

Sentiment, humor fill engaging sports flicks

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — *Cool Runnings* (Disney) sounds like a goofy Hollywood fantasy but it is actually a loosely based account of how four Jamaicans — who never even saw snow — competed in the 1988 Winter Olympics as world-class bobsledders.

Leading the enormously appealing cast is Leon as champion sprinter Derice, who comes up with the idea to form a bobsled team after he, Junior (Rawle D. Lewis) and Yul (Malik Yoba) don't make the Olympic running team. Add Derice's happy-go-lucky pal, Sanka (Doug E. Doug) as the necessary fourth man and former Olympian bobsledder Irv (John Candy) as their reluctant coach and they are ready to practice. But where? Under a broiling sun with junkyard parts as a pretend sled.

Jon Turteltaub directs with a finely honed appreciation for the ridiculous. The humor is contagious, with some laugh-out-loud lines by the irrepressibly sunny Jamaicans, who are fish way out of water when they arrive in Canada's calamitous clime.

Each of the four athletes has distinct personalities and enough conflicts to make you root for these underdogs as the odds mount against them. The pace is lively, the reggae music track vibrant and the visuals quite colorful.

Cool Runnings is high-spirited fun. Because of fleeting violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Rudy

Rudy (TriStar) is the true story of a working-class Catholic boy from the Midwest who refused to give up on his dream of attending Notre Dame and playing on their football team.

Everyone discourages him, including his blue-collar father (Ned Beatty), who reminds Rudy (Sean Astin) that Notre Dame is for "rich kids, smart kids, kids who are great athletes." Daniel "Rudy" Ruettinger has poor grades, little athletic ability and is physically slight.

By age 22 he is still working in the steel mill with his dad and older brothers. His best friend's death in a



The Walt Disney Company
With a down-and-out ex-champion slider named Irv (John Candy, second from right) as their coach, an unlikely team of Jamaican bobsledders sets out to compete at the Olympics in the entertaining *Cool Runnings*.

work accident galvanizes Rudy to move to South Bend, where a priest (Robert Prosky) impressed by his gritty determination gets him into a nearby college.

More help comes in the form of Fortune (Charles S. Dutton), the stadium's maintenance head, who gives Rudy a job as a groundskeeper and lets him sleep in a storage room.

This is a classic underdog story that director David Anspaugh unreels in

inspirational fashion. Astin plays the title character with a palpable earnestness — and the bulldog tenacity needed to make his dream a reality.

The movie is heavily sentimental as well as inspirational, which may not bother some. Others may find this a heavy-handed approach to the story.

Due to gridiron skirmishes, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

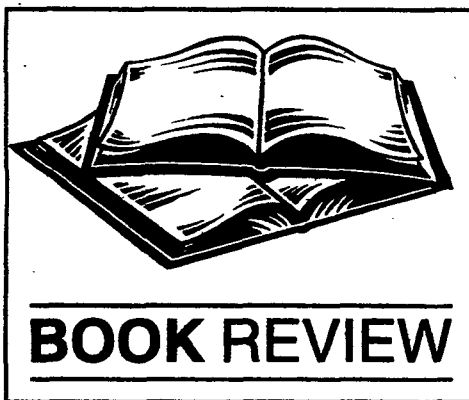
Look at Judaism offers glimpse into other faiths' trends

A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America, by Jack Wertheimer, Basic Books (New York, 1993); 267 pages; \$25.

By Eugene J. Fisher
Catholic News Service

Although numbering only slightly less than 6 million, the American Jewish community in its various denominations and nondenominational movements covers the spectrum of American religious options from rigorous traditionalism, such as found in Hasidism, to the avowed atheism of "humanist Judaism."

In this sense its story mirrors, as author Jack Wertheimer shows in *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*, the internal and external pressures on all American religious communities, while yet remaining distinctively "other."



Wertheimer, professor of history at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, presents a capsule history of the last half-century of Jewish religious life in America. The stress here is on "religious" rather than "ethnic" or other ways of viewing Jewishness. It is a stress that will increase the appeal of the book — with its handy summaries of statistics to its telling anecdotes of Jewish institutional life — to Catholic readers who as often as not will be able to see reflected here much of the tensions and turmoils of our own

community.

The book takes the reader from the stability of post-World War II Judaism, through the turbulent 1960s and early '70s, to the present period which the author views as one of simultaneous "drift toward religious minimalism" and "religious revival." He takes time to look separately at the differing yet related sagas of Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism, each of which reacts to and sometimes against prevailing sociocultural patterns in the larger American society of which they are a part. It is not irrelevant to note that the author is himself a Conservative rabbi.

Wertheimer narrates numerous examples of religious creativity that have emerged from each of the Jewish movements since mid-century. Many of these, such as the "havurah" movement (small, "base" or "floating" communities only tenuously attached to existing synagogues) or responses to women's issues, have parallels with similar felt needs within the Catholic community over the years.

The narration is often salted with a gentle sense of irony, as the author points out how more recent liturgical innovations in Reform Judaism, such as the reintroduction of Hebrew prayers, the wearing of yarmulkes, and even levels of kosher food, have been seen by some Reform leaders as an

abandonment of the purity of the movement's traditional ideology. These creative responses, and how they have worked out in practice for the Jewish community, can provide insights for Catholics facing similar situations.

There are unresolved crises for religious Jews as for Catholics. Many Jewish commentators focus on intermarriage, anti-Semitism and assimilation as the chief dangers to American Jewish survival. While not discounting these, Wertheimer zeroes in on the increasing tensions between the major branches of American Judaism, their increasing intolerance of each other, as perhaps the greatest danger to the Jewish people as a whole since it could deprive the community of the ability to act in concert with respect to the many challenges facing Jews today, including relations with Israel.

This is an honest and well written book that should be read by anyone interested in the state of religion in the waning years of the 20th century.

Fisher is associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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