

WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

**Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait at the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival**

*The starkly beautiful film screened Sunday at the Orpheum*

*Jason Joyce on Monday 04/16/2007 01:04:59,*

It wasn't until Sunday afternoon, while waiting in line to see *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, that I encountered maybe the worst aspect of the film fest: The know-it-all.

"This film is about the -- What was it? -- the 2005 World Cup," bellowed this guy. "I mean, it's not really about the World Cup, it's about this one player, Zidane. It's only about him. So if you think you're going to see a sports movie, you're probably going to be disappointed."

This loud bearer of false information was wrong on a few counts. First, *Zidane* is not about the 2005 World Cup (the Cup was contested in 2006, not 2005), but an April 23, 2005, match in the Spanish Primera Division between Zinedine Zidane's Real Madrid team and Villarreal. And I was among those there to see a sports movie and left far from disappointed.

Conceived of by filmmakers Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, *Zidane* employs 17 cameras, including a couple Panavision HD units with modified zoom on loan from the U.S. Defense Department, to follow Zidane's every move throughout the match in real time. An attacking midfielder, Zidane is known for his graceful aggression on the field as he juggles the roles of table-setter and goal-scorer. There is no dialogue, only a soundtrack by Mogwai woven in with the sounds of the game, from the roar and chants of a partisan Real Madrid crowd to the grunts and shouts of the players on the pitch.

The result is a remarkably riveting view of Zidane, the simultaneous villain and hero of the 2006 World Cup for his head-butting of Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the title game. As he remains focused solely on the ball, he stalks the field, constantly stubbing his toe as he walks and occasionally trots. He communicates very rarely with his teammates, mainly by shouting "Hey!" and pointing. And he spits. He spits a lot. A lot more than he touches the ball, which he does in a few explosive moments.

Throughout, Zidane wears a look of intense concentration which could easily be mistaken for mild irritation. His brilliance as one of the great players in the history of the sport is often attributed to his anger, which simmers just below the surface and occasionally, if quite publicly, erupts as it does in the film's final moments as he is ejected for choking a Villarreal player during a brief melee. But with the exception of a few minutes spent sharing a joke with Roberto Carlos, Zidane's face remains stuck in neutral.

But my lasting impressions of *Zidane* have more to do with the second half of its title: A 21st Century Portrait. What might be most remarkable about the film is its very existence. To those who know little or nothing about international soccer, Zidane could be compared to an athlete like Michael Jordan for his brilliance in the game. But a film like this could never have been made about Jordan whose handlers, responsible for his carefully crafted public image, likely never would have agreed to participate.

The vast majority of big-time athletes and their agents would feel compelled to attach a message to certain parts of the captured match -- Zidane's assist or his red card -- that would render the film far less effective. The starkness created by its lack of dialogue is part of what gives *Zidane* its power. The filmmakers assume the audience is smart and thoughtful enough to consider the moments they have purposely left unexplained.

What also impressed me about *Zidane* was the role, or lack thereof, played by many of Zidane's more glamorous teammates. The 2004-05 Real Madrid team in the film featured five or six of the world's best players at the time (Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, David Beckham, Raul), but they make only cameo appearances as they run past Zidane during the match. The filmmakers' remain true to their vision of viewing a match by focusing on a single player, albeit one who betrays few emotions and displays charisma through his play, not his antics.

**Related Articles:**

[Your source on the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival](#)

**Article Tools:**

**Share this Article:**