narrative dives deeper into visceral emotionality and vulnerability as the male/female dynamic provides for a broader gamut of feelings between the characters. One of the filmâ??s great lines comes from Wilkes addressing her concern for Silvaâ??s insistent need to keep riding, â??the critical difference between a racehorse and a jockey is a horse doesnâ??t know when to quit.â?• The appearance of Moises Ariasâ??s character, Gabrielles Boullait, adds another dimension to the filmâ??s humanity as Gabriel wants to be a jockey just like â??his fatherâ?• Jackson Silva. Silva takes the young man under his tutelage and begins training Gabriel in earnest.

I was pleasantly surprised with *Jockeyâ??s* narrative as it did entwine some of the *Seabiscuit* narratives of the hardships of jockeying while also including seedier elements of what goes on when the race is over depicted in David Milchâ??s short-lived (10 episodes,) Dustin Hoffman led HBO series, *Luck.* Much of jockey was shot on location at the Surf Paradise Racetrack in Phoenix, Arizona. In my opinion, what separated *Jockey* from *Seabiscuit* is the depth Bentley gets from the actors and the writing is excellent. Bentley shares a writing credit with Greg Kwedar, whose self-claimed mission is to tell stories of human connection in difficult places. Mission accomplished as *Jockey* orbits around a series of multi-faceted relationships with some profound emotional depths. And what separated *Jockey* from *Luck* is the intimate focus on the jockey and less focus on stable shenanigans. Very highly recommended viewing!

Sony Pictures Classics announced the night before the premiere that they acquired all worldwide rights to the film, JOCKEY.

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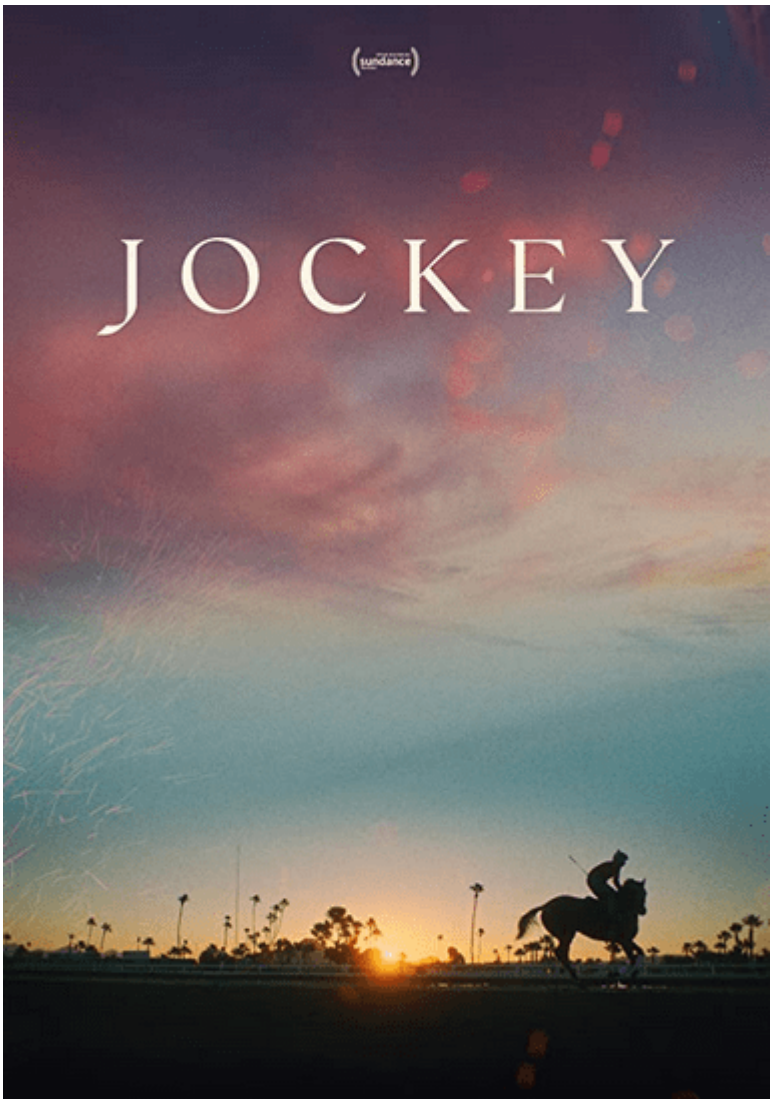

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Date Created
February 14, 2021
Author
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