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**Michael Giltz**

Freelance writer

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# Theater: "All-American" Fumbles Ball But Features An MVP

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**ALL-AMERICAN** \*\* out of \*\*\*\*  
**LCT3/THE DUKE ON 42ND STREET**

*All-American* is the latest production from LCT3, the very welcome arm of Lincoln Center that encourages the development of new plays and playwrights. This drama by Julia Brownell has the eye-catching premise of a female high school quarterback named Katie Slattery (Meredith Forlenza) feeling the pressure to succeed from her dad Mike (C.J. Wilson), a one-time NFL superstar. The entire family has uprooted itself and moved to Palo Alto, California so Katie can quarterback for a high school team with the makings of state champs. Mike's post-football career as a motivational speaker is

winding down so he's focused more and more on Katie. Meanwhile, his wife Beth (Rebecca Creskoff) is more interested in her new career as a real estate agent than having more kids just because Mike is now home and bored.

Oddly, *All-American* shows relatively little interest in this female quarterback and the focus of the show switches by default to her funny, sweet, lovably lost in the shuffle twin brother Aaron (a very appealing Harry Zittel). He ditches pep rallies and avoids his "duty" to sit in the stands and watch football practice. Aaron would rather just fit in and maybe start dating the loner Natasha (Sarah Steele, who gets stronger as the play goes on), who has a slutty reputation but actually seems cool and -- even better -- appears to like him.

It must be a combination of playwright Brownell having an affinity for Aaron and the excellent performance of Zittel. But somehow or other, his dialogue is ten times funnier, sharper and more interesting than anyone else's in the show. The parents rarely come alive as more than types, despite the efforts of the actors involved, until a late scene during a moment of crisis when instead of spelling out their disagreements they simply react to what's happening and we are allowed to actually divine their thoughts by what they do rather than have them detailed at length.

Forlenza is poorly cast. She's a lovely person but there's no getting around the fact that she looks like she wouldn't go within ten miles of any team sport, much less football. (I felt this even before seeing the video above.) it would be easy to say Forlenza looks more like a head cheerleader than a quarterback but even that doesn't seem quite right since cheerleading can be a physically demanding skill, especially at the competitive level. Forlenza's brief moments handling a ball only reinforce the idea of how ill-suited she is for this role. Katie needn't be mannish, but surely a more physically imposing and buff actress could be found to give the character at least a modicum of believability.

None of this is Forlenza's fault, though her performance in the dramatic scenes is equally unconvincing. Blame Brownell since for a quarterback Katie is an awfully passive character. Even when she starts hanging out and apparently sleeping with her fellow teammates (a situation ripe with intriguing possibilities), nothing comes of it that's interesting.

Brock Harris is fine in the small role of a teammate and he nails his one bit of humor with ease. The sets by Lee Savage and lighting by Japhy Weideman (they're inextricably linked) are a highlight, with a football field inevitably the focus of the floor, a kitchen on one side and bed/high school locker area on the other and elegant but piercing lights on wooden frames at both ends sharply illuminating the action. Jill BC Duboff's sound design is invisible, as it should be, discretely creating the murmur and roar of practice and games taking place out of our vision. The direction by Evan Cabnet is straightforward. But he and the LCT3 team should have done more to workshop *All-American* and find its focus by either tackling the gimmicky topic at hand (a barrier-breaking female quarterback) or playing to its strengths even more, namely the talented and impressive Zittel.

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**Note:** Michael Giltz was provided with free tickets to this show with the understanding that he would be writing a review.

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