

How Do You Know

A new movie with a DC background is James L. Brooks' latest, the romantic comedy "How Do You Know," sporting a triangle of Reese Witherspoon, as Lisa, a Olympic-level softball player at a crossroads, Owen Wilson, playing Matty, a relief pitcher with the Washington Nationals(!), and Paul Rudd as George, a honest businessman caught in a company scandal.

Lisa is the appropriately perky woman who wants more from life than the sweet, but narcissistic Matty can offer, but who is chary of George, a new bumbling presence in her life whom she met on the one of the world's worst blind dates. On the male side, Matty likes Lisa well enough—he even tries to get semi-serious with her—but George is frankly smitten, though he's too kind-hearted and decent to be aggressive.

It is no surprise how this kind of game plays out: the question is whether Brooks can ring some intriguing or neat changes on the formula. While there are some nice touches—a mini-essay on male attitudes towards package-opening is one such—the material is really overly familiar and predictable. For example, there is the required best buddy/support gal, in this case two of them, a cliché for each lead. Though two of the protagonists are professional athletes, we get almost zero sense of their physical competence. The film frankly feels long (rated "PG-13," it runs 113 min.), as some of the obligatory "relationship" talk is strung out and repetitive (e.g., a treatise on Play-Doh, of all things, runs on too long).

While the film did do location shooting in DC (at Adams Morgan, for one), it doesn't show much on screen. George resides in what looks like a Georgetown figment, and Matty has a suite in an invented downtown luxury hotel. The only consistent presence of Washington in the film is a handsome, clean Metro bus, which floats through the film like a transportation leitmotif.