

Will Boxing Score a Knockout at the Oscars?

Written by Charles Jay

Saturday, 26 February 2005 18:00

"Million Dollar Baby," Clint Eastwood's controversial, critically-acclaimed tale of a female fighter's quest for ring stardom and the crabby trainer who became her father figure, has been nominated in seven different categories in tonight's Academy Awards.

Indications are that the film is likely to take home at least two of the awards, and may be closing fast for a couple more.

Hilary Swank, a previous Oscar winner who portrayed Maggie Fitzgerald, the fighter in "Million Dollar Baby," is a clear-cut favorite for Best Actress. At Intertops, you actually have to lay 10/1 on her to win (-1000). Generally Swank's supporters will lay anywhere from -350 to -500. The best price we found on her (and we surveyed 21 online sportsbooks) was -286 at Eurobet. With that number, you could actually obtain a "middle" or "scalp" on the other end with Pinnacle Sports, the only place doing two-way propositions on the major categories. At Pinnacle, as of late Saturday night, it was -361 that Swank, would win the Oscar, with a takeback of +331 that she wouldn't. A "scalp" means that you could bet two opposite sides of a propositions and be guaranteed to come out with a profit. Between +331 and -286, it represents quite a chasm within which one can move.

The movie also has another favorite - Morgan Freeman in the Best Supporting Actor category. Bodog.com is making its customers lay 4/1(-400) on Freeman. Gamebookers and Intertops both have him at -333. Diamond Sports International has a good price if you like Freeman (just -240) and Eurobet has him way down there, at -200. For the most part, Freeman is priced between -250 and -300. The veteran performer has been nominated before, but has never won the Oscar, so he may carry a sentimental edge into the fray over Thomas Haden Church and Golden Globe winner Clive Owen, as well as over Alan Alda, a first-time nominee known best for his TV work, and Jamie Foxx, who is considered to be a lock for Best Actor.

Earlier in the process, "The Aviator" and its director, Martin Scorsese, were considered to have a firm grip on Oscar gold. But Eastwood and his film appear to be gaining. Eastwood is solidly in contention for Best Director, listed at +120 at a host of sportsbooks, including Olympic Sports, World Sports Exchange, TotalBet, UK Betting and Bowman's. But he's getting a lot more in the way of respect from Eurobet (-125), Intertops (-125) and BetOnSports (-140). Pinnacle's two-way prop has Clint laying money either way: it is -133 that Eastwood will win, and -143 that he will not. A clue might have come from the Director Guild award, which went to Eastwood. In 49 of 55 years, whoever got the nod from the DGA went on to win the Oscar.

In the Best Picture sweepstakes, "Million Dollar Baby" is really the only legitimate contender other than "The Aviator." According to the "Buzzboard" at Movies.com, "We had 'The Aviator' as the fave here for a long time, but it's looking more and more as though 'Million Dollar Baby' will be Oscar night's big winner." Maybe, maybe not. A number of books, including Paddy Power, SportingOdds, Bet 24 and Sports Interaction have the film as high as 2/1 (+200). BetOnSports, though, has it at even money; most of the others post it between +170 and +190.

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Only a couple of sportsbooks offer numbers on the Best Editing category. "Million Dollar Baby" is a contender there as well, drawing a price of +150 at BetOnSports and +155 at Olympic Sports. Inasmuch as "Sideways" is considered a major favorite to win Best Adapted Screenplay, "Million Dollar Baby" is an also-ran, listed at +400 at BetOnSports and +500 at Olympic Sports.

Eastwood is given very little shot at winning Best Actor, since everyone is laying a very large price on Jamie Foxx of "Ray." Eastwood is 12/1 at SuperOdds.com and 14/1 at Intertops, but is as high as 33/1 at World Sports Exchange, Canbet and Gamebookers. Indeed, if Foxx is a lock for the big award, as most people expect, it really doesn't matter what number you'd place on Clint.

And we saved the best for last.

In the "Shameless Plugs" department, **Diamond Sports International** (<http://www.2betdsi.com> - look for "Oscar Props") is carrying over four dozen special Oscar offerings from yours truly as they are provided through my service, The Charles Jay Line. It's probably the largest list of Academy Award props ever posted.

As some of them pertain to "Million Dollar Baby," the "Make His Day" prop places a 30/1 price on Clint Eastwood winning both Best Director and Best Actor. It's 20/1 that the film will be completely shut out of an Oscar, and 130/1 that it will sweep Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor and Best Director.

There's an "I Got Wood" prop, where wins must be produced by Eastwood for Best Director and Best Actor, "Hardwood" for Best Documentary Short Subject, and either Colleen Atwood ("Lemony Snicket") or Bob Ringwood ("Troy") for Best Costume Design. The payoff - 285/1.

We had a "Hilary Squared" prop where the price was +375 that Hilary Swank would win a Best Actress Oscar and Hilary Duff a Worst Actress Raspberry (Razzie) award, but unfortunately, Duff didn't hold up her end.

My own personal favorites, however, don't have much to do with "Million Dollar Baby" but play on a boxing theme - well, sort of. In the "Ray-Leonard" prop, it's 40/1 that "RAY" will win an Oscar for Best Picture and Dennis LEONARD will capture Best Sound Editing for "The Polar Express."

And then there's the "Ali-Frazier" proposition, pairing Karolyn ALI (Best Documentary Feature - "Tupac: Resurrection") and John FRAZIER (Best Visual Effects - "Spider Man 2"). If they both win, it's a return of 11/1.

While that might not be a "Thrilla in Manila," it's a pretty good deal nonetheless.

(All information is presented for entertainment purposes only. Odds posted were current as of early Sunday morning. Odds naturally are subject to change, so check first with each individual

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sportsbook.)