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# Champions (2023 film)

***Champions*** is a 2023 American sports comedy-drama film directed by Bobby Farrelly in his solo directorial debut, from a screenplay written by Mark Rizzo. It is an English-language remake of the 2018 Spanish film of the same name. The film stars Woody Harrelson as a temperamental minor-league basketball coach who, after an arrest, must coach a team of players with intellectual disabilities as community service. Kaitlin Olson, Ernie Hudson, and Cheech Marin also star.

*Champions* was released in the United States on March 10, 2023, by Focus Features. The film received mixed reviews from critics and grossed \$19 million.

## Plot

Marcus Marakovich, a hot-tempered but skilled assistant coach for a minor league basketball team in Iowa, lets his temper get the best of him during a game and shoves the head coach, Phil. After leaving the stadium, he gets drunk at a bar and while driving home hits a police car, ending up in jail. The next day he is bailed out by Phil. He gets into an argument with him, believing he was right and if Phil had listened, none of the previous night would have happened. Phil explains why he didn't listen and advises Marcus to get to know the players more, that they have personal lives that affect their playing. Phil then informs Marcus that the team owners have let Marcus go.

When Marcus appears for his hearing, the judge gives him a choice of 18 months in prison, or 90 days community service with a basketball team for people who have learning disabilities: "The Friends." He agrees to community service and soon realizes coaching this team will be a personal and professional challenge. At the end of the first practice, he accepts a ride home with Johnny, one of the players. However, Marcus learns that Johnny is driven by his sister, Alex, who Marcus previously met through Tinder and shared a one-night stand with.

The team begins to improve and as Marcus gets to know the players personally, he realizes that they are more than players on a basketball court. When one of the team members, Darius, refuses to play for Marcus, Marcus puts Consentino, a previously injured player, back into the rotation. The team is

### Champions



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>Bobby Farrelly</u>
<b>Screenplay by</b>	<u>Mark Rizzo</u>
<b>Based on</b>	<u>Campeones</u> by <u>Javier Fesser</u> <u>David Marqués</u>
<b>Produced by</b>	<u>Paul Brooks</u> <u>Scott Niemeyer</u> <u>Jeremy Plager</u>
<b>Starring</b>	<u>Woody Harrelson</u> <u>Kaitlin Olson</u> <u>Ernie Hudson</u> <u>Cheech Marin</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<u>C. Kim Miles</u>
<b>Edited by</b>	<u>Julie Garcés</u>
<b>Music by</b>	<u>Michael Franti</u>
<b>Production company</b>	<u>Gold Circle</u> <u>Entertainment</u>
<b>Distributed by</b>	<u>Focus Features</u> (United States)

kicked off the bus when the team "disrupts" the other passengers and Marlon projectile vomits all over an annoyed mother riding with her young son. Johnny calls his sister Alex to pick them up in her *Shakespeare* travel van. Fortunately, Marcus and the team eventually convince Alex to drive The Friends to scheduled away games. Marcus and Alex begin a casual relationship.

Johnny becomes more attached to Marcus and invites him to dinner. Once there, Marcus shares Johnny's news about moving into a shared house with some of The Friends. Alex becomes defensive and tells Marcus to stay out of family business, causing Marcus to leave the home. While Alex is confronting Marcus in the yard, he realizes that Alex quietly uses her daily routine taking care of Johnny as an excuse to break up with boyfriends before Johnny can grow attached to them. Following this, Alex tells Marcus their relationship is over. Johnny becomes angry with Marcus for hurting Alex and lying to him. Johnny refuses to play for The Friends. During the halftime of a game, Consentino tells Johnny to get over his issues with Marcus since members of The Friends play for each other, not for Marcus.

Marcus asks Sonny, one of the assistant coaches with his former team, and who has an uncle that is a manager with the *NBA*, to help Marcus find a new job with the big league. Although Sonny's uncle refuses to help, Sonny leads Marcus on for a while, hoping they will become friends, until he realizes that Marcus was just being nice to him to get an NBA job. When Marcus realizes how manipulative he's been, he asks Sonny to help him with coaching The Friends and Marcus agrees.

Benny, a member of The Friends and who works at a restaurant, has been unable to play in games because his boss refuses to allow him to adjust his schedule. Once the team is able to make it to the semifinals, he tells his boss he should be able to adjust his schedule to play with the team and is fired, but he is now able to play and is one of the key scorers. Marcus and Phil meet by chance in a restaurant and Phil lets Marcus know that Darius, the teammate who refuses to play for Marcus, had a promising career before he was involved in a terrible car accident and ended up with brain damage. Marcus realizes it was a drunk driver who hit Darius and goes to his home to apologize and explain he would never drive drunk again, but that he understands why Darius won't play for him. Darius, realizing he needs to be able to forgive the woman that hit him, decides to begin with Marcus and agrees to go to the *Special Olympics* finals in *Winnipeg*.

