



PREVIEW

The Iron Claw

The Iron Claw

Directed by: Sean Durkin

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British Broadcasting Corporation

a House production

Presented by: A24

in association with: Access Entertainment,
BBC Film

Executive Producers: Harrison Huffman,
Len Blavatnik, Danny Cohen, Eva Yates,
Maxwell Jacob Friedman

Produced by: Tessa Ross, Juliette Howell,
Sean Durkin, Angus Lamont, Derrin Schlesinger

Unit Production Manager: Harrison Huffman

Production Supervisor: Rebecca Ryan

1st Assistant Director: Alisa Fredericks

2nd Assistant Director: Eric Williamson

Script Supervisor: Tamara Hansen

Casting by: Susan Shopmaker

Written by: Sean Durkin

Director of Photography: Mátyás Erdély

Stills Photography: Brian Roedel

Visual Effects by: Crafty Apes

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Louis Chue Vado

Edited by: Matthew Hannam

Production Designer: James Price

Art Director: Sammi Wallschlaeger

Set Decorator: Tim Cohn

Graphic Designer: Roger Johnson

Costume Designer: Jennifer Starzyk

Department Head Make-up: Elle Favorule

Department Head Hair: Natalie Rose

Main & End Titles Designed by: Sebastian Pardo

Finishing Colourist: Sofie Borup

Picture Colour & Finish by: Company 3

Music by: Richard Reed Parry

Music Supervisor: Lucy Bright

Wrestling Choreographer: Chavo Guerrero Jr

Sound Supervisor: Matt Chan

Sound Mixer: Paul Ledford

Re-recording Mixers: Matt Chan, Graham Rogers

Stunt Co-ordinator: Hiro Koda

Stunt Wrestling Co-ordinator: Chavo Guerrero Jr

Publicist: Erin Felentzer

Cast:

Zac Efron (*Kevin Von Erich*)

Jeremy Allen White (*Kerry Von Erich*)

Harris Dickinson (*David Von Erich*)

Maura Tierney (*Doris Von Erich*)

Stanley Simons (*Mike Von Erich*)

Michael J. Harney (*Bill Mercer*)

Holt McCallany (*Fritz Von Erich*)

Lily James (*Pam*)

Grady Wilson (*young Kevin*)

Valentine Newcomer (*young David*)

Scott Innes (*ring announcer*)

Chavo Guerrero Jr (*The Sheik*)

Garrett Hammond (*Sportatorium referee 1*)

Julian Dulce Vida (*sound man*)

Cazzezy Louis Cereghino (*Bruiser Brody*)

Ryan Nemeth (*Gino Hernandez*)

Kevin Anton (*Harley Race*)

Michael Papajohn (*Olympic coach*)

Michael Proctor, Silas Mason, Devin Imbraguglio

(*The Fabulous Freebirds*)

James Beard (*Sportatorium referee 2*)

Kristina Kingston (*teller*)

Brian Hite (*Sportatorium referee 3*)

Jim Gleason (*doctor*)

Maxwell Jacob Friedman (*Lance*)

Aaron Dean Eisenberg (*Ric Flair*)

Leo Franich (*Ross Adkisson*)

Sam Franich (*Marshall Adkisson*)

The true story of the inseparable Von Erich brothers, who made history in the intensely competitive world of professional wrestling in the early 1980s. Through tragedy and triumph, under the shadow of their domineering father and coach, the brothers seek larger-than-life immortality on the biggest stage in sports. Featuring a career best performance by Zac Efron, *The Iron Claw* is a gripping achievement that takes a hold on its audience right from the start.

bfi.org.uk

At one point in Sean Durkin's anguished, beautiful melodrama *The Iron Claw*, the patriarch of the Von Erich wrestling family sits at a table and matter-of-factly lists which sons are his favourites, adding that the pecking order is always subject to change. The film and its characters move on from it swiftly – in fact, it almost plays as a joking encouragement for these young men to reach their athletic goals, such is the light tone. But this fearsome competitive drive has deadly consequences, and *The Iron Claw* elegantly and expertly paints a portrait of how hard-driven masculine legacy can both enrich and devastate a family.

