

Quincy/Boston  
The Patriot Ledger  
August 22, 2008  
**SIXTY SIX**  
Review: Al Alexander  
Grade: Very Good  
Photo: N/A  
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*\*Taken Off Line*

## MOVIE REVIEW: Make seeing 'Sixty Six' a goal

Soccer match just a backdrop for heartfelt coming-of-age story

By Al Alexander  
The Patriot Ledger

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QUINCY — It's no secret that you can get your kicks on Route 66, but I'll bet few realize you also can get them in "Sixty Six," the quirky British coming-of-age comedy set against the backdrop of England winning its most recent World Cup soccer title.

That was 42 years ago last month. But the memory remains fresh in the mind of filmmaker Paul Weiland, who was 13 and excitedly planning what he hoped would be "the 'Gone With the Wind' of bar mitzvahs."

A series of calamities got in the way, however, the biggest of which was England's Cinderella footballers, who despite long odds kept winning and winning, raising the distinct possibility they'd play in the title game July 30, the day of Weiland's bar mitzvah.

Anyone who has ever had the misfortune of throwing or attending a party on the day of a can't-miss sporting event, say Game 7 of the 2004 American League Championship Series, will instantly identify with the plight facing Weiland's alter ego, Bernie Ruben (Gregg Sulkin), as he comes to the hard realization that he could well have the lowest-attended bar mitzvah in British history.

You may also firmly relate to his experiences of growing up in a family where parents and siblings are so self-absorbed they rarely, if ever, notice you exist. But Weiland, despite his best intentions, too often oversells Bernie's trials (he's always picked after the kid with polio when choosing sides for football) and tribulations (he has frequent asthma attacks) to the point that it completely undermines his story's best asset: realism.

What saves him are the performances by a top-notch cast headed by Helena Bonham Carter and Eddie Marsan as Bernie's odd, but sweet, parents, Esther and Manny, and Stephen Rae as a respiratory therapist who becomes Bernie's closest confidant.

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All are superb, but it's Marsan who steals the movie as a perennial loser – much like England's soccer team – who manages to shine when you least expect it.

You almost feel guilty for laughing at Manny's peculiarities, be it his stashing wads of cash in the attic of his North London home, or the insane jealousy he harbors for his gregarious younger brother, Jimmy (Peter Serafinowicz), who is everything he is not.

If the phrase weren't already taken, you could say he suffers from an acute case of Manny being Manny. But unlike his wife, who cherishes his obsessive-compulsive oddities, his youngest son sees him merely as a source of frustration and embarrassment.

Their futile struggles to bond are the heart of "Sixty Six," and both Marsan and the enormously gifted newcomer Sulkin drain every ounce of emotion from it they can, even when they run smack into a wall of happy-ending formula.

They get to you in ways you could never imagine, especially after being undermined by a first act in which Weiland and his co-writers, Peter Straughan and Bridget O'Connor, lather on the quirks and clichés.

Thankfully, Marsan and Sulkin transcend the often silly artifice to get under the skin of their characters, each of whom is dealing with issues much deeper than a bar mitzvah or World Cup match.

Their desperate fights to be noticed move you almost as much as the film's message about adversity being the true measure of a man.

Neither Weiland's uneven direction nor Joby Talbot's intrusive score can get in the way of it, either, as "Sixty Six" satisfyingly evolves from cheeky, light-hearted comedy into heart-wrenching drama. Score one for the Brits.

Movie reviewSIXTY SIX (PG-13 for language, some sexual content and brief nudity.) Co-written and directed by Paul Weiland. At Kendall Square, Cambridge.