Marcus receives news he has been hired by the NBA expansion team in *Seattle* as a third assistant, but Alex tells him they are using his feel-good story as a cover for their scandal. When he tells The Friends he is moving to Seattle, they cannot bring themselves to be happy, knowing it will take him away, and Johnny becomes angry with him again. Marcus is told by the community center manager, Julio, that the city do not have the money to send the players to Canada, so Marcus devises a scheme with Alex to blackmail the owner of the restaurant where Benny worked, and so they are able to get the necessary funds to attend the finals.

In the finals, The Friends are intimidated by the size and name of the opposing team, The Beasts, and it shows in their playing, so when they are down during the halftime, Marcus brings up all the situations that they've conquered and calls them Champions. When returning to the court, Johnny proceeds up the stairs to have his "Champion" moment by telling Alex he is moving in with his friends.

	Universal Pictures (International)
Release dates	February 27, 2023 (Lincoln Square) March 10, 2023 (United States)
Running time	124 minutes <sup>[1]</sup>
Country	United States
Language	English
Box office	\$19.2 million <sup>[2][3]</sup>

The Friends rally during the second half and are within one point of winning, so Marcus tries to set up a play that will have Darius making the final shot. His assistant coach Sonny says it's a bad idea as the other team knows Darius is the best player and they will be all over him. Marcus begins to reprimand him like Phil had done to him but catches himself and realizes the assistant is right and sets up a pick and roll play with Johnny. The play works and Johnny is about to make the basket when another player, Showtime, yells he is open and Johnny passes him the ball, only for Showtime to make his trademark move of a backward shot. He misses the basket but hits the rim, and the team goes wild because he had never before hit the rim. It results in the team's loss, but they still see themselves as Champions because of Marcus's pep talk.

Marcus decides not to take the Seattle job, realizing that Alex was right, and is offered a local coaching job at Drake University. His former assistant takes over the coaching of The Friends, Marcus and Alex begin dating, and Johnny moves in with his friends at the shared house.

A post-credit sequence shows the Friends playing a game where Showtime finally converts on a backward shot, with his teammates celebrating with him.

## Cast

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- Woody Harrelson as Marcus Marakovich, a disgraced J-League basketball coach.
- Kaitlin Olson as Alex, Johnny's sister and Marcus' love interest<sup>[4]</sup>
- Matt Cook as Sonny, an assistant coach<sup>[4]</sup>
- Ernie Hudson as Phil Perretti, a fellow coach and Marcus' friend<sup>[4]</sup>
- Cheech Marin as Julio, the manager of the rec center where the Friends practice.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Mike Smith as Attorney McGurk
- Scott Van Pelt as himself
- Jalen Rose as himself
- Sean Cullen as Frank

## The Friends

- Madison Tevlin as Cosentino<sup>[5]</sup>
- Joshua Felder as Darius<sup>[5]</sup>
- Kevin Iannucci as Johnny<sup>[5]</sup>
- Ashton Gunning as Cody<sup>[5]</sup>
- Matthew Von Der Ahe as Craig<sup>[5]</sup>
- Tom Sinclair as Blair<sup>[5]</sup>
- James Day Keith as Benny<sup>[5]</sup>
- Alex Hintz as Arthur<sup>[5]</sup>
- Casey Metcalfe as Marlon<sup>[5]</sup>
- Bradley Edens as Showtime<sup>[5]</sup>

## Production

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Principal photography took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada from November to December 2021.<sup>[6]</sup> Extras were sought with a casting call through St. Amant, a non-profit organization that works with Manitobans who have developmental disabilities and autism.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Release

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*Champions* was originally scheduled to be theatrically released in the United States on March 24, 2023, by Focus Features, opposite Lionsgate's *John Wick: Chapter 4*.<sup>[8]</sup> In January 2023, the release date was moved to March 10, 2023.<sup>[9][2][10]</sup> The film had its red carpet premiere at the AMC Lincoln Square Theatre in New York on February 27, 2023.<sup>[11]</sup>

The film was released digitally on March 28,<sup>[2][10]</sup> followed by a Blu-ray and DVD release on May 2.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

*Champions* grossed \$16.4 million in the United States and Canada, and \$2.8 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$19.2 million.<sup>[3][2]</sup>

In the United States and Canada, *Champions* was released alongside *Scream VI* and *65*, and was projected to gross around \$5 million from 3,030 theatres in its opening weekend.<sup>[13]</sup> The film made \$1.8 million on its first day. It went on to debut to \$5.2 million, finishing in seventh.<sup>[14]</sup> It made \$3 million in its second weekend, finishing in eighth.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 59% of 128 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.8/10. The website's consensus reads: "Although its apparent attempts to be uplifting can often come across as patronizing, *Champions* is an amiable enough comedy with some seriously talented stars."<sup>[10]</sup> Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 50 out of 100, based on 34 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.<sup>[16]</sup> Audiences surveyed by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A" on an A+ to F scale, while those at PostTrak gave it an overall 83% positive score, with 66% saying they would definitely recommend it.<sup>[14]</sup>

## See also

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- List of basketball films

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## External links

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- [Official website \(<https://www.championsmovie.ca/>\)](https://www.championsmovie.ca/) 
  - *Champions* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15339570/>) at IMDb
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