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Published August 26th, 2015

Campolindo Football Documentary to Debut at California Independent Film Festival

By Spencer Silva

Campolindo Head Coach Kevin Macy likes to talk about the improbability of success in a sport like football, where some teams, simply put, are bigger, faster and stronger than others. "There are no Cinderella stories in football, just Campo," he says often.

In his view, a small community like Moraga shouldn't be capable of producing winning football team after winning football team. But it does. This is the subject of the new film "Banners in the Sky," which is set to debut at 5 p.m. Sept. 12 at the Rheem Theatre as part of the California Independent Film Festival.

In 2011, local football pundits wrote off the Cougars. In fact, they were expected to finish last in the DFAL. As usual, Coach Macy downplayed his team's chances, keeping his hand close to the vest. To the surprise of everyone, they went undefeated in league, won the NCS Division III title and made it all the way to state championship game, which they lost.

The film attempts to explain the success of a team that, theoretically, shouldn't have the talent or resources to compete year to year. The film brings the viewer along for the 2011 season, through early-season victories at El Cerrito and Miramonte, and then, in the playoffs, Bishop O'Dowd and Marin Catholic, a team notably led by starting Cal quarterback Jared Goff.

Coincidentally, Macy's Cinderella talk was from the summer of 2014, when the film was shot. At the time, he was unaware his 2014 squad would best its predecessor by completing a perfect 16-0 season and notch its first Division III state title - in last-minute, thrilling fashion, no less. "We never thought we'd go to state," Macy offered.

Alexander Leis, a recent graduate of Binghamton University, is the film's director. The film is his debut. Leis, a New York native, was already something of a Campo football fan before he took on the project. His cousin, Campo Assistant Coach Matt Keeperman, sent him links to watch their games in 2011 and later suggested he make a documentary. Leis received a Young Artists' fellowship to complete the project.

In Leis's view, it's the program's culture that sets it apart. Jerseys don similar last names year to year; players pass the torch from generation to generation, brother to brother. For this reason, Macy's biggest goal every season is to play on Thanksgiving, when all his former players can populate the sidelines. As a side benefit, it also means they've made the playoffs.

"We never talk about record," Macy said. "Our only goal is to make it to Thanksgiving, as a service to our former players."

In 2014, Leis continued to watch Campo from afar. Then after the state semi-final game he got a phone call.

"The best part of it was the Sutter game, when they were down, and I had to go to sleep," he explained. "I got a call from my cousin, it was like two in the morning ... and he's just like, 'here's the hotel information, book it, I'll see you next week.' I woke up to that."

Leis was on the sideline filming when the Cougars upset El Capitan last December to clinch the state championship. "It was the best football game I've ever been to by far."

At the team's request, Leis made a follow-up film about the 2014 team, which will (likely) be available for purchase at the "Banners in the Sky" premier. Coach Macy acknowledges that Leis is something of a good luck charm. "We gotta keep him doing documentaries."

Tickets are available online at caiff.org; the premier is expected to draw a large crowd.

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