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Film review

Critic's Rating

**Big Fan**

Dir. **Robert D. Siegel**. 2009. R. 86mins. Patton Oswalt, Kevin Corrigan, Jonathan Hamm.

It's easy—painfully easy, for some viewers—to recognize the football lover at the center of Robert D. Siegel's cringe-comedic character study. Maybe they've seen guys like Paul, a gridiron geek played to mouth-breathing perfection by Patton Oswalt, leading tailgate chants in the Giants Stadium parking lot. (He and Kevin Corrigan's Zen-cretin buddy never enter the arena; they just listen to the games outside on a tiny boom box.) Perhaps they've heard such superfans call into radio sports-talk shows, or watched similar Staten Islanders shuffle through the outer borough's suburbs. Anyone fluent in '70s antihero cinema also knows that Paul, who shares a lineage with New Hollywood's misguided loners, will go down a dark path after a violent chance encounter with his favorite player (Hamm). The people for whom the single-minded manchild may resonate the most, however, are film nerds; such intense, do-or-die devotion will strike a power chord among those of us who've turned adolescent fixations into life-consuming obsessions.

Regardless of where you fall on the scale, you'll appreciate how both the writer-director and Oswalt deftly balance treating Paul with bemused condescension and bruised humanity. (The supporting cast isn't quite so lucky, with Paul's family reduced to vulgar, Fellini-esque caricatures; enough with the cheap shots and class superiority.) Unlike *The Wrestler*, which Siegel scripted, *Big Fan* has a way of making a socially marginal figure seem oddly charismatic without stacking the sympathy deck. By the film's end, Paul seems just as creepy and screwed up as when he started. He has, however, stayed true to his team.—*David Fear*

Opens Fri; Angelika. [Find showtimes](#)

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A generation began in his backyard. From Academy Award-winning director Ang

**STILL WALKING** 02:01  
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**BIG FAN** 02:26  
Patton Oswalt plays a hardcore New York Giants football fan who comes to terms