

# FILM REVIEW



## High tops of glory

The Taiwan Beer basketball team is an enthusiastic cast for Blackie's latest project — a documentary about his team

BY HO YI  
STAFF REPORTER

During the Straits Cup basketball tournament in Miaoli last September, reigning local champions Taiwan Beer (台灣啤酒籃球隊) were in the process of losing to China's Jiangsu Nangang Dragons when one of the Chinese players elbowed his Taiwan Beer opponent in the face. Two days later, Taiwan Beer's management ignored an apology from the Dragons and removed its team from the competition. Its players, the team said, were afraid of their Chinese opponents.

It seems a little rich then, to say the least, that a new documentary made about the Taiwan Beer basketball team is called *Attitude*. This, after all, is the team that wimped out of a tournament while the documentary was in production. So what does "attitude" mean? Sportsmanship and professionalism? Or self-absorbed preening?

Ostensibly, *Attitude* — which



Blackie likes his team so much he made a documentary about it.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZEUS INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION

was produced and financed by basketball player-turned-entertainer Chen Jien-chow (陳建州), better known as "Blackie" (黑人), who is also the team's PR director — is about dreams, friendship and refusing to give up, and its tone is exhaustingly positive. It begins with Blackie reminiscing about Taiwan Beer's recent past and how it rose from being a team that nearly fell

apart in 2003 to a second place finish two seasons later. Thanks to unimaginative camera work and editing, the first 20 minutes feel more like a boring speech than a movie.

Things take a lachrymose turn when a junior high school teacher and Taiwan Beer fan surnamed Lin appears. Lin is terminally ill with cancer but is still optimistic

and upbeat about life, and his last words, spoken front of the camera, provide the film's only genuine emotional moment. After Lin dies and Blackie attends his funeral, the tearjerker subplot continues with an episode about basketball star Sam Ho's (何守正) close relationship with his late father and his mother, who he visits in the hospital after practice.

Subsequent chapters ensure that there is no shortage of humor and drama, as basketball fans are wooed with behind-the-scenes glimpses of the celebrity athletes. Viewers see Lin Chih-jeh (林志傑), the SBL's most valuable player, threaten the director and order him to turn off the camera. There's also plenty of brotherly love: players kissing each other on a bus, and horseplay that involves pulling each other's clothes off after practice. Not surprisingly, things come to an end with the team's victory in the 2007 SBL finals, which conveniently (for the film's sake) occurred before its craven exit from the Straits Cup later in the year.

There is nothing wrong with making a film that seeks to inspire people and encourages them to see the bright and sunny side of things. But it's troubling when a film seems like an extended publicity vehicle that aims to advertise SBL stars much in the same way as the movie *Stars* (星光傳奇) sought to enhance the celebrity of pop idol contestants in the "talent" show *One Million Star* (超級星光大道). To be fair, *Attitude* can at times be reasonably entertaining. But the real never-give-up spirit on display here has nothing to do with sports: it's the moxie that Blackie has displayed by risking more than NT\$5 million of his own money on a film that, if it succeeds at the box office, will make himself and his teammates more famous.

### OTHER RELEASES

► COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

#### Journey to the Center of the Earth

This remake's selling point is superior 3D effects, which means that if you're not prepared to wear the nifty new 3D glasses, you're going to have to settle for double vision. Brendan Fraser stars as a professor who is in deep trouble, geologically speaking: With sidekicks in tow, he sets out to conquer the Earth's underworld that claimed the life of his brother. *Journey* has picked up some good reviews along the way, mostly for the 3D escapism, but also for Fraser's agreeable characterization.



#### Run Fatboy Run

Actor-writer-director Simon Pegg (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*) is hot stuff at the moment. This is his latest acting-writing role, in which he plays a groom who flees pregnant bride Thandie Newton on their wedding day. *Thandie Newton*? What a fool, you might say, and years later, he's come to the same conclusion. To try to get her back, he decides to run a marathon against her American boyfriend — but must lose a few spare tires to have a chance. Directed by David Schwimmer of *Friends* fame.



#### Summer Hours

From director Olivier Assayas, *Summer Hours* is a study of adult siblings in France who must orientate themselves after the death of their mother. Part of the challenge involves the disposal of a mansion full of artwork, a decision that stokes tension in the family as the demands of the siblings move in different directions. This is a sincere, complex movie about experiences that many will relate to, but Assayas may just be casting his net a little wider as he places the economic and emotional needs of his characters at cross purposes.



#### Steel Trap

This week's B movie offering is a German flick (with largely Anglophone actors) that piles on the gore as a bunch of media types and socialites are preyed upon by a killer at a New Year's Eve party. The *Saw* franchise's influence comes into view when selected victims are put through a series of deadly tests on different floors. Could the killer be a disgruntled interior designer? This went straight to DVD in the US. Starts tomorrow.



