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## HALF NELSON

### Movie Details

 Post Author: Matt Ho  April 20, 2013  0

OUR RATING



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BEFORE SUNSET

**DIRECTOR RYAN FLECK**

**WRITER RYAN FLECK, ANNA BODEN**

**US BOX OFFICE \$2.7M**

**RUN TIME 1 HR. 46 MIN. RATED R**

**YOUR RATING**

**GENRE DRAMA**

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**STARS** Jeff Lima Ryan Gosling Shareeka Epps



5/5 1 vote

## SYNOPSIS

*Half Nelson* is the featured version of Ryan Fleck's 19-minute short film *Gowanus, Brooklyn* that tells the story of middle school history teacher Dan Dunne (Ryan Gosling), a man with a drug habit. One night after coaching the girls basketball game, his student Drey (Shareeka Epps) catches him getting high in the bathroom stall of the locker room. After she promises to keep his secret, the two begin to form a friendship that may save one another from their own personal struggles.

## REVIEW

Drug-addict teacher in an inner-city school meets student from the inner-city all points to a plot of redemption and salvation. *Half Nelson* though, isn't exactly the teacher-saves-student/student-saves-teacher some would expect from the synopsis. While there are certainly elements of the concept, it strays from a tired predictable formula that can feel preachy at times.

What *Half Nelson* does well is deal with the heavy subjects of drugs, isolation and loneliness, all with a



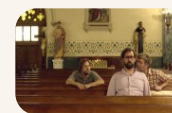
unset 4.5/5 8 votes SYNOPSIS Before Sunrise takes place nine years after Before Sunrise wher [...]



**TAKE THIS WALTZ**  
s Waltz 5/5 5 votes SYNOPSIS Margot (Michelle Williams) is married to Lou (Seth Rogen). They I [...]



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Has Fallen 3.1/5 12 votes SYNOPSIS Mike Banning, former U.S Army Ranger, was the head of the S [...]



**THE COMEDY**  
dy 3.2/5 5 votes SYNOPSIS With a title as ironic as the subculture it criticizes, The Comedyf [...]

## U.S Box Office

### Weekend Box Office for 4/12/2013

42	\$27,487,144
Scary Movie 5	\$14,157,367
The Croods	\$13,115,074
G.I. Joe: Retaliation	\$10,894,415
Evil Dead	\$9,488,302

Source: *The Numbers* - Movie Box Office

## Advertising

sense of realism. Nothing is overly exaggerated; everything that happens has its rightful place in each scene. Heightened drama between the characters in their darkest moments is well-timed and it never overstays its welcome. This is one of the strengths of the film; its ability to introduce conflict that gradually mellows out with a resolution that strips out the unnecessary melodrama. Dan's confrontation with Frank (Anthony Mackie) the drug dealer, for one, could've gone in several conventional directions, and most films within the genre wind up driving towards any of the following: Frank beats up Dan; Dan shamefully walks off unable to warn Frank of Drey; Dan chickens out at the sight of Frank and his entourage, etc. Instead, it's played out in a hush manner that's actually believable. Some may find that the subtlety of the film slows things down, but that's the beauty of *Half Nelson*; at times it's simply a silent portrait of both protagonists.

A lot of praise should be given to the way Fleck and Boden write their characters. Approaching Dan as functioning-addict as opposed to a full-blown addict was a smart choice as it doesn't make him one-noted. The concentrated focus on his intellect and his passion for teaching help balance out his personal demons so that we don't always view him as a total screw up. In fact, a lot of the best scenes in the film are when we watch Dan teach even when he appears slightly psychologically tapped out. His dialogues in the classroom are always compelling, inspiring and on-point. Frank isn't the typical thug drug dealer (other than the fact that he drives what I assume is an Escalade) filled with every gangster cliché in the book.

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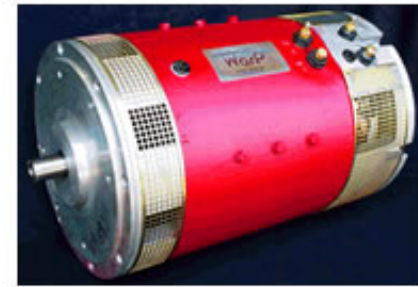
**We are sinners, but we can strive to be good, just not in nature I guess.**

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What's interesting about him is that Fleck and Boden are able to inject traces of humanity into the character rather than using him solely for conflict and intimidation; you don't actually find yourself hating the guy that much. And Drey, despite her problems, has a certain maturity about her that Fleck and Boden have incorporated so that she's not the whiny angst-filled child in distress. Even the minor characters are handled well. Dan's students aren't the usual gang of rowdy misfits disrupting class time, and shots of them reciting their Civil Rights Movement presentation brought a really nice touch. Others, like Dan's family and his ex-girlfriend, or Drey's incarcerated brother help fill in bits of their back story since *Half Nelson* at times leaves much to the imagination.

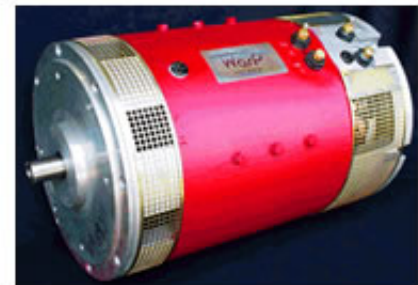
Outstanding performances are delivered by Ryan Gosling, Shareeka Epps, and Anthony Mackie, who all individually bring something to the table. Gosling is convincing as a functioning addict whether the

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scene calls for his character to be sober or wired and unhinged. His ability to convey emotions through his face is flawless in every close up and the most powerful scene in the film that I like to call the pivotal “Oh..” moment, best exemplifies what I’m talking about. The underrated Anthony Mackie makes his presence felt in a supporting role that could’ve been easily forgotten, while Shareeka Epps holds her own demonstrating great chemistry with both her co-stars.

The soundtrack is also worth mentioning. The film prominently features Canadian indie band Broken Social Scene whose music complements the ambiance of the film wonderfully.

## VERDICT

Ryan Gosling may have entered the mainstream with *The Notebook*, but *Half Nelson* is probably where he caught people’s attention as an actor of high caliber. Fellow actors Anthony Mackie and Shareeka Epps are equally good and they make themselves just as memorable as the leading star. This could’ve been another indie flick’s poor attempt to capture the pains of life, but Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden have written a film that’s engaging, non-didactic and unpredictable.

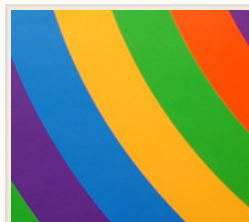
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