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KEVIN COSTNER: KING OF AMERICA



A Perfect World

25th anniversary screening
Prince Charles Cinema
7 Aug, 2018



Bull Durham

30th anniversary screening
Regent Street Cinema
21 Aug, 2018

Two 35mm screenings in celebration of a Hollywood icon

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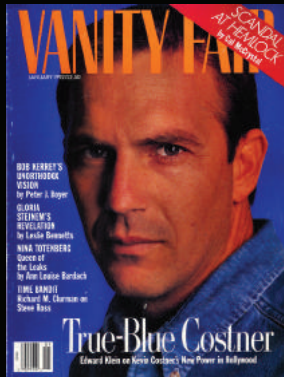
KEVIN COSTNER: KING OF AMERICA



In the decade between *The Untouchables* and *Tin Cup*, Kevin Costner was at his commercial and creative peak. In the second half of the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, he starred in many of the era's biggest films and worked with some of its most important auteurs, from Brian De Palma to Oliver Stone. The success of his directorial debut, *Dances with Wolves*, speaks to the extent of his star power during this period - not only was it a box office smash, it also won the Academy Award for Best Picture of 1990, with Costner taking the Oscar for Best Director.

Costner was the definitive Hollywood icon of the era, playing roles rooted in American myth, like the faded baseball star, the Civil War officer and the outlaw, as well as men like District Attorney Jim Garrison, U.S. Marshal Wyatt Earp and prohibition agent Eliot Ness, historical figures who weigh heavy on the American psyche. It was the era in which he gravitated towards themes and ideas that are deeply embedded in American history, like baseball and the West, two notions he would return to throughout his career, both as actor and director, and ones which are epitomised in *Bull Durham* and *A Perfect World*.

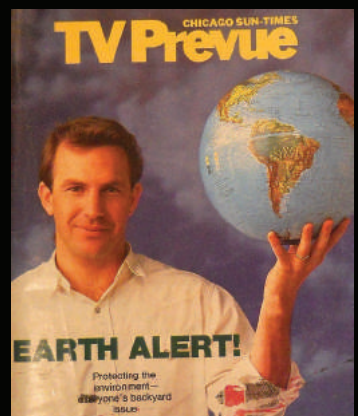
During this period, Costner switched his political allegiance from Republican to Democrat. He played golf with Ronald Reagan in the 80s, but was contributing to Democratic causes by the early 90s. The Berlin Wall had fallen and the Clinton era was dawning, and many of Costner's roles during the period engaged with the past while looking to the future - they embodied the national soul-searching at the end of the Cold War. A number of his characters, both historical and fictional, are entrenched in the national establishment, but almost invariably represent its conscience. Take Eliot Ness, a man enforcing an unworkable law, struggling to save a great, historic American city from collapsing from within. Or Lt. John Dunbar in *Dances with Wolves*, a man bound by oath to the Union Army but drawn to a need to make peace with America's native population.



Outlaw mythology is one of the defining themes of Costner's work during this period. In *The Untouchables*, *Wyatt Earp* and *The Bodyguard*, he is the enforcer, but in *A Perfect World*, director Clint Eastwood cast him against type, playing a man on the other side of the law. The idea of the blurred lines of the law dominated much of Costner's work following *A Perfect World*, especially in the western genre - *Open Range*, his most recent film as director is a prime example.

Baseball, often referred to as America's pastime, is another of Costner's great thematic interests. He has starred in five films about the sport, including *Field of Dreams*, *Bull Durham* and Sam Raimi's *For Love of the Game*. Each one approaches the game in elegiac terms, almost as if it's a lost, forgotten American ideal. Costner himself was a player in his youth, and later became an owner of the Lake County Fielders, a minor league team whose logo used an image from *Field of Dreams*.

Many of the films Costner made during this golden period are historical or engage with certain historical ideas. It's therefore interesting to note that the two films that brought the period to a close, changing the way he was seen in the subsequent decades, were pessimistic, dystopian visions of the future. *Waterworld* and *The Postman* (directed by Costner himself) were notorious flops, becoming punchlines for years to come, but looking back twenty years later, they make for an intriguing epitaph for Costner's heyday – reflective, sprawling films fixated with the sense of a country gone awry.





