

Indiana's Game

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Thesis Advisor
Phil Bremen

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Bremen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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Abstract

This video documentary was meant to examine the idea that basketball is a part of Indiana's culture—in a way that is like no other place on Earth. From almost the time they are born, Hoosiers are drawn to the hardwood, whether they are playing or living each moment with their high school team. With that said, many young Hoosiers may feel an overwhelming sense of pressure from their parents: pressure to compete, pressure to win, or even pressure to do what their father or mother could not. This documentary tries to solve that riddle using two of Indiana basketball's most legendary names: Damon Bailey and Jack Butcher. Dr. Chris Carr, a sports psychologist at Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, also adds his perspective on Indiana basketball and the pressured it may create. The documentary is approximately nine minutes long, and uses both edited raw footage and clips borrowed from other video sources. It is heavily produced, using computer generated editing techniques such as dissolves, freeze frames, and slow-motion video. Different camera angles were used to give the documentary a more artsy feel, as opposed to simple, straight-forward journalism.

Acknowledgements

-I have to thank Damon Bailey, Jack Butcher, and Chris Carr for letting a college kid who could barely carry a camera on her own interview them. Their perspectives gave the project a depth it could never have achieved without such candid responses.

-Phil Bremen, my thesis advisor, has been a constant source of support since I met him on the first day of Tcom 323. He has always been more than willing to help me in whatever facet I might need, and was especially there throughout the rigors of this project. He is a teacher in the true sense of the word.

-I might never have gotten the project edited without the expertise of Tom Kosrowski. For whatever reason, he stayed with me in the media lab until all hours of the night, showing me the ins and outs of the Avid editing machine. His helped me make the project look professional (which was a trick with some of my camera work). For that, I cannot thank him enough.

-I also have to thank James Naismith, for inventing a game that Hoosiers can almost call their own.

Basketball is more than a game in Indiana. For many, it is a way of life, encompassing everything from the time a young Hoosier picks up a basketball and learns how to dribble. With that in mind, I decided that my creative thesis would be a video documentary about basketball in Indiana and the pressures that come out of the state's emphasis on the sport. As a Telecommunications major, I wanted to do a video documentary because I felt that it would give me some useful experience as I entered "the real world" and began a career. The film, which is somewhat blandly called "Indiana's Game," is nine minutes long, and features several interviews with people who have been inside the game and lived in the pressure-cooker that often surrounds "Hoosier Hysteria."

Overall, I was fairly pleased with my thesis. In my opinion, it was a well-written commentary on Indiana basketball. However, I did have some concerns with the technical execution of the documentary (i.e. the framing of the camera angles, the sound, the picture quality, and the shakiness of the video in some spots). I intended "Indiana's Game" to be a heavily produced documentary for television. For the most part, I think that I accomplished that. However, completing this project was an interesting process, and one worth putting down on paper.

In the beginning, "Indiana's Game" was supposed to be a documentary comparing two legends of Indiana basketball—John Wooden and Damon Bailey. I had connections that could secure an interview with both of them. I wanted to weave their basketball histories together, compare their accomplishments, and hopefully show the similarities and differences that might have come from growing up and playing in the same state, yet finishing their careers in such different ways. However, the interview with Coach Wooden fell through toward the end of October, leaving me little time to take the

documentary in a different direction. I talked to my project advisor, Phil Bremen, and he suggested that I focus my project on the pressure to win in a state with such excellence and tradition. I took his suggestion, and knew I could make that idea work using Damon Bailey, who certainly lived in a bubble during his basketball career at Bedford North Lawrence High School and Indiana University. I also decided to interview Indiana's all-time winningest high-school coach, Jack Butcher from Loogootee. I thought that these two interviews, plus some comments from a sports psychologist, would be enough to adequately discuss the topic of basketball in Indiana and the pressure that the sport creates.

As I mentioned before, I ran into some trouble from a technical standpoint. I am not a particularly gifted cameraperson, so I had difficulty making some of the shots and interviews look professional—especially since I was doing everything on my own. After I got back from doing the filming, I was disappointed with how some of the shots looked on camera. I wanted everything to be visually appealing, and I was particularly disappointed with the Damon Bailey interview. However, it was a complete gem content-wise. In the end, I suppose that was more important since I am not interested in becoming a cameraman or cinematographer, but rather, a reporter. This project did teach me a great deal about interviewing and drawing out the strongest content after talking to somebody, as a reporter would have to do.

Before going into the interviews, I tried to make sure that I was thoroughly prepared to ask intelligent, original questions. I hope that I did that, but nonetheless, I came back with some potent sound bites that added immeasurable depth to my documentary. The Damon Bailey interview was a treasure chest of quotes that I could

use to build any number of stories around. I was surprised that being sufficiently prepared for the interviews could make such a difference in the answers that came back to me. However, no matter how much I prepared for those interviews, nothing could have prepared me for the biggest test this project threw my way.

In all my life, I have never had writer's block. Even if it was complete nonsense, I have always been able to set my pen down and get going. That was not the case with the script for this project. I tried over and over to start writing the script, but the words simply would not flow. I would get the introduction written, only to find that I had no way to make a seamless transition to the next section. I think that I wanted this project to be so good that it almost never got written. I was afraid that it would not live up to my expectations, and I was constantly searching for a way to make it absolutely perfect. I finally got some momentum going, and that, coupled with deadline and GPA pressures helped me get the project off the ground. I relaxed, said what I needed to say, and realized that I could dress-up the language later if it needed some improvement. As an aspiring journalist, I am certain that there is an important lesson in there somewhere.

The documentary definitely had some problems that I would have fixed had I not finished my work just before finals week. However, it also ended up being something that I am extremely proud of, and am sending to prospective employers as I am job-searching. I learned how to edit on the computer-based machines in Ball State's media lab, and that gave the documentary a polished, professional look that will hopefully make those employers look twice. In essence, this project helped me kill two birds with one stone. I have the actual film that I can shop around, but I also have the skills that it took to get the documentary finished.

I wanted to do a video documentary because I thought that it would be an appropriate avenue for my major, Telecommunications. It was more than that, however. This project made me think. It forced me to be introspective—about the writing, about my strengths and weaknesses, and most of all, about the universality of my education. Not just my education at Ball State, but my education for the past twenty-one years. As I was working, I could hear little directions from so many people over the years. I could hear my parents saying, “Don’t be afraid to ask him that.” I heard my Tcom 320 teacher saying, “Listen while you’re interviewing someone. You’ve got to be able to follow-up your questions or you’ll miss out on the real story.” I realized how much everything is really connected, and I think that is the most important lesson this project taught me, and perhaps that college could ever teach me.