

# Trouble with the Curve (2012)

PG-13. Our ratings: V -2; L -4; S/N -3. Running time: 1 hour 50 min.

*For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;  
but the haughty he perceives from far away.*

*Psalms 138.6*

*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your  
acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your  
children, or they may lose heart.*

*Colossians 3:20-21*

In a rare screen appearance in a film that he did not direct, Clint Eastwood plays a grizzled character similar to his retired autoworker Walt Kowalski in Gran Torino. This time he is a vision-challenged baseball scout named Gus Lobel who is near the end of his career working for the Braves. Long widowed, he has issues with his career-driven daughter Mickey, played by Amy Adams, who resents his having sent her off to live with a relative when she was a little girl. Thus this is both a baseball and a father-daughter film, with Justin Timberlake thrown in (as Johnny, the young scout for the Red Sox) for the sake of romance.

2012 Warner Brothers

There are no empty chairs to talk to in the film, but there is

a coffee table in his living room that he stumbles over because of his poor vision. He curses it as if it were alive and actively blocking his path. And the script does call for the actor to talk to his male organ and to a gravestone, so maybe these scenes were in Eastwood's mind when he stood on that Tampa stage and saw the aide holding forth the now famous chair.

The first incident is funny, and the second is serious, though some might find it slightly corny. Gus has just arisen from bed and, and like so many men of his advanced age, finds it difficult to urinate first thing in the morning, hence his coaxing it to perform. He keeps up his pleading until at last it responds and he feels that welcome sense of relief. The second is in the cemetery where his wife is buried, and we see by the headstone that she was just 39 when she died. That was some 28 years ago, but Gus still visits the site and converses with her, telling her how much he misses her. He haltingly sings what must have been a song they both enjoyed, "You Are My Sunshine." Later, his daughter Mickey will also sing it, so he must have sung it to her also when she was a little girl still living with him.

Gus is of the old school of scouting, relying on sight, sound, and instincts sharpened by years of watching bush leaguers play in fields and small ball parks. He can tell a lot about a hitter by the sound of the ball hitting the bat. His rival at the Atlanta home office believes that computers and their ability to analyze a player's statistics offer more than Gus and his ilk in identifying prospective new players. Thus this film could be seen as an answer to the film Moneyball.

Pete Klein (John Goodman), best friend of Gus and colleague at the Braves' office, guards his friend's back against those who want to put Gus out to pasture. Worried about Gus's recent behavior, he convinces Mickey to fly over to North Carolina where her father is scouting a hot new prospect. Although she is preparing for a big presentation that could lead to her

becoming a partner at her law firm, she reluctantly agrees to go.

Gus, of course, does not feel he needs any help, even though in several POV shots we see that his sight is deteriorating. His doctor had warned him, urging him to take a break for an eye operation. It is while following the talented slugger Bo Gentry (Joe Massingil) and his team The Grizzilies from small park to small park that we learn why Mickey and Gus have become so estranged.

Johnny, once an ace pitcher scouted and recruited by Gus, is also following Bo around as a hot prospect for his team. A victim of throwing too hard too often so that his shoulder and arm had given out, he aspires to move up from scouting to becoming a game announcer. He becomes as interested in Mickey as in Bo. What happens to the three of them is predictable, but great fun, all three thespians thoroughly convincing in their parts.

Bo Gentry, chubby but a great slugger, is headed for some kind of a comeuppance we can guess because he is arrogant, basking in the glow of groupies who sense that he is headed for the majors. In one brief shot he yells at a vendor selling bags of peanuts in the stand, "Hey Peanut boy!" and the Hispanic young man (Jay Galloway) hurls a bag of goober peas at him with the force of a cannon shot. With the sense of entitlement of a member of the superior class, he turns away without paying for them. Remember the young man's face, as you will see it in a satisfying climax to the film.

Trouble With the Curve isn't in the same league as The Natural or Bull Durham, but for first time director Robert Lorenz, we might say that compared to their home runs, this is at least a double, maybe even a triple, base hitter. This is also scriptwriter Randy Brown's first film, and he inserts numerous mones of humor: along with the already mentioned difficulty in urinating, he has Gus attacking a jerk hitting on Mickey, and

as Johnny stops the fight, Gus says, "Get out of here before I have a heart attack trying to kill you!" Another example is when Mickey tells Johnny that her father named her after his favorite player Mickey Mantel, and Johnny replies that it was a good thing his favorite wasn't Yogi Bera.

In this film's case it does not matter that the basic plot is somewhat predictable (except maybe for a neat twist at the end): the considerable pleasure of watching the film is seeing a cast of excellent actors strut their stuff and make us care deeply about what happens to them. The audience at the screening certainly felt this way, breaking out in cheers at one point and applauding the film as the end credits rolled. I think you will too. Once more an Eastwood film made my day. Just as Unforgiven made me forgive Clint Eastwood for the violence-affirming Dirty Harry, so this one helps erase from my mind the empty chair vulgarity of Tampa.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1. What do you think there is about baseball that it continues to draw the interest of filmmakers? Compare this film to Moneyball. How are the insights of the latter film's approach to the game exaggerated in Trouble...?
2. What drives Gus? Does he seem to have any interests beyond his job? What do you see as the danger in this?
3. Do you think Mickey is like her father in regard to her own career at the law firm? What could this have done to her soul had she continued on her planned course?
4. How does Johnny show resilience in the light of what happened to his pitching career?
5. What did you think of Bo when you first saw him? How has he succumbed to the temptations of power and (minor) fame? Were

you expecting to see him brought down? The same with Gus' smug rival at the Braves' home office?

6. What has happened to the relationship between Mickey and Gus? How might he have avoided her misunderstanding him when he sent her away to live with relatives? How might a touch of the insight of the Colossians passage help both of them?

7. What is the meaning of the title? How is the fate of "Peanut Boy" and Bo a possible example of the passage from Psalm 138?

8. How did you feel at the end of the film? Do you see the hidden hand of God moving behind the events?