

# The Boys in the Boat (film)

***The Boys in the Boat*** is a 2023 American biographical sports drama film produced and directed by George Clooney from a screenplay by Mark L. Smith, based on the 2013 book of the same name by Daniel James Brown. The film follows the University of Washington rowing team, and their quest to compete in the 1936 Summer Olympics. It stars Joel Edgerton as coach Al Ulbrickson Sr. and Callum Turner as rower Joe Rantz.

*The Boys in the Boat* had its world premiere in Los Angeles on December 11, 2023, and was theatrically released by Amazon MGM Studios Distribution in the United States on December 25. It has grossed \$55 million and received mixed reviews from critics.

## Plot

An elderly Joe Rantz watches his grandson rowing a fiberglass boat, thinking back to his glorious rowing days. In 1936, young Joe Rantz is a poor engineering student at the University of Washington (UW), living in an abandoned car and eating canned food, with no job and tuition fees due in two weeks. Fellow struggling student Roger Morris tells Joe the 8+ rowing team comes with jobs and boarding. Despite not being rowers, they make the UW junior varsity (JV) team in a special year for coach Al Ulbrickson, who is under pressure to beat rival Cal and make the 1936 Olympics. Joe and Roger are just happy to have a dorm room and steady food, and gladly mop floors for tuition. Joe starts dating Joyce and admits to racing-shell builder George Pocock that he's been on his own since his dad abandoned him at age thirteen.

The JV and varsity 8+ teams train together, trying to get their rowing "swing" in sync with fast pace. Coach Al worries that his varsity crew isn't fast enough for the Olympics, and the JVs are strong but inexperienced. On George's suggestion, Al brings back Bobby Moch, the experienced but headstrong coxswain, warning him to follow orders on the JVs or he's out. At the Pacific Coast Regatta on Lake Washington, UW and Cal race two miles in front of 100,000 fans. Coach Al wants the JV boat to maintain a steady pace, hoping the Cal JVs

### *The Boys in the Boat*



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<u>George Clooney</u>
<b>Screenplay by</b>	<u>Mark L. Smith</u>
<b>Based on</b>	<i><u>The Boys in the Boat</u></i> by <u>Daniel James Brown</u>
<b>Produced by</b>	<u>Grant Heslov</u> <u>George Clooney</u>
<b>Starring</b>	<u>Joel Edgerton</u> <u>Callum Turner</u> <u>Peter Guinness</u> <u>Jack Mulhern</u> <u>James Wolk</u> <u>Hadley Robinson</u> <u>Courtney Henggeler</u>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<u>Martin Ruhe</u>
<b>Edited by</b>	<u>Tanya M. Swerling</u>
<b>Music by</b>	<u>Alexandre Desplat</u> <sup>[1]</sup>

would screw up, but Bobby calls a fast pace and pulls off a course-record win, astonishing Al. The rowers become campus stars.

Ahead of the four-mile Poughkeepsie Regatta in New York, for a berth in the Olympics, Al risks his job by promoting the JVs above his experienced varsity boat. After Joe sees his long-lost dad in Seattle, he performs badly in New York practice and is benched. Joe packs up to leave, but George Pocock tells him not to quit like his father. Joe reconsiders and agrees with Al that it's all about the boat, the only thing he has. On race day, Bobby is told by Al to start slowly and let the other boats tire, then kick mid-race to 35 strokes per minute. Bobby starts at 28 and holds it past mid-race, then coaxes 36, with a 40-stroke finish to lead ragtag UW to upset Navy, Cal, and the other privileged eastern schools.

