



“NO LOOK PASS”: DOCUMENTARY ABOUT A LESBIAN BURMESE AMERICAN BASKETBALL STAR PREMIERES TO SOLD-OUT AUDIENCES

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No Look Pass, a new film depicting the coming of age story of Emily “E-Tay” Tay, a lesbian, Burmese American professional basketball star who hails from Los Angeles, premiered to a sold out audience at L.A.’s Outfest on July 9. The film’s success led to a second screening that also sold out, and ultimately garnered the festival’s Special Programming Award for Freedom.



Photo Credit: nolookpassthemovie.com

No Look Pass was written, produced and directed by Melissa Johnson, who is, like Tay, a former captain of the Harvard University basketball team. Describing her motivation to make the film, Johnson states,

I was a 6’4”, 127-pound 8th grade girl. Basketball saved me. I decided to make a film that...demonstrated basketball as THE tool a young girl uses to figure out who she is between adolescence and adulthood...When I met Emily Tay I immediately knew that this was the story I had been looking for. Basketball had saved her too.

Standing 5’8” tall, Tay started her career as the co-captain of Harvard University’s basketball team, where she was ranked 23rd in the nation for assists, scored over 1,200 points, won back-to-back Ivy League Player of the Week titles, and regularly received standing ovations from the crowd. In 2009, the Harvard Crimson described the then-Senior as “nothing short of a beast when on the court.” Her signature move led teammates to give her the nickname “Queen of the No Look Pass” (from which the film derives its title).

Despite her success on the court, Tay faces multiple stressors in her personal life. In the film’s trailer, Tay highlights some sources of the tension, stating,

I feel separate from the rest of Harvard. It’s hard for me to relate to a lot of people. I am the only gay person on this team...I’m definitely not close to being out, because my mom’s gonna destroy me [if she finds out].

Ultimately, Tay decides she must follow her heart on all fronts, even if it means not fulfilling her parents’ wishes. She states,

I think it's great to have structure and this tradition and culture behind you and those pressures are good sometimes, but ultimately it's your life and it's your decision and sometimes you have to go against everything you've known since you were little to make yourself happy for the rest of your life.

Her decision to play for a professional team in Germany upon graduation puts her at odds with her immigrant parents, who expect her to move home and enter an arranged marriage. "Girls have to stay home and taking care of your house," her mother declares in the film's trailer.

Upon moving to Germany, Tay meets and begins dating Angela, a United States Army servicewoman. Documenting their relationship prior to the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" put Angela's career at risk, adding another layer of pressure to the mix. Angela recently granted an interview to the newspaper Pacific Citizen, stating,

At the beginning of the film I was really resistant. But towards the end I kind of just got the attitude of: I don't want to be oppressed anymore. It's really hard to explain how much this law has affected me over the years. It's just really taking a toll.

Now 24 years old, Tay is slated to finish her third and final season in Germany next April, according to Pacific Citizen. Angela has six months left of active service, and plans to move back to Los Angeles with Tay. The couple will celebrate their two-year anniversary at the summer's end. When Pacific Citizen's Nalea Ko asked why Tay participated in the film, Tay replied,

I think a big reason is because I wanted to come out of my shell. Also maybe I could make a difference in someone's life if they see it and they're inspired and they're like, "I relate to you. You can do it and your situation is all messed up."

In addition to the Pacific Citizen interview, the film has received positive coverage in LGBT, Asian American, people of color, and feminist media outlets including Curve Magazine, Hyphen magazine, Colorlines.com, and Racialicious.

Ms. Magazine wrote, "No Look Pass successfully combines the thrills of a sports movie...with nuclear-family drama, a culture clash, a love story and even a rare celebration of female friendship. From a theoretical standpoint, it explores the intersectionality of gender, culture, sexual orientation and class. All in all, if you're looking for a feminist Hoosiers, this is as close as it gets."

More information about No Look Pass can be found at: www.nolookpassthemovie.com.