



Blogcritics is an online magazine, a community of writers and readers from around the globe.

Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

DVD Review: *The Tournament*Written by [Tim Gebhart](#)

Published February 21, 2007



Sports are often seen as something that can transcend national and cultural boundaries. *The Tournament*, a mock documentary series that ran on CBC Television in 2004 and 2005, proves there's something else that also may be universal — hockey parents.

Actually, that's being a tad bit unfair to *The Tournament*. Because it purports to follow the fortunes of a youth hockey team in Briarside, Canada, what we see, of course, are hockey parents. But anyone who has ever had a child or been a child involved in organized sports will recognize the parents portrayed here. You might even see yourself or members of your own family.

The two seasons of *The Tournament* have just been released in the U.S. in a two-DVD set. (The first season aired in the U.S. on OLN, now Versus, during last year's NHL playoffs.) You don't need to be a hockey fan or know a single thing about the sport to enjoy the series. In fact, the total amount of actual hockey over the course of the two seasons probably does not exceed one half-hour episode. With a wonderful ensemble of actors, this is the mockumentary at its highest and most enjoyable level, having the almost complete feel and look of a true documentary.

The main but far from exclusive focus of the story is the McConnell family. Dad Barry, impeccably portrayed by Alain Goulem, will do anything to fulfill the dream of his 10-year-old son Robbie playing in the NHL. Robbie is a member of and the leading goal scorer for the Farqueson Funeral Home Warriors, a peewee hockey team whose sweaters have a coffin on them. The coffins are there only because of the sponsor, not because this is an all-star team bound to decimate all its opponents. In fact, some of the other players have a tough time even skating.

Barry, of course, is oblivious to the fact that in reality the NHL is more his dream than Robbie's. While Robbie loves dancing as much if not more than hockey, Barry is building an extension to the McConnell home so it crosses into the next township, hoping that might increase Robbie's chances of playing for the team based there, the top Junior A team in Canada — the Panthers. Just to complicate things, the Panthers are sponsored by Barry's boss, who also happens to be a former high school boyfriend of Barry's wife, Janice, and is still in love with her. And if anything can surpass Goulem's performance as Barry, it is Paula Boudreau. She is absolutely superb as Janice, the hockey mom who loves her husband (most of the time) and her son (unfailingly) and is often the lone voice of reason and sanity in an environment in which hockey truly rises to the level of a national religion.

The six-episode first season of the series follows the Warriors as they try to make it to a tournament in Chateauguay, Quebec. For Barry, it is a chance for Robbie to get noticed and make it to the Panthers. Janice, meanwhile, sees a trip to the tournament as her chance to get away on a romantic vacation as she and Barry haven't left Briarside "since the chemical spill of 1998." Season two follows the Warriors as they work to compete in the "NorAm Cup," a tournament in Worcester, Mass., between U.S. and Canadian teams. Given the near perfection of the first season, it is easy to worry whether the 10 second season episodes can live up to the first. Those episodes are equally as well done and give us even more insight into the individual characters.

Of course, given the nature of organized youth sports, Barry is far from the only obsessed parent. The sponsor's wife, who is sponsoring the team over her milquetoast husband's objections, is as avid and loud a fan as they come. Her "lucky jersey" is a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey covered with

blood. Meanwhile, their tomboy daughter, Denim, is the team's goalie, the only girl on the team, and as foul-mouthed as the proverbial sailor. Barry is continuously butting heads with Dr. Singh, the town gynecologist and "team trainer." While Singh knows little or nothing about hockey, he believes his son, Kumar, is as good if not better than Robbie and, like Barry, he will stop at nothing to help make Kumar a star. And while Barry and Dr. Singh love to talk about how they're doing what they do "for the kids," we all know that they are trying to live their own dreams through their children.

Barry's best friend Dougie is a slow-witted dolt who seems to prefer basking in Robbie's reflected light than lending moral support to his own son. Then there's Janice's best friend, a ditzy recent divorcee far more worried about her looks and getting to the gym than her vomit-prone son's participation in hockey. Throw in a French-speaking hockey coach who is driven to drink and cameo appearances by NHL stars like Phil Esposito and Marcel Dionne and members of *Hockey Night in Canada* and the ingredients for a series that at bottom does show a love of hockey and the people in it are there.

The first disc of the DVD contains a bonus feature consisting of interviews with the creator, crew and cast, as well as some uncut footage. While it gives some insight into who various characters were based upon, the effectiveness is undercut by the fact that, at least on the review copy, the excerpts from the show were very dark and some of the sound quality was below par. Any such failings are largely irrelevant, though, because this is not a DVD you buy for bonus features.

The real treat here is a series that is played to hilarious and at times absurd effect but which never really goes over the top. It is one of those rare comedy series where even if you are not laughing out loud, you cannot help but have a smile on your face because we all have known people like Barry, Janice, or the other parents or perhaps even see parts of ourselves in them. While *The Tournament* shines a light on that aspect of club sports, it does so in a way that lets us focus on the irony and humor.

Tim Gebhart lives in Sioux Falls, SD, where he practices law in order to provide shelter for his family, his dog, and his books. His blog de guerre is [A Progressive on the Prairie](http://www.aprogressiveontheprairie.com).

Comments