A Perfect World

25th anniversary screening
Prince Charles Cinema, 7 Aug 2018

138 mins / 1993 / Warner Bros.

Directed by Clint Eastwood / Written by John Lee Hancock

Starring Kevin Costner, T.J. Lowther, Clint Eastwood, Laura Dern

Expectations were high for *A Perfect World* ahead of its release in November 1993. Just a few months earlier, director Clint Eastwood had won two Oscars for *Unforgiven*, while star Costner was also riding high following the box office success of *The Bodyguard* the previous year. The film was released to admiring reviews but it never quite caught fire with audiences, and it had been forgotten by the time the awards were handed out the following year. "In this film," Clint Eastwood told *The New York Times*, "the audience was probably expecting two guys who'd be at each other, or two pals on a wild adventure. It wasn't that kind of film."

The premise - an escaped convict being pursued by a Texas Ranger - seemed to promise a tense, cat-and-mouse thriller. But John Lee Hancock's script, set in 1963 just prior to the Kennedy assassination, delivered something much more sombre and contemplative about loss, devastation and confusion, while Eastwood's relaxed directorial approach to pacing gave the characters room to breathe and allowed the central relationship to be explored in all of its emotional depth and complexity. When Butch (Costner) kidnaps eight-year-old Phillip (T.J. Lowther), he initially sees his young hostage as insurance or a bargaining chip, but as they spend long hours together on the open road, a bond develops between Butch and the fatherless boy. The criminal encourages Phillip's rebellious spirit, liberating him from the constraints of his strictly religious upbringing ("You have a god-damned red, white and blue American right to eat cotton candy and ride roller coasters," he tells his wide-eyed companion), while his unexpected role as guardian gives Butch the opportunity to be the father he never had.

This outlaw becomes an heroic, almost mythic figure in Phillip's eyes, but our heroes have a way of disappointing us. At this point in his career, Costner had become associated with a certain kind of upright integrity, playing straight-shooting protagonists like Eliot Ness or Jim Garrison. He was a movie star cut from the Gary Cooper mould. *A Perfect World* allowed him to bring murkier shades to his gleaming persona, so while Butch can be charming and tender, he's also a man who's not afraid to kill anyone who'll stand in his way, a man who can silence potential civilian do-gooders with one ice-cold glare. Butch's true darkness is revealed late in the film, in a scene that's as shocking for us as it is for Phillip. It's prompted by the sight of a man hitting a child, an action that triggers something deep inside Butch and begins a sequence of stomach-churning tension that Eastwood allows to play out for an agonising length of time. Even if we have come to know Butch as an essentially decent man, the violence that has been a constant factor in his life has left deep, indelible scars, and the way Costner suggests this backstory, and its damaging legacy, may be his finest work as an actor.

"I don't know nothing. Not one damn thing," Eastwood mutters at the film's end, aghast at the senselessness of the death he has just witnessed, but *A Perfect World* is one of his most probing studies of the cyclical nature of violence, troubled father figures, and men who live by the gun and die by the gun - all themes that he has been drawn to throughout his career. Its haunted, unassuring conclusion may have disappointed viewers expecting a conventional thriller twenty-five years ago, but away from the myopic perspective of box office expectations and awards speculation we can now see *A Perfect World* more clearly as a complex, ambitious, powerful film.



Bull Durham

30th anniversary screening
Regent Street Cinema, 21 Aug 2018

108 mins / 1988 / Orion Pictures
Written and directed by Ron Shelton
Starring Kevin Costner, Susan Sarandon, Tim Robbins

"Well I believe in the soul... the cock, the pussy, the small of a woman's back... the hangin' curveball, high-fibre, good Scotch. That the novels of Susan Sontag are self-indulgent, overrated crap. I believe Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. I believe there ought to be a Constitutional amendment outlawing AstroTurf and the designated hitter. I believe in the sweet spot, soft core pornography, opening your presents Christmas morning rather than Christmas Eve, and I believe in long, slow, deep, soft, wet kisses that last three days."

