

## A Little Support Would Be Nice Here

~Mike Prill

Hello again OscarWatchers! Things are really beginning to heat up in the race now! Master and Commander opens today, and i'm stoked to see what promises to be a stellar adventure film. The Oscar poster has been released, FYC ads are being put out now, we're finally beginning to see who is being campaigned in what categories, yes indeed, the Oscar race is in full swing. The Supporting Actress race tends to be one of the more exciting ones, and this year's lineup doesn't look too shabby, although it's probably not as hot as in some years. Well, as I see it right now, I see one newcomer and four previous nominees making up the top 5 this year. Let's take a look and break this thing down...

### Best Supporting Actress

Marcia Gay Harden- Mystic River  
Holly Hunter- Thirteen  
Scarlett Johanson- Lost in Translation  
Laura Linney- Mystic River  
Renee Zellweger- Cold Mountain

Waiting in the Wings  
Jessica Lange- Big Fish  
Kirsten Dunst- Mona Lisa Smile  
Melissa Leo- 21 Grams

Gonna Take a Miracle  
Patricia Clarkson- The Station Agent  
Hope Davis- American Splendor  
Julie Walters- Calender Girls  
Shohreh Aghdashloo- House of Sand and Fog

### Not Gonna Happen

Julia Stiles/Maggie Gyllenhaal- Mona Lisa Smile, Miranda Otto/Liv Tyler- Return of the King, Kiesha Castle Hughes- Whale Rider, Nicole Kidman- The Human Stain, Ellen DeGeneres- Finding Nemo, Ludivine Sangnier- Swimming Pool, Geraldine McEwan- The Magdaline Sisters

First off, let's look at the who I perceive to be pretty much a lock. You can pretty much count on Marcia Gay Harden getting a nod for **Mystic River** . She's a previous winner, and her performance in this one is what a supporting role should be. Renee Zellweger is also likely to get nominated for **Cold Mountain** . I can't in any good conscience call this one a lock, because this film is still yet to really be seen. Yes, in all liklihood it will get a number of nominations and Zellweger will probably be one of them. What she has going against her at this point is (1) no one really knows how good she is in it, and (2) some have labeled this as an "Oscar bait" role (although I must say that in a good number of instances, the academy does in fact bite the bait).

Count her in though ladies and gentlemen, but don't go so far to call her a lock yet, people just seem to be judging that on the teary eyed Renee they see in the trailer. In recent years, one film often gets two nominees in this category, which I think is pure coincidence but it is something to note. This year will likely be no exception. Despite the doubts that people are throwing out there, I think Laura Linney will get her second nomination for her role in **Mystic River** . Some are saying her role is too small, but the fact is that she absolutely steals the show everytime she is on screen. Need I remind the doubters of Judi Dench's teeny tiny role in **Shakespeare in Love** that actually won her an Oscar? Sometimes all you need is a small role with one big scene stealing soliloquy. I know this is going way back, but I can't help but think of one of my favorite films of the sixties, **Guess Who's Coming To Dinner** , and Beah Richard's small role but big time soliloquy that earned her a supporting actress nod back in 1967. So based on that, Linney's in. I think Holly Hunter has just as good a chance as any for her powerful role in **Thirteen** . It seems to me that the buzz around this film has become ominou last couple weeks, and I do think her nomination is on shakier ground now than it was a couple weeks ago, but I still think that after some of the critics groups start handing out their prizes, that if Hunter can get at least one or two (and I do think she will) she will be nominated in this category. And finally, what is the supporting actress shortlist without a first-time nominee? Last year it was Queen Latifah, the year before that it was Jennifer Connelly, the year before that Kate Hudson and Marcia Gay Harden, the year before that Keener, Jolie, Morton, etc, the year before that--well, you get the idea. The point is that there is always at least one, if not more first time nominees to make the shortlist. This year I think it will be Scarlett Johanson for **Lost in Translation** . She's fresh, she's young, she's beautiful, she's talented, she's in a role that really could be considered lead, but could be pushed as supporting without much of a fuss to ensure her nomination. You see, she's got just about everything it takes. Oh yeah, and she was a part of a fantastic film too.

