

'White Men Can't Jump' remake can't stand up against its predecessor

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time: 101 minutes

This feature from 20th Century Studios will be streaming Friday, May 16 exclusively on Hulu.

This week sees action blockbuster *Fast X* being released at movie theaters everywhere. If you've already enjoyed the first nine chapters, nothing a reviewer asserts will make a significant change on whether or not you're going to see the next chapter. So, instead of presenting a review of a critic-proof movie, this writer decided to take a look and provide an analysis of an alternate option.

While it isn't a sequel, the new film *White Men Can't Jump* is a remake of a sharp-witted 1992 sports comedy that starred Woody Harrelson and Wesley Snipes. As someone who saw and

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greatly enjoyed the original, it is admittedly hard to overcome a bias toward the first film. This updated version does feature charismatic leads and delivers a few laughs, but it also waters down some of the original’s edge and unpredictability.

Kamal (Sinqua Walls) was once a basketball prodigy destined to become one of the game’s greatest players. But a violent episode ruins his career before it even starts, and ten years later he finds himself working as a delivery man and only playing the game with close friends. After getting into an on-court argument with eccentric, wobbly-knees, health-drink salesman Jeremy (Jack Harlow), Kamal finds himself being hustled.

Strangely enough, he doesn’t get angry and instead sees an opportunity. Kamal convinces Jeremy to take an act to the streets and begin hustling players to make extra money. Knowing the dishonest nature of their acts, they also do everything they can to prevent their significant others Imani (Teyana Taylor) and Tatiana (Laura Harrier) from discovering their scamming ways. When the two are invited to compete in a public tournament for big money, it becomes difficult to keep up their ruse.

As mentioned, the two leads are fun to watch. Kamal makes a memorable impression as a man trying to provide for his family, yet struggles with feelings of guilt and rage for destroying his own professional career. His sudden outbursts do create some tension during the film’s most intense matches.

And Jeremy provides some chuckles with his ability to talk and get under the skin of opponents. The character also struggles with ACL injuries and painkiller addiction early in the film, although the drug issue is sadly brushed to the side later in the film instead of providing more dramatic material.

A portion of the insulting chatter feels a bit obvious, but some of the barbs the leads use on competitors to confuse or make them miss a shot are amusing to hear. There’s also a funny and over-the-top gag involving an extreme reaction after one confrontation gets particularly out of hand. These particular moments are entertaining. The film is also nicely photographed with well-edited game highlights as the teams play.

Honestly, this may all work well enough if you have never seen the original film. Unfortunately, if

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you do remember the source material, that title was far edgier. Despite their issues, the leads in this redo are, well, nice guys.

The first movie featured some nasty double-crosses and the characters couldn’t help but take advantage of others when an opportunity arose... even if it also had terrible repercussions on their private lives. In this film, the intentions of the two leads are almost entirely noble. And while the female characters here are strong-willed, the dramatic stakes aren’t as high because the men seem to be only doing what they’re doing in order to overcome personal issues.

The leads in this film are quite compelling and there are chuckles, but in other respects this remake is a bit too nice - at times it even feels like it actually wants to inspire instead of delivering biting humor and big twists. *White Men Can’t Jump* does score some points, but could have used more sting to really stand up against its predecessor.

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