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DVDs: Friday Night Lights Fights

Posted April 21, 2008 | 12:06 AM (EST)

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Never -- and I say this with love -- never has a TV drama been so good and then gone so completely off the rails as Friday Night Lights. I loved the first season of this drama about a small Texas town where the thwarted and mundane lives of seemingly everyone was channeled into a passion for the high school football team. Beautifully acted with a great cast, respectful of the faith that informs many people's lives, filled with subtlety and charm, sexy as hell -- Friday Night Lights

had it all. Including low ratings.
Perhaps out of panic, Season Two began with a show stopper of a plot twist -- one character defending themselves and clearly frightened out of their mind killed a vicious rapist who had promised to attack again. This turn of events soon devolved into idiotic dumping of the body, burning cars to hide evidence and other shenanigans. But this much-debated twist was only the tip of the iceberg. Virtually every character suddenly began behaving like a bonehead. The engaging young couple (the stammering, sweet high school quarterback and his smart, coach's daughter girlfriend) split up for no reason. The coach's wife -- always a rock of intelligence and humor and wit and warmth -- became a desperate, weeping wimp collapsing under the pressure of a new baby. The coach's new job at a major university was clearly just a stunt and it was only a matter of episodes before he returned to town. The paralyzed quarterback - a smart, driven man destined to succeed -- decided to go to Mexico and let a fly-by-night surgeon with seedy offices on the second floor of a run-down building operate on his spine. And on and on and on.
Every week I yelled back at the screen as people I'd come to know behaved completely out of character. And every week I came back. Despite the major stumbles in the scripts, this is the best ensemble on TV right now. And they still managed to wring some genuine emotion and truth out of the most soap opera-like random twists. It's a testament to the emotional investment people make in a series that they'll keep coming back even after the show has lost its way or simply exhausted

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every possible storyline from its setting. That's why millions of people still watch *ER*. That's why I still watch *Friday Night Lights*. I can walk away (from *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*) or just reduce my attention to an occasional glance or fast-forwarding (*Ugly Betty*). But when you really love a show, it's really hard to give it up, even if they've given up. And who knows, maybe in season three they'll find their way back again. I won't give up on them any more than the locals would give up on the Dillon Panthers. Oh, sure, they'll bitch and moan. But they still show up for every game.

Also out this week: *The Orphanage* (\$27.98 and \$35.99 on Blu-Ray; New Line), a well-received Spanish ghost story directed by J.A. Bayona that marks Guillermo Del Toro's leap into above-the-banner endorsements; I like Laura Linney and Philip Seymour Hoffman and Philip Bosco very very much and yet I had a violent dislike for *The Savages* (\$27.98; Fox), the story of unpleasant siblings fighting over the care of their unpleasant father, so go figure; *Human Resources* (\$24.95; Kino) a woefully under-appreciated French drama about a son graduated from college high on business theory who joins the factory where his father works and soon takes the lead in laying off countless employees to improve profits (and seemingly this story will always be timely); *The Woody Woodpecker Collection Vol. 2* (\$39.98; Universal) has 75 cartoons so if the kids are going to watch ALL of them make sure they're in another room or that maniacal laughter will eventually drive you to drink; groundbreaking photographer Sally Mann (and her family, naturally) is studied over a period of five years while developing a new project in *What Remains* (\$29.99; Zeitgeist); the larky, genial *Charlie Wilson's War* (\$29.98; Universal) is not the ode to the CIA that some liberals feared and not the damning indictment of foreign entanglements that conservatives imagined but just a black comedy about good intentions gone awry and featuring Philip Seymour Hoffman in one of the best performances of the year (I told you I liked him); who but the Criterion company would take the care to compile *Silent Ozu: Three Family Comedies* (\$44.95; Eclipse) for its no-frills but increasingly essential line of inexpensive DVDs; *Cloverfield* (\$29.99; Paramount) proved better marketing than movie, so anyone with a hankering for monsters on the loose should follow this with the superior Korean flick *The Host* (\$19.98 Magnolia); *Shirley Temple -- America's Sweetheart Collection Vol 6* (\$29.98; Fox) is inexpensive, but really, when you get up to movies 16, 17, and 18 in a series (including one of her best, *Wee Willie Winkie*) shouldn't they be double features on each DVD and packaged more compactly?; *Before The Nickelodeon* (\$24.95; Kino), a loving documentary about the forgotten cinematic pioneer Edwin S. Porter (the man behind *The Great Train Robbery*), with 19 complete shorts; we're still waiting for the successor to Jet Li, though Donnie Yen argues his case pretty well in *Flash Point* (\$24.95; Genius); Penny Marshall went on to direct Oscar-nominated blockbusters and Michael McKean cowrote and starred in *This Is Spinal Tap* so let's just call *Laverne & Shirley Fourth Season* (\$39.98; Paramount) a case of when smart people make dumb sitcoms; lesbian romance is spiced up with curry in *Nina's Heavenly Delights* (\$24.95; Here); *The Best Of Backyard Habitat Volume 1* (\$14.95; Genius) contains a generous four hours of this kid-oriented series about practical ways to create an animal friendly environment in your backyard so be prepared to get your hands dirty; for fans of puppetry and stop-motion animation, the adult-oriented work of Kihachiro Kawamoto is a delight and the long-overdue release of these DVDs very welcome indeed, including mostly shorts from the 70s in *The Exquisite Short Films Of Kihachiro Kawamoto* (\$29.95; Kino) and his 2005 feature length film *The Book Of The Dead* (\$29.95; Kino).

So, is there any TV show that's let you down the way *Friday Night Lights* let me down? Have you watched the show and do you agree this season was a disaster creatively?

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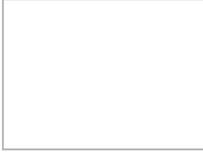
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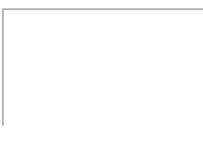
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I forgot I was boycotting ABC, so off it goes. But Boston Legal is another show that has gone off the deep end.

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Never heard of it. Hey, AI is on tonight, woohoo!

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I loved Friday Night Lights, but my wife was never invested, so I've missed most of the second season. Imagine my shock at coming in midway.

I loved (and still love) Dead Like Me. It was a phenomenal series that got canceled. I believe it started on FX. Our whole family got enthralled, then found out there were no more seasons!

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I watched the first season of Friday Night Lights, even though it frequently made me angry. I blogged about it: <http://onlycrook.wordpress.com/2008/01/13/friday-night-lights/>

That town is filled with sluts and losers, and I only marginally care about two of them: the coach and his wife. I wouldn't want to get to know any of the others. Too bad it wasn't cancelled, but will live on for another year.

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I'm pretty excited, my X files complete series box set gets delivered today (was 50% off at amazon). I never saw the last couple of years of it, so I hope it doesn't let me down. Note: if anyone thinks it is, try not to ruin it for me :P

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One of the highlights was watching Mrs. Couch and her teenage daughter go at it to the bewilderment of Mr. Couch. Been there, done that! The "tornado" scene was the beginning of stupid times in Dillon land.

But when give great lines that ensemble can act!!!! I miss them all. I wonder where the plot line of next season will start.

Rescue Me is another one of my favorites and that one gets off track sometimes, but I really care about those characters too.

Damages was great too and I'm looking forward to its return.

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