In the meat-and-potatoes manifesto of minor league catcher Crash Davis, Costner got one of the iconic monologues of modern American cinema, one that defined his appeal: a seeker, but a pragmatist; disillusioned, but a believer in bedrock values; a lover, but less a baby-faced pin-up than a man who knows his way around.

Writer-director Ron Shelton, who would go on to even greater success with *White Men Can't Jump* (1992) and would work with Costner again on *Tin Cup* (1996), had also played baseball until the age of 25 and did himself know something of his way around. He modelled Costner's character and his attitude to the sport on William Holden's character in *The Wild Bunch*, in that he was "a guy who loved something more than it loved him." *Bull Durham* is, indeed, the film which encapsulates baseball not only as a sport, but as a defining American idea, especially in the way it treats the minor leagues. Unlike other developmental leagues in American sports, the minor leagues occupy a curiously outsized position in the national psyche, because players move both ways, by being 'called up' from the minors to the majors, or by facing relegation from the majors to the minors. Tim Robbins's rookie pitcher Nuke LaLoosh, and Costner's Crash, represent the leagues of the promising up-and-comers and the washed-up has-beens. Costner, playing this role at the age of 32, demonstrates both the vitality of peak stardom and the poignantly short shelf-life of a sports career.

As Annie Savoy, the woman who reads Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson to players, and treats being a muse and a groupie with the sweeping charisma of a high priestess, Susan Sarandon refers to life around the game as 'the Church of Baseball.' Shelton calls it 'the talking sport', and one of the appeals of *Bull Durham* is in the way its characters argue, banter and philosophise in their journey towards home runs. "It's the first baseball movie that gets things right without trying," said Roger Angell in his classic New Yorker essay on the film. "There isn't a line in it that feels reverent or fake-tough or hurriedly explanatory."

Wry, poignant, very funny and astonishingly sexy, *Bull Durham* was a big hit in 1988 and remains one of the most beloved of all sports movies by those who know it. Such a celebrated hit is not the kind of movie we'd normally screen – but it doesn't get as much TV play as it once did, and is very rarely shown in UK cinemas. So here we celebrate its unhurried vision of life around America's pastime through the twilight of summer, in the hope of reminding its fans why they love it and giving a new generation a chance to discover it.

KEVIN COSTNER

b. January 18, 1955, Lynwood, CA

FILMOGRAPHY

Malibu Hot Summer (1981)
Night Shift (1982)
Frances (1982)
Chasing Dreams (1982)
Table for Five (1983)
Stacy's Knights (1982)
The Big Chill (1983) (scenes deleted)
Testament (1983)
Silverado (1985)
The Untouchables (1987)
Bull Durham (1988)
Field of Dreams (1989)
The Gunrunner (1989)


Revenge (1990)
Dances with Wolves (1990) (also director)
Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves (1991)
JFK (1991)
The Bodyguard (1992)
A Perfect World (1993)
Wyatt Earp (1994)
The War (1994)
Waterworld (1995)
Tin Cup (1996)
The Postman (1997) (also director)
Message in a Bottle (1999)
For Love of the Game (1999)
Play It to the Bone (1999)

Thirteen Days (2000)
3000 Miles to Graceland (2001)
Dragonfly (2002)
Open Range (2003) (also director)
The Upside of Anger (2005)
Rumor Has It... (2005)
The Guardian (2006)
Mr. Brooks (2007)
Swing Vote (2008)
The New Daughter (2009)

The Company Men (2010)
Field of Dreams 2: Lockout (2011) (comedy short)
Hatfields & McCays (2012) (TV mini-series)
Man of Steel (2013)
Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit (2014)
3 Days to Kill (2014)
Draft Day (2014)
Black or White (2014)
McFarland, USA (2015)
Billy the Kid: New Evidence (2015)
Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016)
Criminal (2016)
The Hurt Business (2016)
Fastball (2016)
Hidden Figures (2016)
Molly's Game (2017)

The People of the Standing Stone: the Oneida Nation, the War for Independence, and the Making of America (2017) (short film)
Yellowstone (2018) (TV series)
The Highwaymen (2018)





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