The U.S. Olympic Committee is short on funds, so UW needs to raise \$5,000 to pay for their travel, otherwise a richer team will go. The team and community raise the money in a week, and they sail for Berlin. In Nazi Germany, eighth-seat rower Don Hume immediately falls sick. At the opening ceremony, Roger tells Jesse Owens to show the Germans that he's the fastest guy in the world. Owens replies, "not the Germans, the folks back home". The team then sets an Olympic record in the qualifier, but it takes a toll on Hume. Al protests the finals lane assignments, but realizes he'll have calm water at the end, so he calls for a fast start to stay close to the great German team, then a big kick to finish. Adolf Hitler attends the finals expecting his 8+ team to complete a German gold-medal sweep of the rowing events. Bobby fails to hear the finals starting gun and starts badly, with Hume struggling early; nonetheless, Bobby coaxes Hume and the crew to 42 strokes per minute to get within reach, then calls for 46 with 300 meters to go. The U.S. wins the gold in a photo finish over Italy and Germany, to the team's jubilation and much to Hitler's chagrin. The elderly Joe comes out of his reverie and tells his grandson that his eight-man crew were always one.

<b>Production companies</b>	<u>Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer</u> <u>Smokehouse Pictures</u> <u>Spyglass Media Group</u> <sup>[a]</sup> Tempesta Films <u>Anonymous Content</u>
<b>Distributed by</b>	<u>Amazon MGM Studios</u> Distribution <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Release dates</b>	December 7, 2023 ( <u>SIFF Cinema Downtown</u> )  December 25, 2023 (United States)
<b>Running time</b>	124 minutes <sup>[3]</sup>
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$40 million <sup>[4]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$55.4 million <sup>[5][6]</sup>

## Cast

- Joel Edgerton as Al Ulbrickson, rowing coach at the University of Washington<sup>[7]</sup>
- Callum Turner as Joe Rantz, a rower at the University of Washington<sup>[8]</sup>
  - Ian McElhinney as Elderly Joe Rantz
- Peter Guinness<sup>[9]</sup> as George Yeomans Pocock
- Jack Mulhern as <sup>[10]</sup> Don Hume
- James Wolk as UW assistant coach Tom Bolles<sup>[11]</sup>
- Hadley Robinson<sup>[10]</sup> as Joyce Simdars, Joe Rantz's girlfriend and later wife
- Courtney Henggeler as Hazel Ulbrickson<sup>[7]</sup>
- Chris Diamantopoulos<sup>[12]</sup> as Royal Brougham
- Sam Strike<sup>[10]</sup> as Roger Morris



The film stars Joel Edgerton and Callum Turner as Al Ulbrickson and Joe Rantz.

- Alec Newman<sup>[13]</sup> as Joe's father Harry Rantz
- Luke Slattery<sup>[10]</sup> as Bobby Moch
- Thomas Elms<sup>[10]</sup> as Chuck Day
- Thomas Stephen Varey<sup>[10]</sup> as Johnny White
- Bruce Herbelin-Earle<sup>[10]</sup> as Shorty Hunt
- Wil Coban<sup>[10]</sup> as Jim McMillin
- Joel Phillimore as Gordy Adam
- Edward Baker-Duly as UW committee member Benjamin Billings
- Jack Staddon as Bo Billings
- Adrian Lukis as Jay Ellis
- Glenn Wrage as Cal Coach Ky Ebright
- Dominic Tighe as UW assistant Coach Brown
- Jyuddah Jaymes as Jesse Owens
- Jacob James Beswick as Harvey Love
- Frankie Fox as Glenn Morry
- Sam Douglas as Chairman Henry Burke
- Robert Morgan as Professor Stone
- Andrew Bridgmont as Heinrich Pauli
- Daniel Philpott as Hitler
- Nicholas Cass-Beggs as German Coach
- David Stoller as Lumber Foreman
- Austin Haynes as Joe's Grandson

## Production

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### Development

On March 2011, The Weinstein Company preemptively acquired the film adaptation rights to the book by Daniel James Brown with Kenneth Branagh set to direct and Donna Gigliotti and Judy Hofflund producing.<sup>[14][15]</sup> In October 2018, Lantern Entertainment, which acquired The Weinstein Company's

assets, contracted with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures to distribute the film worldwide.<sup>[16]</sup> In March 2020, it was announced that George Clooney would direct and produce with Grant Heslov and Mark L. Smith would write the script.<sup>[17]</sup>



