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DVDs: Why You Must Watch "Friday Night Lights"

Posted August 28, 2007 | 10:01 PM (EST)

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I don't like football. I never watch it on TV, except for the Super Bowl and even then it's only to see the commercials.

So believe me when I say that the NBC drama "Friday Night Lights" (a genuine bargain at \$29.98 for an entire season of 22 episodes from Universal) is a terrific show and you need to start watching it. I could say it's the best show on TV because "The Wire" is off the air till 2008, "Battlestar: Galactica" stumbled, "24" had its worst day yet, "The Sopranos" is gone and "Lost" is lost.

But it's not a competition. You can always find time for another great TV show and that's exactly what "Friday Night Lights" has become. As TV Guide might put it, it's the best show that you're not watching.

At the heart of the series is Coach Taylor and his wife (played brilliantly by Kyle Chandler and Connie Britton), the sexiest married couple on TV since the Bradys got into bed together. These two bicker and fight and needle each other and you never doubt for a moment that they are deeply in love.

But the cast is bursting with talent. Zach Gilford plays Matt Saracen, the unlikeliest hero - a stuttering, diffident backup quarterback who has to take charge when an accident gives him the starting position. He's already burdened by a dad off in Iraq and a grandmother who suffers from dementia and needs his constant care. Somehow, Saracen also manages to fall hard for Julie (the delightful Aimee Teegarden), the coach's sweetly willful daughter.

The show's more typical leading man -- Scott Porter as golden boy Jason Street -- is felled in the first episode, becomes paralyzed and spends the rest of the first season trying to maintain his dignity. Watching his cheerleader girlfriend (the terrific Minka Kelly) cheat on him, struggling to feed himself, dealing with his desire for sex - the physically challenged have never been portrayed this honestly and completely in primetime.

But there's so much more to this show than compelling, soap-like storylines. They get the nuances



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just right. After the first episode, I thought to myself, that was good and if this show is really gonna capture life in a small Texas town, we better see the coach going to church. How did episode two begin? At church with the coach right towards the front. Prayer is a constant, quiet part of the series.

So is desire, whether it's the bad boy Tim Riggins (Taylor Kitsch) falling for the hot divorcee next door - but finding what really matters is being nice to the little kid she's raising, the mayor who is quietly lesbian (nobody says a word about it), the booster Buddy Garrity (Brad Leland) who compulsively cheats on his wife, or the strutting "Smash" Williams (Gaius Charles) who falls for a preacher's daughter.

Oh and though everyone insists it's not about the football, they get that right too. "FNL" captures the deeply important relationship between a coach and his team, the office politics that influence who starts and what plays are run, the overwhelming pressure from everyone in town, the emotional turmoil that follows a loss, and the awkward power plays between a player destined for greater things and a coach trying to mold him.

Did I mention the show is revolutionary as well? It makes full use of mobile, hand-held cameras to free up the actors so no one ever has to hit their mark. The result is the most convincing glimpse of real life since "Hill Street Blues" exploded on the air more than 25 years ago. What this means for you is a drama that is absolutely compelling, honest, gripping, funny and unexpected.

Sure, some plot points were a little rushed this season, such as the steroids and racism storylines. But you can trust "FNL" to sidestep your expectations just enough to keep you on your toes. If NBC had any sense, they would hold the series till January (when football season is over) and run every episode in a row without repeats, a la "Lost" and "24." But for now, we'll have to settle for the fact that those geniuses finally realized the best night to air "Friday Night Lights" was on, yes, Friday nights. Sometimes, it's amazing anything good ever gets on the air. So don't let this one get away.

Also out on DVD this week: the fun "Heroes: Season 1" (\$59.98; Universal), a show you already know about; Will Ferrell's "Blades Of Glory" (\$29.99; DreamWorks), which proved that making fun of something as inherently goofy as ice-skating (those costumes!) isn't as easy as it seems; Molly Shannon in "Year Of The Dog" (\$29.99; Paramount), which had the courage to take seriously the animal rights passion of her dorky character; the generous six hours of comedy on "Martin Lawrence Presents 1st Amendment Standup Season 1" (\$29.98; Starz); potty-mouth Bob Saget in his stand-up act "That Ain't Right" (\$19.98; HBO); the brilliantly cast UK miniseries "A Dance To The Music Of Time" (\$59.99; Acorn); the amusingly titled "Rick & Steve: The Happiest Gay Couple In The World - Complete First Season" (\$19.99; Logo/Paramount); and one of the sturdiest sitcoms ever made, "The Odd Couple Second Season" (\$38.99; Paramount).

So tell me, what's your favorite TV show on the air right now?

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Usedtobequiet [See Profile](#) I'm a Fan of Usedtobequiet [permalink](#)

I agree; great show. Maybe it's a little too "real" for some folks?

My long time favorite though is King of the Hill.

[Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 11:48 AM on 09/06/2007

cuthbertallgood [See Profile](#) I'm a Fan of cuthbertallgood [permalink](#)

I destest football, so FNL is just a no go for me. Nothing could be less interesting. Just my personal feelings, it is just not for me. If it is a quality show, I wish them great luck and a long run.

