



Perhaps I'm predisposed to liking *Big Fan* since a) I'm a die hard Giants fan, b) I grew up in the neighborhood where it was shot, and c) it's a film about sports fanaticism, which is a topic I know quite a bit about. But that doesn't mean you'll hate *Big Fan* if you aren't familiar with sports or the New York football Giants because this isn't a film about sports, it's a film about fandom -- about being so in love with something you go overboard and neglect your friends, your family and your life in order to feed your addiction. This isn't a comedy about the goofy football fan who gets off on chanting and screaming his team's name; it's instead a cold, lonely drama (with brief moments of awkward humor) about the neurotic football fan who'd give up everything (and I mean *everything*) to see his team make the playoffs.

Set in the borough of Staten Island, home to the blue collar heroes of New York City, *Big Fan* follows just one of several guys who live and die by their favorite sports team. Football is in no way just a simple form of weekend entertainment in New York; it's almost a religion for some people -- including Paul Aufiero (Patton Oswalt), a 35-year-old Giants fanatic who still lives at home with his nagging mother while working the late shift inside one of those parking garage toll booths at a hospital. While at work, Paul spends his time carefully penning Giants-themed trash talk speeches so that he can call in to the overnight talk radio show and give those Philadelphia Eagles fans (especially one loudmouth nicknamed Philadelphia Phil) some of the business. This is Paul's entire life -- and when he's not at work writing his speeches, or outside Giants Stadium watching the games on a makeshift television with his one friend, he's dealing with a family who want Paul to finally do something with his life.

But Paul doesn't want anything more out of life; he's perfectly content with what he has now, which is a football team with a great record nearing the playoffs. And things appear to get even better for Paul when him and his friend Sal (Kevin Corrigan) spot the famed Giants linebacker -- and Paul's favorite player -- Quantrell Bishop filling up his car at a gas station. The boys then decide to follow Bishop and his crew through the ghetto areas of Staten Island, to a random house, and then into Manhattan, eventually winding up at a strip club in Times Square. After a couple missed opportunities to chat up their football idol, Paul finally makes a move into Bishop's VIP section where he inadvertently mentions that he followed the Bishop crew all the way from Staten Island -- a fact that enrages Bishop to the point that he decides to beat the living snot out of Paul in a fit of rage.

Of course the beat-down story blows up, unfortunately placing Paul at the center of the hottest news in New York City. Bishop is suspended pending an investigation, the Giants start losing games without their star linebacker, the Philadelphia Eagles begin gaining ground in the division, and Paul absolutely hates his life. His family -- including a brother and sister who are married and have their own families -- want Paul to sue Bishop for millions, while a NYC detective wants to put the criminal behind bars. And Paul ... he just wants the Giants to make the playoffs.

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Written and directed by Robert Siegel, it's easy to see the similarities between *Big Fan* and *The Wrestler*, which

[Sign In](#) 3 days ago wrote. Similar in style to that of Darren Aronofsky (who was originally tapped to direct *Big Fan*), the film feels small and intimate, shot with this kind of harsh working class tint that injects real life into every scene. Siegel, a huge sports fan himself, grew up on Long Island listening to these same fanatics phone their favorite sports-talk show late at night -- most of whom called so much they had their own nicknames. And there's nothing wrong with a dedicated sports hobby, but *Big Fan* shows you what happens when that hobby turns into a dangerous lifestyle -- one so consuming it erases all forms of common sense.

As Paul, Patton Oswalt -- who's used to shoveling out the jokes on stage -- gives a truly genuine performance full of dedication and heartbreak (the only thing missing from him -- but what we pick up with his family -- is a thick Staten Island accent). Matching his character in lameness is Corrigan's Sal, a disheveled, quieter Giants fan who, essentially, is Paul's biggest fan. Siegel's debut feature is definitely a strong one, full of real life and complicated characters. And while most of us have never stepped off the ledge in support of our favorite sports team, we can certainly relate to the love, passion and faith that goes into being a big fan.

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