

# Baseball movies are the hit of the Spring

Three baseball movies are being released in April - one in theatres, the other two on video - to mark the opening of the baseball season.

Charlie Sheen shows up in two of them.

The theatrical release is Major League, a comedy about a widow who inherits the Cleveland Indians. She wants her team to lose so attendance will fall, enabling her to break her stadium contract and move the franchise to sunny Florida.

Rachel Phelps (Margaret Whitton) stocks the Indians with a collection of misfits, including Jake Taylor (Tom Berenger), a catcher on his last legs, and Rickie Vaughn (Sheen), a rookie pitcher who was paroled from prison in order to try out for the team.

Steve Yeager, who spent 15 years behind the plate for the L.A. Dodgers, portrays Indians' batting coach Duke Temple. Before the

cameras started rolling, Yeager, a technical consultant for the movie, spent time honing the baseball skills of Berenger, Sheen and Cor-



Entertainment

Bob Spence  
Thomson News Service

bin Bernsen, who plays third baseman Roger Dorn.

"All of our stars look like good baseball players, but more importantly, they are good ball players," said writer/director David Ward. "It has always bothered me... when a character who is supposed to be a baseball player obviously can't play baseball."

His cast can. The script suffers somewhat from cliches, but the

movie is still worth catching.

The video releases are a pair of 1988 movies, including one of the best baseball movies ever made, Eight Men Out. The movie is based on the 1919 Black Sox scandal, when eight members of the Chicago White Sox were banned from baseball for life for throwing the World Series. The other video release is Stealing Home, in which a washed-up ballplayer recalls his earlier days.

Eight Men Out (starring D.B. Sweeney and Sheen) deserves the four-star rating many reviewers have given it. It is by far the best of this trio of baseball movies. Stealing Home (Mark Harmon, Blair Brown), with a plot that barely crawls at times, is the weakest of the trio.

While we're on the subject of baseball (what better subject is there?), let's turn to the publishing world.

Ernie Whitt, the veteran Toronto Blue Jay catcher-turned-author, offers a plethora of anecdotes in Catch: A Major League Life (McGraw-Hill Ryerson).

The most compelling portions of Catch, which is being released April 17, are vivid details about Whitt's struggle to make it to the Major Leagues. The book (Greg Cable is the co-author) recounts the numerous setbacks Whitt encountered but ultimately overcame.

Whitt, the last original Blue Jay (the only player taken by Toronto in the 1977 expansion draft who is still with the team), takes the reader through the Jays' 1988 season, month by month. He keeps interrupting his tale to offer flashbacks on his career and the development of the Jays.

Whitt uses a mixture of criticism (about attitude) and praise (for attitude and performance) to

describe some of his current and former teammates. His sharpest criticism is fired at umpire Joe Brinkman and former Jay managers Roy Hartsfield and Bobby Mattick (now a Jay vice-president).

While Whitt may not have endeared himself to some of his teammates, this is not a scandal-dripping expose, but a story about one player's struggle to make it to the Major Leagues and the ups and downs of life in "The Show."

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## John Irving's latest fails to dazzle

### ABOUT BOOKS



REVIEWED BY THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSN.

By Peter Robertson

"A Prayer for Owen Meany" By John Irving. Morrow, 543 pages, \$19.95.

"I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice, not because of the voice, or because he was the smallest person I ever knew, or even because he was the instrument of my mother's death, but because he is the reason I believe in God. I am a Christian because of Owen Meany."

So goes the first prophetic line in John Irving's "A Prayer for Owen Meany," a book that serves to link faith, hope and desperation in the same beguiling way that the author managed in "The World According to

Garp." The stark assurance of the line heralds the rest of the narrative of the childhood/adolescent recollections of Johnny Wainwright, a teacher and churchgoer living in Toronto. The narrative cuts from past to present, across 35 years. It moves from his childhood in New Hampshire and his best friend Owen Meany, a world almost overloaded with imagery and metaphor, to the staid tranquility of Johnny's later years.

Under five feet tall, with a frozen Adam's Apple rendering his every intonation a chilling scream, Owen was a mesmerizing figure. When, in 1933, his bat sent a baseball straight at the head of Johnny's saintly mother, killing her instantly, Owen's life seemed

set on a course. Only Owen himself knows that the course was set years before that game.

In previous novels, Irving's world has come to include tragedy and humor and an underlying bizarreness. The same is true of "Owen Meany." That Owen has survived an unusual birth, foreseen his own death and stoically assumed the role of God's instrument are articles of faith for the unusual youngster, and eventually come to mean the same for his friend.

Sadly, "A Prayer for Owen Meany" isn't close to the work that "Garp" was. Irving himself shows an uncharacteristic lack of confidence in the tale by continually informing the reader that Johnny or Owen already know something that the reader will

have to wait to have revealed. The insularity of Irving's vision opens the doors to some unusually dry sections.

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