

Undefeated

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [March 21, 2012](#) issue

Undefeated is a solid piece of filmmaking that is also too little too late. The Oscar-winning documentary by Daniel Lindsay and T. J. Martin concerns the travails of a high school football team in a poor black neighborhood of North Memphis that overcomes years of futility thanks in large part to a white volunteer coach who inspires them to believe in themselves both on and off the field.

It is too little because it doesn't engage the Manassas High School's wider emotional story, beyond the past failures of its football team. It is too late because the film *Hoop Dreams* dramatically raised the bar for such documentaries: we now expect more than just a few grim or inspiring stories about players overcoming family problems, academic issues and injuries as they battle poverty and aim for college success as a road out of town.

This is not to minimize the many roadblocks facing such rich real-life characters as O. C., a talented offensive lineman who must improve his grades to qualify for college; Money, whose hopes for an academic scholarship seem to be a distant pipe dream; and Chavis, a fine linebacker who starts to play football only after serving 15 months in a youth penitentiary. And we have nothing but respect for head coach Bill Courtney, who genuinely seems to love his players and devotes copious hours to their success—while also trying to be a good husband and father and to keep his lumber business afloat.

But alas, we've been here before, and *Undefeated* brings little new to the discussion.