

Trent's Fearless Oscar Predictions

Contributed by Trent Daniel
Monday, 16 February 2009

First, let me get this out of the way: I think *The Dark Knight* was the best picture I saw last year. For such a high-budget film with an extraordinary amount of hype to not only deliver the action, but actually add depth to the Batman mythos, was a remarkable accomplishment. Why wasn't it nominated for Best Picture? IMHO, much like the Heisman Trophy will never go to an offensive lineman, Oscar simply does not seem willing to hand over their little golden man over to a "comic book" movie, regardless of its quality (though they don't seem to mind the cash flow these comic book movies bring in every summer).

That said, it's time to focus on the films that are nominated, with my fearless predictions for who will walk away with Oscar come next Sunday, Feb 22:

BEST PICTURE(

- *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*(
- *Frost/Nixon*(
- *Milk*(
- *The Reader*(
- *Slumdog Millionaire*

The nominations for *Milk* and *Slumdog Millionaire* are generally considered expected and deserved, as well as, to a lesser extent, *Frost/Nixon*. The two most "questionable" nominations (as well as the ones most viewed as "stealing" *The Dark Knight*'s spot) are *The Reader* and *Benjamin Button*. I think *The Reader* can be ruled out of winning because it has received some mixed reviews, as well as a bit of a backlash against its nomination (with some pointing out that it is becoming known more for Kate Winslet's nude scenes than its Holocaust theme). Furthermore, there has also been a bit of a surprising backlash against *Benjamin Button* as well, with some critics dismissing it as "Forrest Gump 2.0" (from the director and star of *Seven* of all things!).

Frost/Nixon might get some strong support because of its post-Bush "press taking down an evil Republican" theme. However, I think its nomination will be viewed as reward enough. Furthermore, A) [[Ron Howard]] was a winner only recently for *A Beautiful Mind* (and the Academy does tend to try to "spread the wealth," so to speak, with their award) and B) Oscar has a history of nominating films based in a newsroom, TV studio or courtroom, yet these movies hardly ever win (see nominees such as *Michael Clayton*, *The Verdict*, *Broadcast News*, *Network* and, fittingly, *All the President's Men* as examples).

That leaves *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Milk* to fight it out. *Slumdog Millionaire* will arrive with a lot momentum from its recent strong showing at the BAFTA awards. Furthermore, though it is viewed by some as a daring indie film (and its India setting is an underused and underappreciated setting in Western movies), it has a familiar theme (one man or woman overcoming great obstacles in order to succeed) as old as the movies themselves. The Academy would be quite comfortable handing this film the Oscar.

However, Milk's main theme, the near epic biopic of a revolutionary figure, is one Oscar is quite comfortable rewarding as well (see winners A Beautiful Mind, Gandhi, Patton and Braveheart among others). Furthermore, gay marriage is a passionate cause of the moment for many in Hollywood and rewarding Milk could be viewed by some voters as a chance to make a statement. Finally, the Academy received some unwelcomed criticism a few years ago when Crash upset Brokeback Mountain, with a few feeling the cause of the upset being some Academy voters being "uncomfortable" voting for a film with a homosexual theme (there is a bit of justification for this, IMHO, as I feel that Brokeback is the better film as well). This is not to say that Milk will win just because of its gay theme, as it has received strong reviews across the board as well as placed high in many Top 10 lists at the end of the year. Still, I would be ignoring the elephant in the room if I didn't feel that its pro-gay message, as well as the chance for some voters to "make amends" for Brokeback, will help it this year.

My pick: Milk

BEST DIRECTOR

- Danny Boyle, Slumdog Millionaire(
- David Fincher, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button(
- Ron Howard, Frost/Nixon(
- Stephen Daldry, The Reader(
- Gus Van Sant, Milk

I was hoping for at least a nomination for The Dark Knight's Christopher Nolan here, but it was not to be (I guess the Academy felt any director could have pulled off the truck chase and hospital explosion in Chicago, as well as the helicopter abduction in downtown Hong Kong so seamlessly, but again, that's just my opinion) and the five nominations here mirror the Best Picture nominees.

