

Concussion: Film Review

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 30 December 2015 21:04



Headline: Will Smith Delivers Oscar-Quality Performance as Fearless Brain Researcher Who Fought the NFL

In 2002, [Will Smith](#) landed his first Academy Award nomination for *Ali*, a riveting biopic about Muhammad Ali directed by Michael Mann. Although a cultural icon in his own right, Smith managed to disappear into the role in the process of delivering a brilliant performance as "The Greatest" boxer of all time.

Despite his being able to "Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee!" the sport eventually exacted a devastating toll on the champ. For Ali would become afflicted with a host of neurological disorders as a consequence of taking so many hits to the head.

While fans call it being "punch drunk," the clinical term for the condition is Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). What's ironic is that Will Smith is on the verge of landing another Oscar nomination for *Concussion*, a picture in which he plays [Dr. Bennet Omalu](#), the Nigeria-born physician whose discovered the link between football and brain damage while working as a forensic pathologist in Pennsylvania.

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He first recognized something was amiss while performing an autopsy on the Pittsburgh Steelers' former center Mike Webster (David Morse), who died at 50 from a combination of amnesia, [depression](#) and dementia. Dr. Omalu was shocked to observe that the Hall of Famer had the brain of a very old man, so he decided to posthumously examine those of other National Football League vets who also passed away prematurely.

Lo and behold, the research revealed they all had suffered from CTE, ostensibly as a result of the pounding their skulls had taken on the field. Unfortunately, when Dr. Omalu subsequently attempted to go public with his findings, he was threatened and discredited by the army of lawyers and quacks hired by Commissioner Roger Goodell (Luke Wilson) to protect the NFL's image.

Thus unfolds *Concussion*, a David vs. Goliath saga reminiscent of *The Insider* (1999), the similarly-themed expose recounting the real-life ordeal of the intrepid whistleblower who took on the Tobacco Industry when it was still hell bent on denying any link between smoking and cancer. An interesting factoid which bears mentioning is that

The Insider

was directed by the aforementioned Michael Mann.

Concussion, however, was directed by Peter Landesman (Parkland). He adapted it to the screen with the help of investigative journalist Jeanne Marie Laksas from "Game Brain," an article she published about the cover-up in the October 2009 issue of GQ magazine.

Landesman surrounded Smith with a talented cast, starting with the gifted [Gugu Mbatha-Raw](#) as Omalu's feisty wife Prema Mutiso. The dramatis personae also includes Oscar-nominees Alec Baldwin (for

The Cooler

) and Albert Brooks (for

Broadcast News

), as well as Hill Harper, Richard T. Jones, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje and Eddie Marsan.

But make no mistake, *Concussion* is a marvelous Will Smith vehicle, one that he'll undoubtedly get to drive for the duration of awards season, possibly all the way to the Oscars on Sunday, February 28th.

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Excellent (4 stars)

Rated PG-13 for profanity, mature themes and disturbing images

Running time: 123 minutes

Distributor: Sony Pictures



About the author of this review: Kam Williams is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is a member of the New York Film Critics Online, the NAACP Image Awards Nominating Committee, and Rotten Tomatoes. He is a contributor to TheLoop21.com, eurweb.com and so on. He is also a columnist for our webmag www.megadiversities.com. One of his interviews

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made the cover of Heart and Soul magazine last fall. One of Kam Williams' interviews with Spike Lee is included in the 2002 book entitled Spike Lee: Interviews (Conversations with filmmakers). This book collects the best interviews of Lee. Some of Kam Williams' articles are translated into Chinese and Spanish. In 2008, he was Voted Most Outstanding Journalist of the Decade by the Disilgold Soul Literary Review. In addition, he has been honored at the U.N. (for BMORENEWS GLOBAL FORUM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT) on June 15th 2012 by the Foundation for the Support of the United Nations (FSUN). Williams is an erudite Attorney who holds a BA in Black Studies from Cornell University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton School, and a J.D. from Boston University. Recently, he was featured on this website: <http://www.caribbeanlifeneews.com/stories/2015>.

[015.](http://www.caribbeanlifeneews.com/stories/2015) Kam Williams is a member of the Bar in NJ, NY, CT, PA, MA & US Supreme Court bars. He lives in Princeton, (New Jersey) with his wife and son. Kam Williams can be reached at kwilliams@megadiversities.com.