

Review: Basketball fans in for a treat with Adam Sandler's Netflix outing 'Hustle'



CHENNAI: Watching Adam Sandler leave his funnyman persona behind for deeper roles in recent hits “Uncut Gems” and “The Meyerowitz Stories” has been refreshing, and fans of the actor will be glad to see his extremely nuanced portrayal of a basketball scout in Netflix’s latest sporting venture, “Hustle.”



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In it he plays Stanley Sugarman, a down-on-his-luck basketball scout who discovers an extraordinary player abroad and brings him home without executive approval. Obsessed with the game, Sugarman neglects his wife, played by the talented Queen

Latifah who is ultimately wasted in the role, and their teenage daughter, Alex (Jordan Hull).

Director Jeremiah Zagar, who recently made the switch from documentaries to narrative features, offers a wonderful piece of cinema that has not only on-court excitement but also an arresting on-screen dynamic between Sugarman and his Spanish discovery, Bo Cruz (played by real life NBA player Juancho Hernangómez).

Hernangómez plays a heavily tattooed, seven-foot, 22-year-old construction worker who has unbelievable skills on the city's outdoor public courts in Spain. The film focuses on Sugarman's efforts to get his new ward noticed by NBA teams, with more than a few obstacles in their path.

Zagar and cinematographer Zak Mulligan create magic by capturing the players' rhythmic motion and movement, while the compelling exploration of family dynamics — not just between Sugarman and his folks, but also among Cruz and his family — offer an altogether different layer that complements the battles on the court and the many training montage scenes.

The script, by Taylor Materne and Will Fetters, also manages to infuse dramatic tension between cocky player Kermit Wilts (Anthony Edwards) and Cruz during an exhibition game, which is just one example of why this film works on multiple levels — the tension is both physical and verbal.

While the writing conveys a wonderful understanding between Sugarman and Cruz, Hernangómez's character is not well etched out. Sandler gets most of the attention and a sense of balance is missing. However, the two-hour narrative is well paced and well crafted. Although it is predictable to a point, it is immersive and worth a watch, especially for basketball fans as the long list of cameos reads like a dream NBA fantasy team: Luka Dončić, Trae Young, Kyle Lowry and Tobias Harris all make short appearances that will excite fans of the game, but could leave others scratching their heads.