

WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

***Children of Glory* at the 2008 Wisconsin Film Festival**

Kristian Knutsen on Monday 04/07/2008 10:00 pm , (8) Recommendations

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The Games of the XXIX Olympiad are set to begin four months from now in Beijing, and there's already plenty of controversy. The Olympic torch relay has been met with ongoing protests from Tibetan independence activists since getting started in Athens two weeks ago, and objections to the Chinese government's policies in Tibet and towards Sudan, among other issues, build as the games approach.

It's business as usual, in other words, for the quadrennial tradition, a nexus of international politics despite its ostensible mission of cross-border camaraderie. Take the movie [*Children of Glory*](#), for example.

Combining Cold War conflict and sports, the film dramatizes the [Hungarian Revolution of 1956](#) through a love story between a student dissident and a member of Hungary's national water polo team. While Soviet tanks were crushing the uprising in the streets of Budapest, the Hungarian national team was training for the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, its members only learning the true extent and brutality of the subjugation upon arriving in Australia.

The defending gold medal champions would get a chance to defend their national pride, though, in a semifinal showdown against the U.S.S.R. in what became known as the [Blood in the Water match](#), perhaps the most famous water polo contest in history.

Sound familiar? The Miracle on Ice game between the U.S. and C.C.C.P. in the 1980 Winter Olympics holds a fabled position in American sports history, particularly in these lands of cheese and sky-blue waters, and has been the subject of multiple dramatic and documentary films. Though the Hungarians were not underdogs versus the Soviets in their Olympic showdown more than a half-century ago, this was no contest between superpowers, and so the stakes were commensurately higher. So too, is its place in Hungary's history. Hence the creation of *Children of Glory*, a big-budget Hollywood-style epic about the match.

Titled *Szabadság, szerelem* in its native Hungary, *Children of Glory* was directed by Krisztina Goda, and featured the work of a pair of Hungarian-American heavyweights in the film industry. Producing was Andrew Vajna, who was behind such films as *Terminator 3* and *Die Hard: With a Vengeance*, while *Basic Instinct* and *Showgirls* writer Joe Eszterhas contributed to the screenplay. Their influence was palpable.

Children of Glory is a by-the-book costume melodrama, starting with the improbable (and ahistorical) romance between the two main characters, and continuing with typical sports movies clichés, limited characterizations, and focus on action set-pieces. These battle sequences and water polo matches are executed tolerably, though, and the visuals are engrossing.

I'm a sucker for historical epics, and this one is particularly interesting for its application of standard Hollywood tropes in a foreign context. It also tells a story not very well known outside of Hungary or the worlds of water polo or Olympics history.

Children of Glory was one of two titles at this year's Wisconsin Film Festival about the Blood in the Water match, the other being the contemporaneous documentary *Freedom's Fury*, which was in turn produced by Vajna, Lucy Liu, Amy Sommer, and Quentin Tarantino. I wasn't able to see that film, but I certainly want to now.

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