

OFFSIDE

Iran 2006

93 mins

Crew and Cast

Director Jafar Panahi
 Screenplay Jafar Panahi
 Shadmehr Rastin

Cinematography Mahmood Kalari

First Girl Sima Mobarak Shahi
 Azari Soldier S afar Samandar
 Soccer Girl Ayda Sadeqi

Synopsis

Tehran, 8th June 2005. It is the day of a deciding World Cup qualifier between Iran and Bahrain. Iran only need to draw to get to the finals. A man looks for his daughter, whom he suspects of trying to smuggle her-self into the game; women and girls are banned. Another girl is making her way to the stadium, inexpertly disguised as a boy. When she arrives she is apprehended and taken by a soldier to a holding area along with five more girls. They argue with their reluctant captors. One of the girls, desperate to relieve herself, is taken to the men's lavatories. The soldiers looking through the stadium bars, provide the girls with commentary on the game. Excitement mounts as the minutes tick away. Just before the end of the match, the soldiers' feared chief arrives, and the girls are driven off to the vice squad, along with a boy arrested for possessing firecrackers. On the bus the young people listen to the final minutes of the match on the radio. When Iran win, Tehran explodes in celebration. The bus is stuck in traffic, the soldiers are dragged off to join the festivities, the girls escape.



Reviews

Football, for the male characters in *Offside*, means solidarity: men of all ages are noisily off to the match. But this is a carnival from which women and girls are excluded; any who try to get in are rounded up and held. These young women are on their own, then, and when the timid first-timer realises she will have to undergo a body search before entering the stadium she panics and is captured. The other girls with whom she is corralled are more experienced: one has even dressed as a soldier and managed to watch the entire first half before being frogmarched away. They must await punishment for their immoral behaviour.

The heights of absurdity are reached when one of the soldiers is required to accompany one of the girls to the men's toilet (the stadium has no facilities for women). Horrified that she might read the graffiti on the walls, he fashions her a mask from a poster of Iran's star player Ali Karimi, though anything she might read in the toilets has already been matched by the ripe language of the toughest of the captive young women. The soldier cannot let her into the toilets until he has emptied the cubicles of men, but the nearer he comes to doing so the longer and more impatient the queue outside becomes. Chaos ensues and the girl escapes to the match, only to return out of concern for the soldier to whom she had given her word not to escape.

Offside is shot in a fluid, semi-documentary style and is located entirely outdoors or in moving vehicles, with no domestic interiors. This and the use of non-professional actors create a sense of spontaneity and authenticity. Much of the film was shot on the day of the actual Iran-Bahrain match at Tehran's Azadi stadium, and Panahi knew that the ending of his movie depended on the outcome of the game. In fact, the match ended in triumph, and the film concludes on a superficially optimistic note as both soldiers and captives melt into the night.

Nevertheless, only the least attentive viewers will fail to register the film's darker strains. These young women must go to practical and emotional extremes for the simple, ultimately frustrated pleasure of attending a football match. It is a striking feature of the film that the football remains unseen, glimpsed for a few seconds in long shot as the girl is ushered to the toilet, or on a television set at the back of a shop.

Offside is comic and exuberant, bold and resilient, but it is also acutely sensitive to the tensions simmering in a society where young people, only too aware of the possibilities offered by a globalised world, are asking when they too will be brought into the game.

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