I love Madmen on AMC, excellent in all aspects, like HBO stuff used to be. Love Weeds, this season so far not as much as previously, but still great. Californication has some very funny moments, and that makes up for some of its short comings.... I'm late to the game on this one, but I've gotten to really like 30 Rock. Maybe because it is a comfortable setting to me, just as FNL is not. After writing this down, I feel badly for not giving FNL a try. Quality tv is rare enough these days that I should not dismiss it for being sport oriented. I will watch at least one and see how it goes.

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Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz [permalink](#)

Very admirable! All anyone can ask is that you give a show a chance. It really is about small town life much more than football, the sport. But even if you don't like it, at least you will have given it a shot.

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Libsrule [See Profile](#) I'm a Fan of Libsrule [permalink](#)

I tried to like it. But I just wasn't able to after the third episode. ABC couldn't get viewers to agree either, but like many a show, maybe a second season will make a difference.

I hate Battlestar Craptica. Not even an argument there.

I'll miss the Sopranos.

I agree completely about LOST. What a joke it's turned into.

24 has become predictable, very predictable.

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HEROES reminds me of Lost/X-Men. WAY too much drama.

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 [InternationalObserver](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of InternationalObserver](#) [permalink](#)

The problem with 24 was that it became increasingly ridiculous. If you watch the episodes back to back (instead of one hour per week) you realise that there is no way anyone could take the physical abuse Jack Bauer does hour after hour and keep going.

BTW - can the producers PLEASE make the last ever series a 're-interpretation' of the JFK assassination. With Jack Bauer as a Lee Harvey Oswald type character (ie accepting the conspiracy theorists version that Oswald was in fact a CIA agent). This would be SUCH a good way to end the series!!! Oh, the fun you could have with the script

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 [Michael Giltz](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

Hey Libsrule, thanks for giving the show a try. No one can ask more than that. While I liked the show a lot from the start, I did feel it got better and better. NBC didn't help the show by moving i around constantly, but the good sign is that viewers did respond. From the very first episode on, a rock solid 6 million viewers typically tuned in every week for a new episode, whether it aired on Tuesday or Monday or Sunday. Usually, the sign that a show isn't working with viewers is when the audience drops from week to week. FNL was very steady and I'm sure that's one reason NBC brought it back.

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 [coachwrite](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of coachwrite](#) [permalink](#)

As a voting member of ATAS, I'm always surprised at the worthy shows that are ignored in favor of "old" favorites, new flavors, or because of a superior lead in...and apparently everyone's too lazy to push the button on their remotes.

FNL is fine--really fine, and really real. I'm familiar with high school sports, the dramas and the traumas as well as the pressures (in this case exacerbated because of the locale) placed on players, coaches and their families. FNL's superb actors, excellent writing, and consistently accessing the "high" road over the cliche deserves better than being bounced all over the weeknights---but hard core fans will follow where ever it leads, just like we did for "Boomtown", a loss I'm still grieving over.

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 [Michael Giltz](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

You get to vote in ATAS? I'm jealous. Of course, the voting procedures remain a constant work in progress and with their emphasis on individual episodes rather than an over-all season (surely the episodes a show picks should just be as a guidelines for people who don't watch a lot of the shows), odd results seem inherent in the Emmy nominations. I don't miss Boomtown because when they brought it back for a second season, they changed everything about the show that made it special and ruined it, so the sooner they pulled the plug the better. On the other hand, I do miss Deadwood because it remained true to itself and didn't get messed with (though the last episode was a bit rushed). "American dreams" falls somewhere in the middle. Great family show, but halfway through the final season they panicked and saw cancellation coming and rushed some storylines egregiously. I wish they'd gone out in style and they have nothing to be ashamed of, but it wasn't quite as satisfying as it should have been.

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 [Beaux510](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Beaux510](#) [permalink](#)

Hear Hear! Besides Jericho and Life on Mars (BBC - best show on TV in the last 15 years) FNL is a gem that I'm surprised wasn't canceled, as quality usually is.

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 [InternationalObserver](#) [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of InternationalObserver](#) [permalink](#)

Heh heh ... Life on Mars was brilliant.

I hear they're making a US version. That should be interesting. The charm of the UK version was that not only did the central character go back to the 70s (or did he?) but the cops he met acted like the ones we saw on 70s cop shows, and the show 'looked' like a 70s british cop show.

I wonder if the US version will have the 'feel' of Starsky & Hutch or Mannix?

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That's surely the only way it would make sense. I can't see spinning it out for five years. Maybe they'd go from Starsky & Hutch to Miami Vice after two or three years? So high concept I think it works best as a short run series.

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 Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

I'm not a big fan of Jericho, but the BBC Life on Mars is very clever. Oddly, they were planning a US remake but I think it fell through, thank goodness. Glad you're watching and enjoying FNL.

