

Chang Can Dunk

Chang Can Dunk is a 2023 American sports-drama film written and directed by Jingyi Shao in his feature length debut, starring Bloom Li, Dexter Darden, Ben Wang, Zoe Renee, Chase Liefeld and Mardy Ma. The film is an underdog coming-of-age story, involving high school basketball and the titular character's determination to overcome expectations.

The film was released on Disney+ on March 10, 2023.

Plot

Xiao Ming "Bernard" Chang is a band geek sophomore in high school who expresses interest in basketball, with whom he shares a rivalry with star player Matt O'Neil, his former friend. One day, he meets his new bandmate Kristy and becomes smitten with her, only for Matt to start hitting on her. Chang continues to feel threatened by Matt, especially when his friends lock him in the basement at a house party. He escapes and confronts Matt over a prior basketball game and claims that he can dunk, but Matt puts him down and he's humiliated when he falls into a swimming pool.

Chang continues his quest to reinvent himself, especially since his mother Chen always judges his decisions. He finally confronts Matt at school and bets that he can make a dunk by homecoming. Should Chang win, Matt must shave his head and give him his prized Kobe Bryant jersey. Should Matt win, Chang must shave his head and give him his prized 1st edition Pokémon Trading Card. Kristy knows full well what the bet is really about, but chooses to support Chang regardless. Chang's best friend Bo helps him train rigorously, but after a week, feels that he hasn't accomplished much. He goes online and discovers Deandre Cooke, a YouTuber who films himself dunking.

Chang meets Deandre and gets him to take him on as his protégé. Seeing as how they cannot pay him, Bo instead offers to improve the terrible production of his YouTube videos. He agrees. Chang improves significantly as Deandre films and uploads his exploits online and the two form a bond. At the same time, Chang and his mother start to feel distant. The day before the dunk, Chang feels that he's still off and sneaks into the school late at night. In the

Chang Can Dunk



Official release poster

Directed by	Jingyi Shao
Written by	Jingyi Shao
Produced by	<u>Rishi Rajani</u> <u>Lena Waithe</u> Brad Weston Negin Salmasi
Starring	Bloom Li <u>Dexter Darden</u> Ben Wang <u>Zoe Renee</u> Chase Liefeld Mardy Ma Eric Anthony Lopez
Cinematography	Ross Riege
Edited by	Brad Turner
Music by	Nathan Matthew David
Production companies	<u>Walt Disney</u>

morning, everyone gathers to see Chang's dunk attempt and after large fanfare, succeeds, winning the bet and earning him school fame.

Despite his online recognition, Chen remains ignorant of her son's success. He's invited by ESPN to New York to talk about his win and he brings his friends with him. When he's asked to make the dunk again, he misses, claiming wind interference. However, Chang is consumed by his fame and nearly ditches his friends. At school the next day, Matt accuses Chang of cheating by lowering the basket on the court. Chang denies but Matt shows a video proving it. Chang accuses him of racism and they fight, resulting in both boys getting suspended. Chen finally learns what Chang has been up to and tells him that he doesn't need to prove himself to others, while Chang says he cannot talk to her because she's always unhappy and makes everyone else unhappy. Chang realizes that he cannot make a dunk and publicly apologizes for his cheating.

Chen confronts Deandre over the time he spent with Chang, but he tells her that he was a great kid whom he truly believes in. Realizing that her son has potential, Chen goes home and destroys her house's unfinished veranda from her separated husband. Chang helps her and repairs their relationship. Chang makes up with Bo and Kristy, the latter of whom he starts dating. He tries out for the school basketball team and makes up with Matt, with both of them becoming better people.

Sometime later, Chang is on the basketball team and his coach tells him to enter a game. While he briefly makes a mistake, he steals the ball from an opposing player and dribbles down the court, rising for a dunk before the film ends as the crowd cheers.

	<u>Pictures</u> Hillman Grad Productions Makeready
Distributed by	<u>Disney+</u>
Release date	March 10, 2023
Running time	109 minutes
Country	United States
Languages	English <u>Mandarin</u>

Cast

- Bloom Li as Chang
- Ben Wang as Bo
- Zoe Renee as Kristy
- Mardy Ma as Chen
- Dexter Darden as Deandre
- Chase Liefeld as Matt
- Dominic Pace as Mr. Bennevido
- Nile Bullock as Owen
- Eric Anthony Lopez as Syd
- Chris Critelli as Mr. Ryan
- Jenna Roach as Melissa
- Jim E. Chandler as Mr. O'Neil
- Elizabeth Inghram as Mrs. O'Neil
- Aaron Vargas as Todd
- Julien Goldberg as Timmy
- Jay Williams as himself
- Kimberley A. Martin as herself
- Kendrick Perkins as himself

- Andre Drummond as himself
- Richard Jefferson as himself
- Angel Oquendo as a coach

Production

Development

The film was reported in 2019 with a script by Jingyi Shao,^{[1][2]} the film was ultimately placed on hold and deemed a 2020 *The Black List*-ed film, which includes screenplays that would not be released in theaters during that calendar year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^[1] By September 2021, it was announced that Shao will also serve as director on the project, while Bloom Li was cast in the titular role. Chase Liefeld joined the cast later that month.^[3] Rishi Rajani and Brad Weston serve as producers. On November 4, 2021, it was reported that Dexter Darden and Ben joined the cast.^[4]

Filming

Initially announced to begin production in October 2021,^[5] principal photography commenced ahead of schedule in September of the same year. Scenes were filmed October 22–23, 2021 at Frank Scott Bunnell High School in Stratford, Connecticut.^{[5][6]} Filming also took place for a month and a half at Westhill High School in Stamford, Connecticut.^[7] By December 2, 2021, filming had wrapped up.^[8] In December 2021, Zoe Renee and Mardy Ma were revealed as part of the cast.^[8]

Release

Chang Can Dunk was released exclusively as a Disney+ original film on March 10, 2023.^[9]

Reception

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 95% of 21 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.80/10.^[10] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 77 out of 100 based on reviews from five critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[11]

Frank Sheck of *The Hollywood Reporter* praised Jingyi Shao for his directing and writing, stating he provides "amusing dialogue that rings true and complex characterizations defying easy stereotypes," and said, "*Chang Can Dunk* delivers a valuable message that should certainly resonate with its target audience."^[12] Calum Marsh of *The New York Times* called the film "exhilarating" and "warmhearted", said it manages to avoid clichés, and found it to be entertaining and thoughtful high school comedy.^[13]

Brian Lowry of *CNN* asserted, "*Chang Can Dunk* isn't an all-star, but viewed that way it's a nice wrinkle on an old story – the sort of calculated leap that, unlike Chang's gamble, feels like a pretty good bet."^[14] Jennifer Green of *Common Sense Media* gave the film a grade of 4 out of 5 stars, praised the presence of positive messages and role models, citing loyalty and perseverance, and complimented the diverse representations across the cast.^[15]

Accolades

Jingyi Shao was one of the ten directors honored during the Palm Springs International Film Festival for his contribution to the film.^{[16][17][18]}

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External links

- Official website (<https://disneyplusoriginals.disney.com/movie/chang-can-dunk>) 
 - *Chang Can Dunk* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13650494/>) at IMDb
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