

# Boxing movie a feel-good, hard-knocks tale

## CINDERELLA MAN

Starring Russell Crowe, Renee Zellweger and Paul Giamatti

Directed by Ron Howard

Now playing

Even the hardest-hearted moviegoer will be moved by this tale of courage and determination. Jim Braddock

was a New Jersey boxer during the Great Depression.

He had been a star, but a humiliating defeat knocked him out of the ring.

From there, he had one bad break after another — literally — breaking his hand three times and being forced to work unloading cargo at the docks.



Anne Brodie

### On Movies

He suffers chronic pain and is getting too old to fight.

His wife, Mae, believes in him no matter what. She keeps a sunny face and waters down the milk so there is enough for their children.

The Braddocks live in a basement tenement that is disturbing for us to see today.

The raw shabbiness and inadequacies of the place are appalling but during the Depression, things were tough on everybody.

Hundreds of thousands lived just like the Braddocks in cities all over the United States. We can see their breath in that frigid apartment.

Mr. Braddock is haunted by the guilt and desperation of not being able to care for his family, while stoically accepting the circumstances.

But he keeps on. Against his social conscience, he signs up for relief, state assistance. The woman behind the desk says 'You're Jim Braddock. I never



Renee Zellweger and Russell Crowe star as the supportive wife and down-for-the-count boxer in *Cinderella Man*, filmed in Toronto by director Ron Howard.

thought I'd see you here'. His shame is complete.

Out of the blue, he gets a boxing match. He wins. And another. He wins. A miracle occurs. He is coming back up.

Paul Giamatti of *Sideways* fame is fierce as Mr. Braddock's boxing promoter, coach and friend. He is confident he can work through to the top.

He needs him, too. While he wears well-cut suits and drives a snappy roadster, his luxury apartment is empty. Everything has been sold.

They both need a break.

Ron Howard is a masterful director who is taken for granted despite a record of well-told movies, relatable characters and a general goodwill toward his subjects.

*Cinderella Man* is a feel-good film told through a hard knocks story.

Russell Crowe looks sickly and thin, reflecting the Depression era's poverty. But he's as emotionally agile as ever in this complex part.

Mr. Giamatti is superb and nearly steals the picture.

There are lots of terrific performances from local

actors, including Linda Kash, the Philly Cream Cheese angel, as Mr. Giamatti's wife, and the wonderful Chuck Shamata as Mae Braddock's priest.

*Cinderella Man* was shot in Toronto in the eastern studio complex off Carlaw and the Lakeshore. I visited the set to interview Mr. Howard.

It was pouring rain, early in the morning and Mr. Crowe hadn't shown up on the set. But Mr. Howard was excited to the core about the film.

I can see why.

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