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WEB SITE: Everybody into the Oscar pool!

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Will *Babel* continue its winning streak, which started at the Golden Globes?

Will Martin Scorsese finally earn the best director award for *The Departed*?

Will Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima* or SAG winner *Little Miss Sunshine* trump them all?

Picking this year's Oscar winners is no walk in the park -- not like some years past at least. But that shouldn't stop movie buffs, celebrity hounds and office-pool addicts alike from trying to predict the winners.

Thankfully, several sites provide outlets for such cinematic guesswork, offering virtual arenas to make picks, learn about nominees and voice opinions. Each site is free after registration (unless otherwise stated). Some let you create personalized pools, which can be shared between co-workers or friends, while others offer chances to win some nifty prizes.

The official Academy Awards "Sweepstakes" (predict.oscar.go.com/predict/) pits your Oscar expertise against the site's other visitors. Successfully pick the winners for each of the 24 categories represented in this year's gala -- by filling out an electronic ballot -- and you could win tickets to sit on the red carpet for next year's festivities or one of four 80GB iPods.

Entertainment Weekly delivers a similar challenge at its Oscar site (ew.com/ew/flash/voxpath), which asks you to pick winners for 12 of the categories represented. While no prizes are offered, the contest does let you test your Academy Awards knowledge against the magazine's experts. The site also boasts a sporty interactive ballot, which employs some clever flash animation and keeps the voting fast and fun.

RocketPool.com specializes in making custom-designed pools for your office or circle of friends. Its Oscar offerings include everything from the traditional pick-the-winners-in-each-category contests to pools shaped around fashions, acceptance speeches and more. Click "Create Pool" from the main navigation bar to get started, or choose one of the available templates from the site's template "Launchpad."

Awardshowfantasyleague.com mixes pieces of all the previously mentioned destinations. You can compete against other visitors for prizes such as iPod Shuffles and iTunes gift certificates. Or you can build your own pool to share with family and friends. As the name suggests, the site also

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adopts a fantasy sports mindset, allowing visitors to view voting percentages of other users and post Oscar thoughts on a variety of online forums.

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