

'Varsity Blues' boils down to teen soap opera

BY SAM MCKEWIN
Senior editor

It was amusing to watch James Van Der Beek, of angst-ridden teen

show "Dawson's Creek" at a recent premiere party, call his character in the new movie "Varsity Blues" completely different from the role he plays on the small tube.

It might be, if you consider he has a Southern accent. And instead of loving movies, he plays football. Oh yeah, and his hair's been cut. And it's brown. But the differences more or less end right there.

Yes "Varsity Blues" is a movie about high school football - Texas high school football, to be exact - and it would hope to ensnare you in its world of high-pressure athletics, with a little teen-girl skin tossed in for good measure.

But make no mistake, "Blues" is a soap opera with pads on. Its characters, including Van Der Beek's backup quarterback Jonathon Moxon, play out much the same hour-long drama that can be seen on the WB Network: oversexed, over-the-top and a little too smart for your (or their) own good.

"Varsity Blues" is the tale of West Canaan, Texas - more specifically, the West Canaan Coyotes, the high school football team that the town revolves around.

The town is geared toward football like a machine. There are huge pep rallies. Life-size billboards litter the yards of the players. The starters can attain just about any luxury they want, especially their choice of beautiful women who always seem to dot the movie landscape.

It's Moxon who wants no part of it. As backup to best friend Lance Harbor (Paul Walker), Van Der

Beek's character is content to sit on the sidelines his senior year, awaiting a chance to escape away to college with his intelligent, sensitive and, of course, gorgeous girlfriend Julie Harbor (Amy Smart).

(Jon Voight) and his father (Thomas Duffy). Poor little Moxon is confused.

The rest can be guessed. Moxon fights with his dad, the coach, his girlfriend, his friends and himself. A couple of people get naked. Players steal police cars and go to strip clubs. You know, the regular high school kids' night-out stuff.

Director Brian Robbins ("Good Burger") wants to capture the truth and honesty of high school life and the pressure of small-town sports. Some of it's there, but the movie's too glossy and overwrought to really matter.

Worst is Voight, who creates a character who is borderline insane. It's doubtful he, as his character asserts, could change academic records of players who disobey him, thus denying them entrance into college. Coaches don't

have this power, nor would they get away with it if they did. The whole movie boils down to the big game and Moxon's big speech to the team. There's no reason to reveal who wins the big game; if one looks hard enough, the trailer gives it



COURTESY PHOTO
JAMES VAN DER BEEK plays Jonathon Moxon, a reluctant high school quarterback pitted against an obsessed and abusive football coach (Jon Voight) in the coming-of-age Texas football film "Varsity Blues."

Well, Van Der Beek can't be a backup the whole movie, so Lance Harbor has to get hurt. He does, and he loses all the fame and possibly his girlfriend, Darcy (Ali Larter), who goes after Moxon. Moxon is pressured by the winning-obsessed coach

The Facts

Title: "Varsity Blues"
Stars: James Van Der Beek, Jon Voight
Director: Brian Robbins
Rating: R (adult content, language)
Grade: C-
Five Words: "Varsity Blues" is hardly believable

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