

41st SEASON**ENGLISH FILM CLUB 2020/21****Locarno, Cinema Kursaal****18:15****Friday, 30 October 2020****RICHARD JEWELL****2019**

129 minutes

Directed by **Clint Eastwood**

Starring: Paul Hauser, Kathy Bates, Sam Rockwell

In 1986, Richard Jewell is working in a local office of the Small Business Administration, pushing a cart full of office supplies. That is where he meets Watson Bryant (Sam Rockwell), an irascible lawyer who will become his champion later on. Fast forward to 1996, Richard has been fired from a police deputy job and is working as a campus security guard at Piedmont College, where he gets into various altercations with students on campus. The college president, Ray Cleere, eventually calls Richard into his office to question him about these incidents on campus and then fires him.

Richard lives at home with his mother, Bobi (Kathy Bates). Eventually, Richard gets one of the security jobs at the 1996 Olympics taking place in Georgia. Meanwhile, at the local FBI office, agent Tom Shaw (Jon Hamm) is assigned to cover the concerts at Centennial Olympic Park. Crime reporter Kathy Scruggs (Olivia Wilde) from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution is assigned to cover it.

Night one of the concerts goes fine though Richard is overly cautious and suspicious of every backpack or person acting strangely. He sees some teens throwing glass bottles and shoos them away. Then, afterwards, he sees a backpack under a bench they were near. Richard, suspicious, alerts the police about the bag, who initially think he's being ridiculous but eventually agree to follow protocol. The police find a bomb inside the bag, and the bomb squad is alerted. Meanwhile, a man makes a 911 call and tells them that a bomb is going to go off at the park. Richard and the rest of the police rush to evacuate the area. The bomb does explode, causing a frenzy and killing a woman. The next day the story is national news, and Richard is being championed as a hero. Days later, the FBI realizes that Richard fits the profile of the "hero bomber", and for the next several weeks the news media focuses aggressively on him as the presumed culprit, labelling him with the ambiguous term "person of interest", sifting through his life to match a leaked "lone bomber" profile that the FBI had used. The media, to varying degrees, portrays Jewell as a failed law enforcement officer who may have planted the bomb so he could "find" it and be a hero.

Critics' comments:

Eastwood's conceptions of heroism and villainy have always been, if not endlessly complex, at least never simplistic... (Glenn Kenny, *Roger Ebert*)

The main heavies are Tom Shaw, a stone-faced F.B.I. man played by Jon Hamm, and Kathy Scruggs, a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. It's her reporting that sets off a feeding frenzy in the newspapers and on the airwaves, including a painful moment when Bobi sees her beloved Tom Brokaw saying terrible things about her son. That is real footage. Scruggs, played by Olivia Wilde, was a real person (she died in 2001). Tom Shaw was not — the F.B.I. agents have been renamed in the movie — and the implication that Scruggs had sex with him in exchange for information about the bombing case has no apparent basis in reality. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution has threatened legal action against Warner Bros. for the way its journalists, Scruggs in particular, are portrayed in the film, and the studio has pushed back. On strictly dramatic grounds, the character is, at best, a collection of lazy, sexist screenwriting clichés. (adapted A.O. Scott, *NY Times*)

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