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 Apples [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Apples](#) [permalink](#)

In the same way that many theater goers say how much they enjoyed the show but couldn't face the prospect of seeing the movie, I had pretty much the same attitude with the FNL TV series; enjoyed the film but didn't want my memory of it spoiled by a TV series with a different cast. However, Michael Giltz's passion for the show had sparked an interest.

And speaking of Friday nights, can I put a plug in for the only current TV series of the summer where waiting a week for the next episode is agony - Sci-Fi's Dr. Who. This new incarnation is completely different from the early days of the Brit show. The standard of effects, the writing, and the acting - particularly of its current lead - David Tennant, is tremendous, not to mention tremendously funny. I believe the previous series actually won Best Drama of the Year at the BAFTAs, though it continues to be a no show at the Emmys. Awards aside, the show is a delight and has managed to do something that the early days of Doctor Who never even aimed for - it made it human and occasionally touching. I'd recommend series 1 and 2 on DVD, and I believe this current series 3 will be available this November.

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 Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

I liked the film version of FNL quite a lot. The TV show has a much bigger cast of characters and a much broader sweep. It really covers life in this small town. Give it a shot. The new Doctor Who is terrific -- equal to the Tom Baker days of the original. It would be better than ever if they had a bigger budget and could afford to do more shows that weren't always based on Earth. They're ingenious about making the storylines convincing, but it is hard to always be an intergalactic Time Lord but spending half your time on one planet. David Tennant is terrific (I now like him even better than Eccleston) and the new sidekick Freema is great too (though she needs to get over her crush on him). Great fun for the family, too. It'll never, ever get Emmy nominations -- just not the right type of show, as Buffy found out over seven years.

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 jahyarin [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of jahyarin](#) [permalink](#)

i must admit i've never seen the show though i keep meaning to since i know they have a habit of using the music of ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead.

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 Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

As good a reason as any to check them out. It's not a constant presence but the people behind the show are clearly fans and if they've got good taste in music they might have good taste in scripts, actors, etc. (It's always been one of my favorite band names. My own favorite name for a punk band at the moment is Aging Trophy Wife.)

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 JeffDeVore [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of JeffDeVore](#) [permalink](#)

The problem with running the show on Friday night is that, true to its title, high school football is played on... you guessed it, Friday nights. Will check it out as I liked the Billy Bob Thornton movie.

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 Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

You're absolutely right. Not nearly enough room to say everything I'd like. They had the show on several different nights during the season. Like all shows with complicated plots, I think the days of running say eight episodes then taking a month off then two episodes then taking two weeks off then showing five episodes and so on are a thing of the past. The ONLY way to schedule shows like this is all at once without repeats a la Lost and 24. Friday night -- when football season is over -- would be perfect. Air it in January to piggyback on Super Bowl excitement and then air straight through May sweeps. Friday night in the fall is stupid, but at least they realized a show with Friday in its title was one people expected to air on Fridays.

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 InternationalObserver [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of InternationalObserver](#) [permalink](#)

"...I think the days of running say eight episodes then taking a month off then two episodes then taking two weeks off then showing five episodes and so on are a thing of the past. The ONLY way to schedule shows like this is all at once without repeats a la Lost and 24..."

I'm dumbstruck that US networks run their schedules this way! Does any other country do it that way? Certainly none that I've visited, nor the one I live in. How on earth do they expect a show to succeed? Do they think that once an audience has tuned in for the first few episodes they're 'hooked' and can be relied upon to follow their TV Guide avidly to keep up with screenings?

D'uh, it doesn't work that way. And they wonder why TV viewership is declining

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 Bellatrix [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Bellatrix](#) [permalink](#)

Thanks so much for touting this show. I think it's the best drama on TV, with performances so raw and moving, I never come away without tears in my eyes. As a southerner who grew up in a small town, I love how the director, Peter Berg, captures both the beauty and ugliness of that experience, and never stoops to condescension or cultural critique. He lets the characters and their stories speak for themselves. I also respect the way he handles religion, which is still such an integral part of southern life, with subtly and respect. What a brilliant piece of art this is!

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Glad you love the show too. I felt they dropped the refs to faith a little bit in the second half of the season. But in general it was woven in appropriately and very welcome.

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 huffposer [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of huffposer](#) [permalink](#)

Nice summary. FNL is probably my favorite show. I love it. It's about much more than football (although I'd probably still like it if it was nothing but football).

Heroes is very good. Takes me back to my comic book years of the 70's and 80's.

Lost has been great at times and meandering at times. When it's good, though, it's among the best.

And I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, but I like a number of reality shows. Amazing Race is my favorite.

It was nice to see something on HuffPo that wasn't overtly political. Thanks for the article.

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 Michael Giltz [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz](#) [permalink](#)

No shame in reality. They've been around since TV began -- Queen For The Day and the like. Amazing Race is very well done, though personally I'm a shameless addict to American Idol. Thanks for reading.

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Oh, I forgot. I'm also "nuts" for Jericho -- even if it is on life support.

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