Like Best Picture, I feel the contest is between Boyle and Van Sant, with Van Sant winning. I feel he will ride momentum for what will turn out to be a good night for Milk. Furthermore, he is the better known director and is generally well regarded (though he has had a few train wrecks in his career, such as Even Cowgirls Get the Blues and the unforgivable Psycho insult, er, remake).

My pick: Gus Van Sant

BEST ACTOR

- Richard Jenkins, The Visitor(
- Frank Langella, Frost/Nixon(

- Sean Penn, Milk(
- Brad Pitt, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button(
- Mickey Rourke, The Wrestler

Again, I feel this will be Milk's night, so I'm going with Penn. Furthermore, A) he is one of the most respected actors, professionally and politically, working in Hollywood today and B) for actors, playing a historical figure in a major Hollywood production is surefire Oscar bait (see [[Jaime Fox]] for Ray, [[Ben Kingsly]] for Gandhi, [[Phillip Seymour Hoffman]] for Capote and [[George C. Scott]] for Patton, just to name a few).

The only chance for an upset is by Mickey Rourke for The Wrestler. His gritty performance as a washed up wrestler on the dive circuit has actually picked up more awards than has Penn's, plus Rourke's own personal career comeback is inspiring. Still, I think Rourke's nomination will be viewed as reward enough and that Penn will walk away with his second statue.

My pick: Sean Penn

BEST ACTRESS(

- Anne Hathaway, Rachel Getting Married(
- Angelina Jolie, Changeling(
- Melissa Leo, Frozen River(
- Meryl Streep, Doubt(
- Kate Winslet, The Reader

This one is a tough call for me. The safe choice is Streep, playing to the hilt a showcase role as the nail-chewing headmistress of a fundamentalist Catholic school. However, Winslet is a well respected actress as well and unlike Streep, has yet to win one of the little golden men (again, the Academy does like to spread their award around).

Oscar also likes to have at least one surprise among their awards and Leo has received critical raves for her turn in the little seen indie Frozen River. It would still be an upset, but not a total surprise, for her to sneak in and win this. In truth, unlike other categories, I cannot totally rule out any of the five nominees winning.

Streep is clearly the safest choice here. I'm going to gamble that Winslet might steal some votes from Streep, opening the door for a slight surprise here.

My pick: Melissa Leo

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR(

- Josh Brolin, Milk(

- Heath Ledger, The Dark Knight(

- Robert Downey Jr., Tropic Thunder(

- Philip Seymour Hoffman, Doubt(

- Michael Shannon, Revolutionary Road

No surprise here. Ledger will and should win. This will be Oscar's main chance to reward The Dark Knight, as well as Ledger's now legendary performance (arguably the most noteworthy film performance this decade). Indeed, if he doesn't win, the big story will not be who won best picture, but that Ledger didn't win.

The only shot at an upset comes from Downey, which is somewhat of a shame, because his daring, hilarious turn in Tropic Thunder would have a great shot at winning in nearly any other year (plus he has as much of an inspirational career comeback story as does Rourke).

My pick: Heath Ledger

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS(

- Amy Adams, Doubt(

- Penélope Cruz, Vicky Cristina Barcelona(

- Viola Davis, Doubt(

- Taraji P. Henson, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button(

- Marisa Tomei, The Wrestler

A much, much tougher call than Best Supporting Actor. Again, I can't rule out any of the nominees. Still, I think it will be between the two actresses from Doubt, with Davis getting the slight edge due to raves about her brief but noteworthy scene with Streep (the most memorable scene involving any of the nominees).

My pick: Viola Davis

Other selected pics on my part:

- BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY: Dustin Lance Black for Milk

- BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY: Simon Beufoy for Slumdog Millionaire (note: the screenplay award is often used as the "runner up" award by the Academy and they will use it to reward Slumdog here)

- BEST ANIMATED FEATURE: WALL-E

- BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM: Waltz with Bashir (Israel)

- BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE: Man on Wire

Finally, look for The Dark Knight to pick up some technical awards, such as Best Art Direction, Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing and Best Visual Effects.