The story is one of real wrestling legend: the so-called 'curse' of the Von Erich wrestling family, four good-looking brothers and a former wrestler dad who pushed them to fame and fortune. But grief and loss would puncture their lives and relationships, eventually leaving only one of the brothers surviving in its wake. Even if you have some awareness of the rise and fall of 1980s wrestling superstars, and the impending, unthinkable tragedies that befell them, there is no way to brace yourself for the cascading horrors of the film, or for how effective its gentle visual language is.

Holt McCallany is brilliant as Fritz, the de facto dictator of the Von Erich clan, whose wrestling career in the 1950s is the backdrop to the ambitions he has for his four boys. There's Kevin (Zac Efron), the most sensible and clearly the most serious about his plans to become heavyweight champ, judging by his sculpted physique (his bulging, fake-tanned bicep is caught in focus very early in the film, the shot lingering just long enough to make its point). Then there's Kerry (a quietly sullen Jeremy Allen White), aspiring Olympian and party boy, who comes home to the ranch to join the family business. There's David, Kevin's best friend, thinner and less physically threatening but great 'on the mic', talking in promos and egging on the crowd – he's animated by a lovable, fringe-jacketed Harris Dickinson with an airy attitude, and provides a certain sprightly sense of mischief in contrast to the self-seriousness of his brothers Kevin and Kerry. Finally, there's Michael (Stanley Simons), the baby of the bunch, more interested in becoming a rock 'n' roll star than a wrestling one; constantly harassed by his father for his relative lack of strength and agility, he is shy and sorely aware of his inability to fill his brothers' shoes. These boys eat, drink, wash, pray, fight and, most importantly, wrestle together: they are totally enmeshed.

Chelsea Edmundson (*Tania*)
Romeo Miloro Newcomer (*Jack Jr*)
Terry Joe Nelson (*Jerry*)
USA-UK 2023©
132 mins
Digital

Courtesy of Lionsgate

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 12 Feb 18:30

Preview: Getting It Back: The Story of Cymande
+ Q&A with Tim Mackenzie-Smith and Cymande,
plus afterparty

Tue 13 Feb 18:30

Christopher Nolan in Conversation

Thu 15 Feb 18:30

Tenet + intro by director Christopher Nolan

Thu 15 Feb 20:15 BFI IMAX

Preview: Evil Does Not Exist *Aku wa sonzai shinai*
Sat 17 Feb 18:00

TV Preview: This Town + Q&A with Steven
Knight, cast members Michelle Dockery, Jordan
Bolger, Ben Rose and Levi Brown, director Paul
Whittington and executive producer Karen
Wilson

Mon 26 Feb 18:15

The Scent of Green Papaya *Mùi đu đū xanh*

Wed 28 Feb 20:40

Durkin and director of photographer Mátyás Erdély (also his DP on *The Nest*, 2020) film the brothers' relationship with care and tenderness, capturing their closeness through the sun-dappled Texan summers of the early 1980s: radio rock playing, kegs of beer at a tailgate party, and cut-off denim for tanned boys and girls alike, with nary an un-cowboy-booted foot to be seen. In a charming single tracking shot through a parking lot at one of the Von Erichs' wrestling shows, a young woman (Lily James) comes to ask for an autograph, the camera language making it clear that this is the romance of Kevin's life. As tragedies mount, Durkin handles the shifts in tone through subtle but effective use of light and space. After the loss of one brother to a sudden health problem, the bright prettiness of the film's Texan summers looks flat and denatured, rooms drawing smaller with gloom and shadow.

Efron's already widely praised central performance strikes a balance between innocence and experience, hulking physicality and deep inner turmoil. He is the oldest brother (though only because his family lost their firstborn as a boy, prefacing the tragic series of events to come), and he is frequently devastating in this part. In more than one sequence in the final half hour, his facial expressions have the power to floor the viewer: a pool of unwept tears in his eyes and a crease in his brow. His Kevin is a person left so emptied out by loss that each incident seems to be changing him on a cellular level in front of your eyes. Few films leave such a palpable ache, and it figures its masculine melodrama with such tenderness. Grief is a love enduring – and this is a film that will endure.

Christina Newland, *Sight and Sound*, March 2024

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