

# *Everybody Wants Some!!*—Richard Linklater goes to college

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*Written and directed by Richard Linklater*

Director Richard Linklater is among the more interesting filmmakers to have emerged from the American “independent film” scene of the 1990s. He is a specialist in coming-of-age tales, and his better films—including *Slacker* (1991), *Before Sunrise* (1995), and the more recent *Boyhood* (2014)—have given us sensitive portraits of young, often aimless and unfulfilled characters anxious about the future that awaits them.

Among Linklater’s more popular works is *Dazed and Confused* (1993), which concerns an incoming class of freshmen baseball players at a Texas high school during the mid-1970s. They smoke pot, chase girls and are both harassed and mentored by the new class of seniors.

The director’s latest, *Everybody Wants Some!!*, is not a direct sequel to *Dazed and Confused*, but it is certainly its spiritual successor. It follows a team of libidinous college baseball players as they await the start of classes at a fictional Texas college in 1980.

The film opens with the arrival of freshman pitcher Jake (Blake Jenner) three days before classes begin. He is quickly introduced to the eccentric and competitive teammates with whom he will share a house. Among others, there is Glen McReynolds (Tyler Hoechlin), who can swing at a baseball with an axe and slice it in half; the egotistical and self-destructive Jay Niles (Juston Street) from Detroit; the pothead Willoughby (Wyatt Russell); and the inevitable country bumpkin, Billy Autrey (Will Brittain).

The house rules, handed down by the team’s coach, are simple enough. No booze is allowed in the house, and no girls are allowed upstairs. We know instantly that both rules will be broken on the first night.

When they aren’t throwing house parties, the teammates go dancing at a local disco called Sound

Machine, or at least until they get thrown out after Niles starts a brawl. Subsequent adventures lead them to a country western bar, a hardcore punk show and a costume party hosted by art students. They even manage to play a little baseball and attend a class or two.

More thoughtful and quiet than some of the other players, Jake eventually stops chasing girls to begin a romance with art student Beverly (Zoey Deutch), providing the film with some of its sweetest, most genuine moments.

*Everybody Wants Some!!* has its strengths and weaknesses. Linklater is capable of portraying certain individuals and situations with considerable accuracy. The hopeful, awkward first telephone conversation between Jake and Beverly, in which both play at sounding cool and uninterested, is perhaps the film’s most successful scene. It hits all the right notes. Deutch, in particular, turns in an excellent performance.

Other scenes hint at more serious issues beneath all the fun and games. One player is so competitive he has a meltdown when he loses a simple game of ping-pong. He slaps himself angrily and throws and breaks his paddle. Another player erupts when he proves unable to withstand more raps on his knuckles than his teammate in still another idiotic game. In general, there is something unhealthy and self-destructive about the competitiveness on display. Some of these young men are ready to explode over the most trivial matters.

In one of the film’s more interesting twists, pothead philosopher Willoughby, who earlier encourages Jake to embrace his “inner strange” and goes on about tapping into the unexplored potential of the human mind, is revealed to be a 30-year-old who drifts from college to college under an assumed name in order to continue playing ball and living life as a student. He

has spent years trying to avoid entering the adult world. When Willoughby's deception is uncovered by the school, he is expelled.

This is something that raises a number of questions, or at least it should. It is curiously skipped over by Linklater, and makes a relatively small impression on his characters. This is a revelation that ought to have shaken Willoughby's teammates, but they more or less laugh it off.

Why might a relatively young man in the early 1980s want to remain a student and withdraw into a cloud of pot smoke rather than grow up? Another scene provides some clues. In it, we watch as some of the players walk around campus and comment on their more well-behaved and studious classmates. All these people are just going to grow up and find jobs, they say. It seems a terrible fate to them. Imagine, they lament, a life in which the prospect of playing professional baseball doesn't lie ahead of you!

These are interesting strands that Linklater never quite ties together. His eye is drawn instead to the smaller moments, the minutiae of storytelling. He creates indelible moments, but the whole is often lacking. Many of his films, even the better ones, remain undeveloped in this way.

There are but few indications of the broader world in which the college students live. One of the ball players casually reads a newspaper carrying the headline "Financial Outlook Weakens: Beginning of a Bear Market." In another scene, the teammates pass by rival campaign tables for Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. These are only passing references. Their only real purpose is to place the characters in the appropriate period. They are merely part of the set decorations that, along with the fashions, the soundtrack and the dance moves, help recreate the atmosphere of the 1980s—in a superficial sense.

In the end, *Everybody Wants Some!!* is a more-or-less conventional film about finding oneself. It's about going to college and trying on new identities and encountering new ideas. At one point, a professor writes on his blackboard a motto that might serve as the message of the film itself: "Frontiers are where you find them." In another scene, Beverly tells Jake that one has to be passionate about whatever one does, that things are only meaningful to the extent that we put meaning into them. That sounds about right for a

freshman art student, but Linklater doesn't appear to go much further than that himself.

Such views are a good deal more conformist than those involved appear to realize. They weaken a film that had the potential to say more.



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