



FILM: **RICHARD JEWELL**

FDG RATING: 3.7 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Clint Eastwood: *director*  
Paul Walter Hauser: *actor, Richard Jewell*  
Kathy Bates: *actress, Bobi Jewell*  
Sam Rockwood: *actor, Watson Bryant*

DATE: September 20, 2020

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **RICHARD JEWELL**

Flash back to the 1996 Atlanta world Olympics, when breaking news alerted the public to a bombing at Olympic Park. The film, *Richard Jewell*, is the story of the diligent security guard who discovered a suspicious backpack under a bench and quickly notified the police. It was stuffed with dynamite and shrapnel. The FBI was already on site and immediately summoned to clear the perimeter as Jewell assisted. His obsessive alertness, and quick action saved many lives causing the massive explosion to result in only two deaths and approximately 100 injuries; numbers that could have been exponentially higher.

Hailed as a hero, the media descended on the home of Richard Jewell showering him with respect for his extreme competence at law enforcement. It is exactly the recognition he craved since he is obsessed with enforcing the law, insuring that rules are meticulously followed, and has an inordinate respect for authority. His doting mother, (a stellar performance by Kathy Bates) beams with pride seeing her socially inept son, the hero, on the news.

Richard's disproportionate attention to rules and authority exposes an underlying psychological problem causing the tables to quickly turn. Obese, in his thirties, living with his mother who dotes on him, and speaking in a slow unnaturally purposeful manner, he fits the stereotype of someone the public sees as maladjusted and somewhat repulsive. Also, without any other leads, the FBI wants to quickly identify the bomber to quell public fear and anxiety. Suspicions shift to Jewell. He was the first person to see the backpack and as more of his background is exposed, he fits the profile of a psychotic in search of self-aggrandizement. Word is out that he was fired from a job at a local college for exceeding his authority in his zeal to keep the campus drug free. Speculation in the press is that Richard planted the explosives himself, in order to make himself a hero. His mother's teary eyed despair as her son is vilified had a few viewers wiping moist eyes.

Seeing clips of the real Richard Jewell, it's uncanny how actor, Paul Walter Hauser, looks like Jewell as well as captures the man's lumbering movements, gestures, expressions. His nuanced performance balances a slightly autistic demeanor with an overbearing attention to rules. In one scene Richard sternly declares, "I'm in law enforcement too" although his perception of himself as being on the same level the FBI agents is both naive and pitiful.

Sam Rockwell is brilliant as the irascible, down-on-his-luck lawyer G. Watson Bryant who first meets Jewell in the mid-80's when Jewell is the supply delivery boy where Bryant has an office. Noting that the lawyer likes candy bars, Jewell places a stash in Bryant desk drawer during his mail delivery. The two form an unlikely bond when Jewell confesses his dream to be in law enforcement, and Bryant wishes him well and says to look him up when he accomplishes his goal, giving him his business card. Probably one of the only people who treated Jewell with some respect, it's Bryant who Jewell contacts as his need for a lawyer becomes an unfortunate reality. The surprising rapport between Bryant, Jewell and his mother was touching. On the other hand, Jon Hamm's FBI agent and Olivia Wilde's aggressive and callous reporter, were flat, and cartoonish, but that was probably Clint Eastwood's intent.

We liked when with Bryant's support, Jewell stopped being a victim and fought back. As one discussion participant noted, he picked the right guy for his lawyer.

Other resident reviewers were disappointed in the film. One resident reviewer thought it was a compelling news story when it happened, but it didn't translate into a compelling film noting a weak script/screenplay. Nothing new was learned from the film and no depth of experience was created. No need for a film. We know the premise, how the media turned the hero into a suspect (with no evidence) exposing the bias of FBI.

It's a sadly true story that Jewell's feeling of self-worth was too brief. Any glory he experienced was soon taken away while the damaging psychological effects last the rest of his life and the blame points to the media, which is a stark contrast to other films where the media is the staunch voice of truth exposing lies. The film stood up to our resident critics with a moderately heroic 3.7 on a scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, [adedic@pacbell.net](mailto:adedic@pacbell.net)

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