### Film Notes

#### ATTITUDE (態度)

DIRECTED BY: LIN CHIA-WEI (林家緯) AND LEO LIAO (廖人帥)

STARRING: THE TAIWAN BEER BASKETBALL TEAM

RUNNING TIME: 80 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: ON GENERAL RELEASE



■ Red Cliff (赤壁)  
NT\$21,292,022



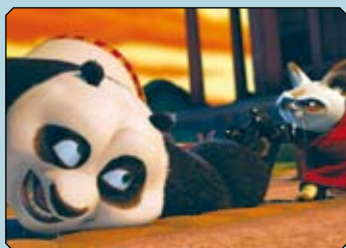
■ Hancock (全民超人)  
NT\$7,806,082

### TAIPEI'S TOP FIVE

City cinema weekend box office takings

(July 12 and July 13)

Source: Group Power Entertainment Corp



■ Kung Fu Panda (功夫熊貓)  
NT\$4,564,662



■ Detective Conan: Full Score of Fear (名偵探柯南 — 戰慄的樂譜) NT\$2,469,749



■ The Bank Job (玩命追緝：貝克街大劫案)  
NT\$1,682,667

## REEL NEWS

The John Woo (吳宇森) epic *Red Cliff* (赤壁), dubbed the most expensive movie made in Asia, enjoyed record takings for a Chinese film in its opening weekend in China, the movie's distributor said on Wednesday.

The film, which depicts events in the ancient Three Kingdoms period, made US\$16 million

in China in the four days after its debut last week, said a China Film Group spokesman.

The box office takings beat other previous domestic blockbusters such as *Curse of the Golden Flower* (滿城盡帶黃金甲), directed by Olympic opening ceremony mastermind Zhang Yimou (張藝謀), as well as Taiwanese director Ang Lee's (李安) *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (臥虎藏龍), Xinhua news agency said.

Woo, a Hong Kong film director and producer, rose to international prominence with *Face Off* starring John Travolta and Nicolas Cage in 1997.

He was also the director of *Mission: Impossible II* starring Tom Cruise.

Oscar-winning Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki releases his first full-length film in four years this weekend, dropping computer

graphics for his pencil to tell the story of a fish-girl and the sea.

*Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, which the reclusive 67-year-old both wrote and directed, will hit screens at cinemas across Japan tomorrow after weeks of intense media interest.

Inspired by the 19th-century fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, the story centers around a tiny fish-girl, Ponyo, who rides a jellyfish to escape her home in the sea.

She meets a five-year-old human boy, Sosuke, who vows to protect her, but Ponyo is taken back to the sea. Desperate to be a human and live with Sosuke, Ponyo heads to land again with help from her sisters.

Miyazaki is one of Japan's biggest cultural exports. His last film, *Howl's Moving Castle*, broke opening box office records at home in 2004 before winning a cult following in Western and Asian nations.



Hopes are high for Hayao Miyazaki's animation movie *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, which is a story centered on a tiny fish-girl, Ponyo, who rides a jellyfish to escape her home in the sea.

PHOTO: AFP

Miyazaki, who had used computer graphics since *Princess Mononoke* in 1997, decided to shun hi-tech effects in his latest film. "Our experience told us that what you can do electronically doesn't impress people much. We decided to go fully with pencils ... That's our strength," he said in a recent interview with Japanese

Hong Kong director John Woo's new film *Red Cliff* has broken opening weekend box office records in China.

PHOTO: AP

public broadcaster NHK.

The film used 170,000 hand-drawn pictures to animate characters and objects, a record number for a Miyazaki production.

It took one and a half years for 70 staff to draw the pictures, according to Studio Ghibli, which has released his works.

Sony Corp will increase the storage capacity of its PlayStation 3 video-game console starting in September, following a similar move by Microsoft earlier this week.

The storage space on Sony's console will double to 80 gigabytes, Jack Tretton, head of Sony's US games unit, said on Tuesday. Sony also will offer movies from major studios for sale or rent through its PlayStation 3 and PSP video-game players, Tretton said.

The *Class*, winner of the Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival, will open the 46th annual New York Film Festival.

The Film Society of Lincoln Center, which produces the festival, announced on Tuesday that it will give the opening night

honor to Laurent Cantet's drama about classroom life at a French junior high school. The docudrama was shot with real students and teachers in a raw, improvisational style to chronicle the drama that unfolds over one school year. *The Class* (Entre les Murs) was unanimously selected for the main prize at Cannes by a nine-member jury headed by Sean Penn.

It's the second film by Cantet to play at the New York Film Festival; his acclaimed *Time Out* was shown in 2001.

"Laurent Cantet has pioneered a new kind of social cinema," said selection committee chairman Richard Pena in a statement. He continued that it is a style "that explores the key issues of our day, from contemporary labor struggles to First World/Third World relations and now to education."

This year's festival, which runs from Sept. 26 through Oct. 12, will be held at the Ziegfeld Theater due to ongoing renovations at the event's traditional home, Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center. —AGENCIES