



How "The King and Me - A Softball Odyssey" came to be

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The King and Me is a feature documentary film about Fastpitch softball told through the lens of one of its greatest players, Dave Blackburn. Many softball fans know all about Dave's legacy. But, people outside of the sport will learn about Dave for the first time when they see his film.

As for me, I met Dave in late 1992. In those days, I was the technical artist and co-creator, along with June Lavenberg, of Club VR. My background as a filmmaker, photographer and amiga computer techie led June and me to join the Virtual Reality SIG, Special Interest Group, of SigGraph which Dave ran. So, Club VR was a big part of our first meeting at the Electronic Cafe in Santa Monica, CA.

Needless to say, we hit it off big time. From there, Dave and I worked together on numerous virtual reality projects. He would always talk about his softball happenings. But, I really had no idea what that was about. And, his softball people had no idea that he was such a techie.

Although I knew him as "Big Dave", his softball buddies called him "The Big Right Hand", "The Gentle Giant" and "Breeder". Above all else, he was the heart and soul of his softball teams.

Decades went by and I hadn't heard from Dave in quite a long time. Then, out of the blue in 2012, I got a phone call from him. The call went something like this:

"Hey Brian, it's Big Dave... Yeah, I almost died in a car crash... Really. Yeah, I think we should make a movie about my life... Okay!"

So, I turned to Curt LaFurney - my production partner of our company Paradox Studio & Productions - and we began to strategize how we could get this film made.

Now, Dave had tons of old VHS video, photos and plenty of stories to tell, but what we really needed was interviews from his team mates and buddies from other countries like Team Canada.

We started at home. Our first interview was with Rich Hoppe who met Dave through their mutual love of fast pitch when they were competitors. Rich also played for over 20 years with world famous softball pitcher Eddie Feigner and his four man team, a.k.a. the King and his Court.



But, what about all of Dave's team mates and the multitude of softball friends from other teams? Many of them lived in Chicago and Philly, while the rest were scattered all over the world, literally. So, Dave suggested that I travel northeast to grab as many interviews as I could and then bop up to Canada to get some more.

The next thing we know, Dave's friends at Maccabi USA and Maccabi World Union invited him to Israel in 2013 for the 19th games to throw out the first pitch of the gold medal softball game.

That was one of our 'Aha' moments...

Curt had the idea that I accompany Dave on the trip to Israel to film all the color and pageantry. Not to mention, so many of Dave's team mates and friends would be there who I could interview. But, it was not so easy or simple.

Then, Dave entered the games as a para-athlete in table tennis.



With the help of the Maccabi USA board, Executive Director Jed Margolis, President Ron Carner and General Chairman Jeff Bukantz, I became an official member of Team USA in the media delegation and, alongside Jewish Life Television (JLTV), ended up wearing many production hats: Producer, Director, Equipment Wrangler, Dave's Assistant, On location Field Manger, Director of Photography, Camera Guy, Sound Guy, Transportation Guy and Fixer!



From there, all the pieces started to fall into place.

So, Dave and I joined our group of athletes on an El Al flight at LAX bound for Tel Aviv, Israel, "The Land of Milk and Honey" P.S. Nobody seems to know why they call it that!

And that is how our filmmaking odyssey of *The King and Me* began.



But, this film is more than just a story about a softball pitcher. It is so much more...

The King and Me features many stories.

First, it's a softball odyssey that weaves together Dave Blackburn's story of playing Fastpitch. Dave knew by the age of five that he wanted to become a barnstorm-pitcher when he saw his dad go up against softball pitching legend Eddie "The King" Feigner. Dave's father, Ernie Blackburn, was a celebrated pitcher in his own right. So, the pitching duel drew a record-breaking crowd.

The film is also a personal story about Dave and his teammates, their adventures and their trips down memory lane. And, it spotlights the competition on the field that led to so many enduring friendships off the field.

It shares the history and significance of the Maccabiah Games, a homecoming for Jewish athletes from all over the world, as a celebration of Jewish identity, heritage, culture and connection. Dave contributed 25 Years of epic pitching to the games with Team USA.



The film is also a voyage to some of the most majestic sites of Israel such as: Masada, the Western Wall and The Dead Sea, which we were able to experience thanks to Simon Bene who served as our para-athlete tour guide. But, the trip would not be complete without visiting one of Dave's favorite places and ritual stops, the artistic cave home of Nissim the Hermit of Herzliya.



This documentary is also a story about the meaning of family, friendship, camaraderie and community through softball and competitive sports, and as embodied by the Maccabiah Games.

Finally, it's the account of Dave's horrible car crash. Although he was in a coma for about two months, in recovery centers for nearly a year, and lost much, including part of his right leg and the ability to walk, he never lost his sense of humor, his love of life and his love for the game.



In his softball career, Dave pitched over 1,800 games. He had 1,400 wins and 70 no hitters. He was a six-time World Maccabiah Games medalist with 4 gold medals, 1 silver and 1 bronze.

Dave was inducted into the International Softball Congress (ISC) Hall of Fame for all his contributions to the game, which includes introducing streaming broadcasts to softball.



What a career. What a guy. What a softball odyssey.

You will be moved, touched and inspired by Dave's story and *The King and Me*.

TheKingAndMeMovie.com

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