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Hawkes is good to the 'Bone'

Supporting actor noms vie for glory

By Josh Chetwynd





CHRISTIAN BALE

"The Fighter"

Why he'll win: Bale literally transformed himself for this role, losing 30 pounds and adding the bug-eyed frenetic mannerisms of his real-life subject, Dicky Eklund. Between the Golden Globe he received and the various critic and guild awards he's picked up, Bale's performance has been the most lauded of the group.

Maybe not: Maybe there's been too much applause for the performance and voters will have a bit of Bale fatigue. Or maybe there's still some backlash out there from Bale's "Terminator: Salvation" tantrum.

Critic's quote: "Bale endows (his character) with a confidence that has no justification in reality and that can only come from a lifetime spent as mother's favorite. His performance is shrewdly observed, physically precise and psychologically acute. It's beautiful work." -- Mick LaSalle, San Francisco Chronicle

JOHN HAWKES

"Winter's Bone"

Why he'll win: Hawkes plays Teardrop with an uncomfortable calm that allows him to serve as the fulcrum for the film's smoldering tension. Academy members will undoubtedly appreciate how Hawkes never oversells his hardscrabble character.

Maybe not: Hawkes had the least screen time compared to the other nominees. While he does a lot with those moments, it may not be enough to put him over the top.

Critic's quote: "Played with unnerving conviction by John Hawkes, Teardrop scares even the scariest people in Ree's neck of the woods. With his haggard face and deep-set, almost satanic eyes, Teardrop is the area's intimidating lone wolf, and while (co-star Jennifer) Lawrence's performance will get more attention, it is Hawkes' work that truly makes us believe that this world exists." -- Kenneth Turan, Los Angeles Times

JEREMY RENNER

"The Town"

Why he'll win: In what could have easily turned into a parody, Renner imbues the sociopath Jem with depth and complexity. If Academy members want to reward Ben Affleck's "The Town," Renner is their only option.

Maybe not: Renner now has back-to-back Oscar noms and some might decide that's reward enough. Moreover, while impressive in this film, Renner's work in "The Hurt Locker" may make this performance in this film appear relatively small.

Critic's quote: "(Director Ben Affleck's) instincts are also right in casting Renner in the role of Jem, the local baddie with a short fuse, and letting the effortlessly magnetic actor steer the pace of the action, hinting at danger even when Jem's just nursing a brew." -- Lisa Schwarzbaum, Entertainment Weekly

MARK RUFFALO

"The Kids Are All Right"

Why he'll win: Ruffalo offers one of the more subtle performances of the bunch as Paul, the sperm donor/birth father to kids Joni (Mia Wasikowska) and Laser (Josh Hutcherson). Voters could end up selecting both lead actress nominee Annette Bening and Ruffalo if they want to fully laud the excellent ensemble nature of the movie.

Maybe not: It's been awhile since a single film earned two acting Oscars (Hilary Swank and Morgan Freeman in 2004's "Million Dollar Baby"). The Academy might choose to keep the trend going and just honor Bening over Ruffalo. Plus, Ruffalo's understated turn isn't the type of tour de force role that typically nabs the statue in this category.

Critic's quote: "Ruffalo shows his depth in a pitch-perfect performance of a freewheeling guy who seems like an older brother of the rootless fellow he played so captivantly a decade ago in 'You Can Count on Me.?' " -- Claudia Puig, USA Today

GEOFFREY RUSH

"The King's Speech"

Why he'll win: As the calm commoner/speech therapist Lionel Logue, Rush gives a restrained performance that serves as the perfect foil to Colin Firth's volatile royal Bertie. As the most-nominated film, "The King's Speech" could ride the momentum to a slew of statues and Rush may get swept up in the tide.

Maybe not: Rush could just as easily get lost in the shuffle as one of the film's 12 noms (especially considering the abundance of attention his co-star Firth has received for his effort). Also, while it has been a long time, Rush is the only actor in the category to have previously won an Academy Award (his best actor turn in the 1996 drama "Shine"), which may leave some voters looking to go with a first-timer.

Critic's quote: "Rush is adorably disheveled here, confident regardless of the formality of the situation. He's afraid of nothing, in contrast with his powerful but nervous patient (Firth), and watching the sparring matches between two actors at top of their game is nothing short of a joy." -- Christy Lemire, Associated Press