Director and co-producer George Clooney (left) and co-producer Grant Heslov

## Casting

In November 2021, it was announced that Callum Turner would portray Joe Rantz.<sup>[8]</sup> In February 2022, additional casting was announced, with Joel Edgerton and Hadley Robinson amongst the additions.<sup>[10]</sup> Courtney Henggeler and James Wolk would join in March,<sup>[7][11]</sup> and Chris Diamantopoulos would join in April.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Filming

Principal photography began in March 2022,<sup>[18]</sup> and was due to take place at Winnersh Film Studios in Berkshire, as well as in Los Angeles and Berlin.<sup>[19]</sup> The 1936 Summer Olympics and scenes around the University of Washington boathouse were filmed on the Cleveland Lakes in the Cotswold Water Park near Swindon (UK), with additional scenes filmed at Molesey Boat Club,<sup>[20][21]</sup> and at Pinewood Studios.<sup>[22]</sup> Members of various boat clubs in the area, such as, St Hugh's Boat Club, Merton College Boat Club, The Queen's College Boat Club, Walbrook Rowing Club and Oriel College Boat Club from the University of Oxford, were recruited as rowers for various national teams in the Olympics. Additional filming was done at Ashlyns School for many of the scenes set inside the University of Washington.<sup>[23]</sup>

## Music

The film score was composed by Alexandre Desplat. The soundtrack was released by Sony Classical on December 22, 2023.

## Release

*The Boys in the Boat* was first screened at the reopened SIFF Cinema Downtown in Seattle on December 7, 2023.<sup>[24]</sup> The screening was attended by a number of students from Sequim, Washington, where Joe Rantz was from.<sup>[25]</sup> This was followed by the film's official world premiere at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Los Angeles on December 11, 2023.<sup>[26]</sup>

It was released by Amazon MGM Studios on December 25, 2023.<sup>[27]</sup> In the United Kingdom, it was released by Warner Bros. Pictures on January 12, 2024.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Home media

*The Boys in the Boat* was released for digital platforms on January 16, 2024.<sup>[28]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

In the United States and Canada, *The Boys in the Boat* was released alongside *Ferrari* and *The Color Purple*, and was projected to gross \$2–3 million from 2,557 theaters on its first day.<sup>[29]</sup> It ended up making \$5.7 million, finishing fourth at the box office.<sup>[30]</sup> The following weekend the film made \$8.3 million, finishing sixth at the box office and totaling \$21.9 million over its first week of release.<sup>[4]</sup> In the film's second weekend it made \$6 million, finishing sixth.<sup>[31]</sup>

### Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 58% of 156 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.1/10. The website's consensus reads: "*The Boys in the Boat* tells its inspirational true story with heart and solid craftsmanship, but director George Clooney's solidly traditional approach prevents it from leaving much of an impact."<sup>[32]</sup> Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 54 out of 100, based on 35 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.<sup>[33]</sup> Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak reported 86% filmgoers gave it a positive score.<sup>[30]</sup>

Sheri Linden of *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote, "At times *The Boys in the Boat* could have used more of an edge. But like the Huskies, it gets the job done, stumbling sometimes but mostly assured."<sup>[34]</sup> Bilge Ebiri of *Vulture* called the film "an unshowy but slick underdog sports picture, fluidly told and elegantly mounted."<sup>[35]</sup> *The Messenger's* Jordan Hoffman gave the film a score of 6.2/10, writing, "'It's a bit old fashioned' is the primary takeaway most have from *The Boys in the Boat*, and what that really means is low-stakes, relaxing and predictable, but also basically good."<sup>[36]</sup>

CNN's Brian Lowry wrote, "the movie can't really escape the whirlpool-like drag of its earnest familiarity, paddling around in a middle lane that doesn't rival the most stirring practitioners of this well-worn genre."<sup>[37]</sup> *The Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw gave the film 2/5 stars, writing, "Clooney is capable of putting much more on the scoreboard; this feels like an animatronic museum display."<sup>[38]</sup>

## Notes

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- a. Credited in the main film

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