

george

WRESTLING WITH RESISTANCE

"I think my childhood made me tougher, just as wrestling is doing."

Premiere Screening
November 12, 2009
Basketball Hall of Fame
6:00 - 8:00pm

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GEORGE: WRESTLING WITH RESISTANCE

SYNOPSIS

You don't *play* wrestling. Unlike most other sports, wrestling is the direct imposition of your will on another person, one-on-one. You learn to work against opposition, as wrestling pushes your physical and mental toughness to the limit.

George: Wrestling with Resistance parallels the tough sport of wrestling with the adversities facing youth in the inner city. The film follows George Hargrove's wrestling season during his freshman year at Springfield Technical Community College. He travels from Springfield to Niagara Falls to Minnesota for the National Wrestling Championship.

George is the epitome of a Springfield kid. George's mother was 16 when he was born. George's father was a drug dealer who was murdered on his own street when George was 11 years old. He lives in the projects and moves around a lot: he is set up for failure in every way. So why isn't George a dropout or a drug dealer? Why does George aspire to go to a four-year university, graduate, marry, have children and own a home?

Springfield struggles with many issues. Springfield is a poor city that has the lowest graduation rate (54.4%) in Massachusetts, compared to the state's 81.2% average. The film offers hope through the people that inhabit it. We hear from the students and their advocates, fiercely proud teachers and coaches, that provide opportunity through education and athletics. We get a glimpse into the challenges that they face everyday. And we learn about George and how his achievements have shown other students what success really is.

The filmmaker, Tim O'Donnell, teaches and coaches at the high school George attended. He met the subject four years ago at wrestling practice and became George's coach and mentor. Charming, handsome and polite, George stands at 6'2" and 210 pounds of pure cut muscle; he is an athletic specimen. He is a quiet leader who teaches by example. *"I once witnessed another coach give George a duffle bag to replace the plastic grocery bag he was using to carry his workout gear. George shined an inspiring smile followed by a sincere thank you. He found a pack of Tic-tac mints inside the duffle bag and asked if he could keep them. When the coach approved, George gave a Tic-tac to each wrestler on the bus."*

George has learned how to wrestle, but he has also learned how to use hard work and discipline to overcome life's oppositions.

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INSPIRATION AND BEYOND

Tim O'Donnell

Why did you make this video and what really motivated you?

For the past four years I've been telling people about this kid I coach and how amazing he is. I got a similar response like "yeah, I met someone like that" or "gee, that's great." It wasn't enough, they didn't get it. Coincidentally my artmaking career was moving towards video so I had the necessary skills and equipment to approach a documentary project. My mentor at the time (Ellen Harvey, an oil painter from Brooklyn, NY) asked me to create a list of potential projects and she stressed that I should include not just art based work, but overall life goals. Through a list of 20 different ideas there was one that emerged, to make a five-minute video on someone that has changed my life forever and doesn't even know it. That was the beginning of *George: Wrestling with Resistance*.

Why do you want people to see it?

Springfield is very popular in the news for all the wrong reasons. This is a disconnect from what I experience in Springfield as a teacher: positive amazing young kids who inspire. I want people to explore a different way of looking at success and redefine what it is we actually call success. The book *Outliers*, by Malcolm Gladwell, which exposes success from a different perspective, partially inspired the film and how it was organized. The film is a social reality piece. At the same time it is an expression of the brutally beautiful sport of wrestling and the ironic strengths of gritty tough city kids. People need to know the George story. I believe it will impact their lives, just as it has impacted my life.

What do you want to be the outcome of people seeing this film (for you, for George, and for the public)?

We all have these flames that get sparked by others and sometimes don't ignite for awhile. I can still remember my mom showering me with positive reinforcement when I did a drawing as a five year old kid. This motivation was so pivotal to my artistic direction and teaching philosophy later in my life...or maybe that fire was always with me and I didn't know it was burning. I want to continue making personal films about real life that can impact people in a positive way.

I want George to get into a 4 year college and continue his path to success. He deserves a great life and there are a lot of people that could benefit from knowing him.

I have been deeply effected by cinema, sometimes I watch a film and I have to change my way of thinking or it's fuel for a task or project and sometimes it's the thing that puts me back in perspective. I think *George* can do this. I want people to walk away from the film impacted in a positive way, whatever that might be, even if it is temporary.

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QUOTES FROM THE FILM

“These kids now are dealing with a lot of urban challenges with the deterioration of home life.”

– Mayor Sarno

“I try to be just like him. I want to do what he do. I want to be just like him.”

– Bemnet Banks (younger athlete that knows George)

“Somebody says, where do you teach? And you say Central High School. They say, how is it there? The last thing in the world they want to hear from you is it’s awesome and the kids are awesome. They don’t want to hear that. They want to hear that you had a knifing and a murder today.”

– Dan McLaughlin (Springfield teacher and coach for 33 years)

“The connection they make with our staff members is something that makes people come to this school.”

– Tad Tocarz

“I think my childhood made me tougher, just as wrestling is doing.”

– George Hargrove

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER:

Tim O’Donnell is a teacher and chair of the Fine Arts department and coaches wrestling at Springfield Central High School. Tim is earning a Master’s degree in Fine Arts through Massachusetts College of Art and Design. He is also a freelance videographer/editor and works at Stevens 470 marketing firm. He was a 2x Academic All-American wrestler at Springfield College. He credits his family, teachers, coaches, and George for the production of the film.

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