

THE WORKERS CUP

WORLD PREMIERE - SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL
World Cinema Documentary Competition



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Running Time: 1:28:36

Country of Production: United Kingdom | Film Completion: January, 2017

Languages: English, Nepali, Malayalam, Twi, Ga, Hindi, Arabic | Subtitles: English

Shooting Format: HD | Screening Format: DCP | Sound Format: 5.1

Press Materials available for download from www.theworkerscupfilm.com/press



LOGLINE

Inside the labor camps of Qatar, African and Asian migrant workers building the facilities of the 2022 World Cup compete in a football tournament of their own.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

The Workers Cup is set inside the labor camps of Qatar, where the World Cup is being built on the backs of 1.6 million migrant workers. The film follows a team of laborers living a real-life version of fantasy football. By day they sweat to build the World Cup; by night they compete in a “workers welfare” football tournament, playing in the same stadiums that will one day host the world’s greatest players.

We join one team of men from Nepal, India, Ghana, and Kenya whose only common ground is their love for football. Each match offers them a momentary escape from the homesickness and isolation they endure as the lowest class in the world’s richest country.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In 2022, Qatar will host the biggest sporting event in the world, the FIFA World Cup. But right now, far away from the bright lights, star athletes and adoring fans, the tournament is being built on the backs of 1.6 million migrant workers. *The Workers Cup* is a feature-length documentary giving voice to the men who are laboring to build sport's grandest stage.

Sixty percent of Qatar's total population are laborers. From India, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and, increasingly from Africa, some of the world's poorest people are working the lowest level jobs to ensure the World Cup can be hosted in the world's richest country. These men work exceedingly long hours for scant salaries, and they live isolated in labor camps which are by law kept outside city limits.

With unprecedented access, our film unfolds largely inside a Qatari labor camp that the migrant workers we meet say feels like a prison. Hidden between a highway and remote stretch of desert, the Umm Salal Camp is intentionally out of sight and out of mind. So are the 4000 men who live there.

We focus on a select group in the camp who have been chosen to compete in a football tournament for laborers: The Workers Cup. The tournament is being sponsored by the same committee organizing the 2022 World Cup and 24 construction companies have been invited to field a team of workers. Over the course of the tournament we follow the men as they alternate between two startling extremes: they play heroes on the football pitch, but are the lowest members of society off of it.

The film is a portrait of a handful of players on the team. It explores universal themes of ambition, aspiration and masculinity, as we see our protagonists wrangle hope, meaning, and opportunity out of dismal circumstances. The mundane is fraught with turmoil, whether it is changing jobs, talking with family back home, or going on a date. This results in a terrible toll to the psyche of our protagonists, as they are depleted of the hope that motivated them to come to Qatar in the first place.

Ultimately, our own complicated relationship with sport is revealed, as we see its power to unite and divide society by turns.

MAIN PROTAGONISTS

Kenneth, 21, Ghana

A recruiting agent in Ghana told Kenneth that he'd be coming to Qatar to join a professional football club. After Kenneth arrived in the country, he realized his agent lied. While Kenneth works construction, he still dreams of playing professional football. He hopes to catch the eye of a scout while playing in The Workers Cup so he can escape the camp.

Paul, 21, Kenya

Surrounded by 4000 men, and working a job that keeps him in the camp seven days a week, Paul is struggling with loneliness in this distant land. He dreams of meeting a girl and falling in love.

Umesh, 36, India

Umesh came to Qatar with a simple dream: to earn enough money to build his own home. Until he accomplishes this, he'll live separated from his wife and two sons, who are named Rooney and Robin after the Manchester United stars.

Padam, 28, Nepal

After 8 years of failing to get around Qatari laws that prohibit him from bringing his wife to Qatar, Padam now has to decide if he should stay and earn, or return to Nepal to be with his wife.

Samuel, 24, Ghana

A talented goalkeeper, Samuel played in the 1st Division in Ghana but he still couldn't make ends meet. He came to Qatar to work construction, but out of pride he lied and told his father that he was coming to play professional football.

Sebastian, 38, India

Sebastian is a middle manager in the construction company and is responsible for running their nine labor camps across Qatar. He is also tasked with being the company's team manager during the football tournament.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When Qatar won the right to host the 2022 World Cup, a spotlight was shone on this very secretive country. Journalists from around the world attempted to access labor camps and construction sites, but they were stopped and even arrested. Because our team lived in Qatar, we had the relationships and knowledge needed to negotiate access inside the camps.

Our filmmaking team has worked together in Qatar for many years producing films for outlets including CNN, the BBC, and HBO. Some of these films focused on migrant workers building the World Cup, but they only told a small portion of the story and the workers themselves were often seen as victims. Many times we were obligated to hide the identity of our contributors or to shoot undercover. These stories still presented important insight, but they lacked the intimacy that I believe leads to understanding.

