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Caviezel brings passion to Jones role 'Stroke of Genius' goes beyond golf

By Mike Snider
USA TODAY

Jim Caviezel expects comparisons between his starring role in the new film *Bobby Jones -- Stroke of Genius* and his recent portrayal of Jesus in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

"I went from being the king of kings to the king of swing," says Caviezel, 35. "There are similarities. They are both difficult and hard (roles). You have one who is a man and one who is a man-god."

He and producer Kim Dawson are in Augusta this week for sneak previews of the film, hosted by *Golf Digest* and Time Inc. The film opens nationwide April 30. (For more information, go to www.bjfilmlc.com.)

A successful box office take is no gimme for a golf film. *Caddyshack* only became a cult classic on home video, while *Tin Cup* fell short of blockbuster status despite Kevin Costner's star power.

But Caviezel thinks Jones' journey will resonate beyond golfers. "He faced difficulties in his life and his personality," Caviezel says. "Something inside of him was saying, 'I needed to play better than that.' Maybe it was the guy I played before who was telling him that."

The independent film, which also stars Malcolm McDowell as *Atlanta Journal* reporter O.B. Keeler, tracks Jones from a small boy following his father around the golf course through his winning of the Grand Slam and the founding of Augusta National. Along the way, he tames his club-throwing temper and displays a code of sportsmanship that makes him an international icon.

"Here's a guy who can call a penalty on himself, which cost him the (1925) U.S. Open," Caviezel says. "We tell kids from kindergarten and first grade not to lie, cheat or steal. But that gets sort of lost along the way in high school and college that, 'Hey, make a buck and don't get caught. (Jones) is like a folk hero, but he really existed.'"

Most modern athletes "have bought into the idea that 'I'm not your kid's

role model.' That is the complete antithesis of what Bobby Jones was," Caviezel says.

Even though the actor had played very little golf, he managed to develop a smooth swing that resembles Jones'. Producer Dawson describes Caviezel as "a graceful and powerful athlete. He was intense about learning the swing in a way that was very credible."

A lefty, Caviezel used wooden-shafted replicas of the clubs Jones used. "They really worked hard to get it right, and it was so refreshing to see that," says Eddie Papczun, owner of Golf Links to the Past (www.golflinkstothepast.com), which sells the clubs.



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