



Documentary Review: 'No Look Pass' -- on Love and Basketball

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Asian, California-born, star point guard on the Harvard basketball team, now playing professional b-ball. Uh oh, more about Jeremy Lin, you must think. Wait, I'm not finished. "Ninja" and "Queen of the No Look Pass" are her nicknames, and instead of signing the big contracts in the glamorous NBA, she is cashing in \$900 a month in the German second division in a town called Viernheim.

Know who I'm talking about? It's Emily Tay, the subject of a new documentary called *No Look Pass* by filmmaker Melissa Johnson, which shows us that even for the gay daughter of conservative Burmese parents, love and basketball can co-exist.

Johnson, a former captain of the Harvard women's basketball team, decided to make *No Look Pass* after conducting a post-game interview with her for another short documentary she was working on. The film chronicles Emily's senior season at Harvard and her first as a professional basketball player in Germany. We learn that Emily, also called ETay by her teammates and coaches, learned her deadly crossovers by watching videos of Allen Iverson, and used those skills to advantage: from hustling lunch money from playground kids, to getting into the prestigious Marlborough highschool in L.A. alongside the kids of Steven Spielberg, to admission into Harvard. Admirably, she's done everything on the power of her own will, because in her parents' view, Burmese women are not supposed to play sports. Instead, Emily should accept an arranged marriage and become a housewife (there goes that Harvard education for nothing!).

Being gay and the daughter of a conservative Burmese household leads inevitably to contradictions, as Emily tries to navigate between respecting her parents' wishes and fulfilling her own. "My mother will destroy me if she finds out I'm gay," Emily says, and her struggles with telling her parents the truth dominate the film's narrative. However, instead of succumbing to family pressure like her brother, ETay decides that while she would like to be the perfect daughter, she is not going to ruin her life for it. She has no desire to become someone who "marries a Burmese doctor, has a lot of money, but at age 80, regrets that she has never loved."

The film crew is very successful in establishing a close connection with the subject. As a result, the camera lens is able to extract candid moments from Emily's basketball and personal lives. We hold our noses while Emily cleans the bathrooms at Harvard dorms, and laugh with her when she

learns how to drive in a shaggy Citroen, German-style. On the other hand, excellently filmed basketball scenes are filled with drama that rival those of a big budget Hollywood production. Finally, the characters who grace Emily's life are always entertaining in their own ways -- the coach of Harvard's women's team has a knack for half-time expletives that could land her a role in a Tarantino film.

Unfortunately, any attempts to resolve the tension between Emily and her family are never shown. In a way, those confrontations may not be needed, because Emily already knows what she wants and has no plan to compromise her happiness to please her parents. While this does not help the audience to better understand the complexities of a life beset by equally strong duties to family responsibilities and personal desires, and what happens when those do not cross, we can at least be assured that at least for now, Emily is living the dream of having both love and basketball.

[No Look Pass](http://www.nolookpassthemovie.com/) (<http://www.nolookpassthemovie.com/>) premieres at [OutFest](http://www.outfest.org) (<http://www.outfest.org>) in Los Angeles on July 9.

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