Starring Sandler

The Safdie brothers had only one person in mind to lead “Uncut Gems” – and they were willing to wait

By Sonia Rao

There’s a chance Adam Sandler could land an Oscar nomination for “Uncut Gems” next month – perhaps a surprising development to those who can recall the comedian’s numerous nods from Razzies, which parody traditional award shows by honoring cinema’s greatest failures each year.

While some point to Sandler’s dramatic turns in “Punch-Drunk Love” and “The Meyerowitz Stories” as proof of his acting abilities, sibling filmmakers Josh and Benny Safdie credit his comedy records and some sillier roles – including “Billy Madison,” “Happy Gilmore” and even the Razzie-nominated “Big Daddy” – as the reason they wanted him for their latest project.

As is to be expected, Howard’s convoluted scheme doesn’t quite go as planned – and the same could be said of “Uncut Gems” itself. The buzzy thriller, inspired by stories the Safdies’s father told them about his time working on the West 47th Street block, has been roughly a decade in the making. There were the usual delays – script revisions and what-not – but also the brothers’ tireless pursuit of Sandler.

“He can ground these insane situations in reality to the point where you care and you’re rooting for this character with all your heart,” Benny recently said by phone. “That was something we knew was important for Howard. He’s going to test you, but you always need to love him and root for him.”

It took years to secure Sandler for a role that the Safdies, along with frequent collaborator Ronald Bronstein, seem to have

See SANDLER, D6

D. Clark Wernecke, executive director of the Gault School, shows a decorated stone tool that was found at the Gault archaeological site. It might represent the oldest dated art in the Americas.

[JJF WHIPPLE / AMERICAN-STATESMAN]
Adam Sandor says in "Uncut Gems" (CONTRIBUTED BY A.J. VAM).