There are three actresses just itching to break into the top five. Jessica Lange is one of them for **Big Fish** . She does have some strikes against her though. First of all, I really do feel that the days of her receiving Oscar noms is over, she's kind of yesterday's news in my opinion. Not that she's not a great actress, but the Academy likes fresh faces in this category usually. The other thing is that her role in **Big Fish** is reportedly VERY small, and generally insignificant to the film. Buzz could change, but as I see it now, no nod for Lange this year, despite the fact that most predictors do have her making the shortlist. Going back to the subject of young, beautiful, talented actresses, Kirsten Dunst is **Mona Lisa Smile** 's best shot at a major nomination. The word was that Columbia wasn't going to campaign this film, but alas, that was false. They are in fact campaigning it, and if they're smart, they'll give Dunst the biggest push. The academy is just waiting and itching to get this young star to join the club. Eventually, that WILL happen, I'm just not quite convinced that this is the year. Her performance will really have to be fantastic, due to the fact that the genre she appears in is really beginning to get dull (I'm seriously ready for a teacher flick to knock my socks off the way, pardon the comparison, **Dead Poets Society** did). And then there is the all of a sudden, and seemingly out of nowhere, much talk about Melissa Leo for **21 Grams** . Here's another that could take the spot of a first time nominee, and her chances are looking better by the day. If Holly Hunter trips up and doesn't get a nod, I think Leo is in. At this point in the game, I'd say that Leo is the sixth person in the list, and if anyone falters, she's moving on up into the shortlist.

On many occasions, an actress from a small film will make her way into the shortlist, ala Chloë Sevigny. This year there are a few possibilities, none of which quite have what it takes I don't think, but you never know. The actress with the best shot is Patricia Clarkson for **The Station Agent**. She is such a fantastic actress, who's role in **Far From Heaven** I still feel was severely understated. She could get in, as she does have her supporters no doubt. People were really buzzing about Hope Davis' role in **American Splendor** for a short while there, but the buzz on this film is pretty much dead at this point in the game, and it's only hope at a nomination right now is a screenplay nod, and even that is in serious jeopardy. Folks are comparing **Calendar Girls** with **The Full Monty**, and while I'm not sure about that, Julie Walters is one of the many well respected British actresses that the academy loves to nominate, and yes, she is very good i agree. However, the buzz for this film has yet to get cranked up, and I'm beginning to have my doubts if it will. If it get's one or two Globe noms, it's still alive, if it doesn't, it's dead. Another performance that's beginning to get talked about is Shohreh Aghdashloo's role in **House of Sand and Fog**. I seriously think that her name will be drowned out due to all of the noise being made for Kingsley and Connelly, but she may get some attention as well. If she can get a few critics behind her, that will help her cause quite a bit.

Like I said earlier, Kirsten Dunst is **Mona Lisa Smile**'s only hope at a major nod. Therefore, Julia Stiles and Maggie Gyllenhaal can forget about it this year. One day, they'll both have their chance I'm sure. Neither Miranda Otto nor Liv Tyler will be nominated for **Return of the King**. If anyone gets nominated from this film it will be Mortenson or possibly Astin, but even those predictions are shaky. Kiesha Castle Hughes was NOT a supporting actress in **Whale Rider**, she was lead, despite what Newmarket's campaign says. She was fine in the film, but not nomination material by any stretch, especially considering that I can think of at least 3 performances by young actresses that were better this year. Nicole Kidman's hopes for a nomination will rest on how good she is in **Cold Mountain**, she will not get a nod for **The Human Stain**. Let's face it people, even though she was good in it, this film has no chance. There has been some talk about **Ellen DeGeneres**'s role in **Finding Nemo** having a chance. As funny as many of her lines were in this film, none of them makes me laugh harder than to think of her getting a supporting nod for this, NOT GOING TO HAPPEN! It's animated! And by the way, while we're on the subject, who is with me on the fact that the Best Animated Film category HAS TO GO!?! Email me your thoughts on that. Ludivine Sangnier for **Swimming Pool** and Geraldine McEwan for **The Magdaline Sisters** were solid, but will get few votes if any. So that's how the race shapes up to me. See you next week for the look at the Best Supporting Actor Race!!!

Questions? Comments? Email me: <mailto:mikeprill@netzero.com>