

film

Chill Out

Icelandic soccer hunks heat up the screen;
Doris Duke TV movie leaves us out in the cold

Eleven Men Out

For most of us, Iceland conjures up images of, well, ice. But there's a lot more happening there, according to *Eleven Men Out*, now available on DVD. This infectious dramedy puts a new spin on an old theme: What if one member of a successful, beloved, macho sports team turned out to be gay?

Hunky Ottar Thor (Björn Hlynur Haraldsson) is a soccer superstar. During a post-game locker room scene, a journalist informs Ottar that he'll be a back-page item in a profile story they're doing. Apparently soccer isn't "sexy" enough to sell magazines. Irritated, Ottar decides to give the journalist a juicy story by abruptly coming out: "I'm gay. Homosexual," he says, almost offhandedly. Typical of the film's sly humor, the reporter whispers to him, "You're on the cover now."

Alas, not everyone is as excited about Ottar's revelations. His bigoted father suggests a psychiatrist. His teammates vacillate from "who cares" to "that fairy." His mom moans a lot. His son freaks out, and his drunken ex-wife just wants to give him a blow job.

Inevitably, Ottar is booted from the team, but he is quickly taken in by an amateur team struggling in the bush leagues. And there's an extra payoff for Ottar, as the manager tells him, "One or two of the

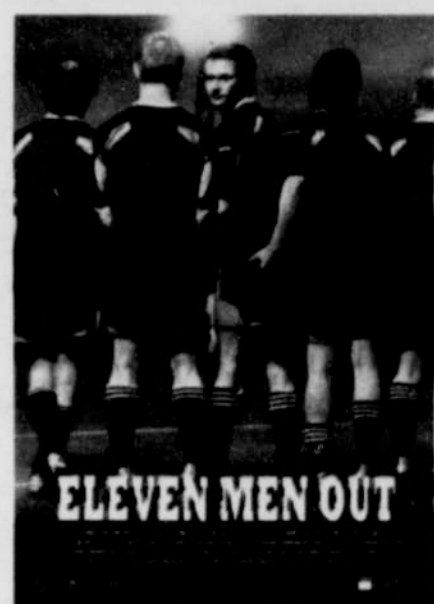
players are sort of gay." Ottar signs up and is soon dating Daniel, a cute twink player who's apparently been had by most of the team members gay and straight. Meanwhile, Dad continues his campaign to "fix" Ottar; his brother tries to help Dad "ease into the homo vibe" by renting *Philadelphia*; and Ottar tries to bring his son around, navigate his first gay relationship and figure out if he wants to become a big-time queer activist.

The film's leisurely narrative and occasional sitcom impulses will put off viewers who want a lot of high drama or deep characterizations in their gay sports movies. But there are enough compensations here to make it worthwhile, not the least being lots of full-frontal nudity, and dialogue like the line spoken by one of Ottar's straight teammates: "What's so bad about being gay? Isn't everyone these days?"

—Gary Morris

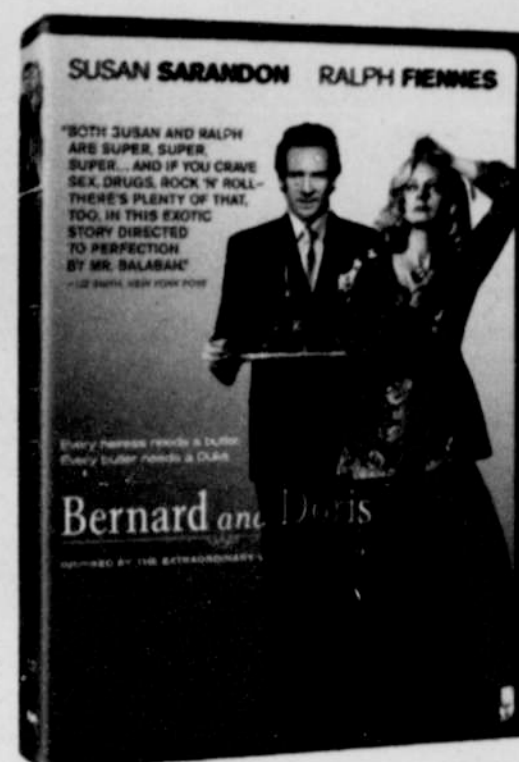
Bernard & Doris

Bernard & Doris, an HBO film about the surprisingly close relationship between tobacco heiress Doris Duke and her butler Bernard Lafferty, starts out charmingly intimate, only to end up seeming somewhat shallow, smaller in scope than necessary.



Susan Sarandon channels Duke with aplomb, and Ralph Fiennes makes a suitably androgynous, stiff-upper-lipped Lafferty; with rare interruptions, the film focuses exclusively on this odd couple. It works intermittently as a very small character study of the two, who are unexpected kindred spirits. The development of their relationship from a strictly work-related one to a friendship is the film's story, and it isn't a bad one.

Duke was a rich and powerful woman, but she experienced so much failure and trauma in her love and family lives that she could not be emotionally close to anyone until Lafferty arrived and proved that someone could care about her without ulterior motives. He begins his service to her as a timid, impeccably self-possessed gay man who is uncloseted yet still overly self-conscious; his blooming out into a comfortable level of flamboyance (including sharing his boss's accessories) under Duke's tutelage is one of the more interesting aspects of their evolu-



ing closeness. The pair's shared, destructive weakness for alcohol represents the dark side of their deep bond—and

is pretty much all the film offers in the way of dramatic complication or tension.

Director Bob Balaban and screenwriter Hugh Costello frustrate by hinting at what makes these personalities what they are without letting us experience any of it. (The film's staid, TV-movie visual sense and equally blah score don't help matters.) Their fascinating, complex life stories are related to one another in a few lines of dialogue. *Bernard & Doris* feels overstuffed with scenes of them talking; perhaps the suggestion is that they lived out their lives mainly to relate them to one another and that their friendship superseded everything else. But the film lacks anything to convince us of that level of obsession. By the end, it has failed to earn or justify its claustrophobic approach to two people who had so much of interest going on outside their friendship.

—Christopher McQuinn 10

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