In order to make a film that the workers could be proud of, I aimed to capture the complexity of their experiences and push beyond the common narrative that migrant workers are casualties of circumstance. My hope is that our film creates empathy for their story rather than sympathy.

At its heart, *The Workers Cup* is a sports film and it employs the genre's narrative conventions that have proven so durable over time. In particular, I've been inspired by documentaries about amateur competitions that result in powerful illustrations of our social structures and the human spirit.

Football provided the perfect access point for this emotional and relatable story. Featuring protagonists from India, Kenya, Ghana, and Nepal who are living together in Qatar, *The Workers Cup* is a portrait of our increasingly globalized world. Yet sport is universal, in all of its agony and ecstasy. The World Cup is being built on the backs of our protagonists - still they can't help but love the game.

This paradox holds the film in balance for me, and I believe it reveals some greater truth about how we find meaning in life.

- Adam Sobel

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



Director Adam Sobel:

Adam Sobel is a filmmaker who grew up in Arkansas, spent the past 5 years in Qatar, and recently relocated to Chicago. He has produced television and journalism around the Middle East for outlets including The Guardian, CNN, and ITN.

Sport's role in society is key to Adam's work. In 2013, Adam directed a series on Mt. Everest following the first woman from Saudi Arabia to reach the top. *The Workers Cup* is his feature-film debut.



Producer Rosie Garthwaite:

Rosie Garthwaite is the Executive Producer of Mediadante, an award-winning independent production company making films about the MENA region to a global audience. In 2015 the International Emmy-award winning *Escaping ISIS* she developed for Channel 4 and PBS was

referenced by the UK Prime Minister in a key speech and shown to the U.S. Congress. In 2014 she executive produced a CINE Golden Eagle award-winning series following the first Saudi woman up Everest. She is a former British army officer and author of the award-winning book "How to Avoid Being Killed in a War Zone" published by Bloomsbury in 2011.



Producer Ramzy Haddad:

Ramzy Haddad grew up in a much smaller Qatar before immigrating to Canada to continue his higher education in 1995. After making a start as a PA in Montreal on feature fiction films, he returned to the boomtown of his youth, Doha, Qatar, and shadowed the director of the first feature length documentary shot there *Linda and Ali: Two Worlds Within Four Walls*.

Ramzy seeks to challenge dominant narratives with his work. In his role as Creative Producer on *The Workers Cup*, he embraced the opportunity to bring out the nuances of the migrant workers story in Qatar to the world. Ramzy has directed and produced factual programs for AJE, Discovery and HBO. He's currently producing another feature documentary shot in Qatar and now lives in Beirut, Lebanon.



Executive Producer Dennis Paul:

Dennis Paul co-founded REACT to FILM, an educational nonprofit built upon the power of social issue documentary films. RtF developed a rigorous full-semester middle/high school course which speaks to students literacy and ELA skills, is aligned to the Common Core standards, provides youth with a foundational civics tool kit, and inspires them to make positive changes in their lives in reaction to the social issues raised by the films and curricula materials. RtF has enabled collegiate leaders at more than 40 colleges and universities in the U.S. to establish College Action Network chapters for this purpose, and we continue to mentor the advancement of those chapters, as well as the enablement of more chapters in the US and abroad. Dennis is the Founder and Managing Member of Thyra Global Management, which invests primarily in the technology and real estate sectors. For a decade, Dennis has served as a Trustee of the Museum of the Moving Image, and has been engaged with numerous nonprofit organizations focused on the digital divide, educational opportunities for under-served youth, and the power of social issue documentaries to help engage youth.



Executive Producer Paul Miller:

Paul Miller is an independent producer and film executive working in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East. He is currently based in Amsterdam. He is a founder and partner at Film Bridge Capital, which supports producers in securing finance, packaging their project and finding co-producers. Paul was previously Director of Film Financing at the Doha Film Institute in Qatar. His filmography includes *Snow Angels* (dir. David Gordon Green, 2006); *A Love Song for Bobby Long* (2004, Golden Globe nominated); *Poor Consuelo Conquers the World*, with Les Films d'Ici for ARTE in 2011; *Prozac Nation* (dir. Erik Skjoldbjærg, 2001); *Men with Guns* (dir. John Sayles, 1997, Golden Globe nominated); *Lone Star* (dir. John Sayles, 1996, Academy Award nominated). Miller also executive produced the feature-length documentary, *The Man Who Drew the Future*, with Una Films and ARTE.

MAIN CREDITS

Directed by Adam Sobel

Produced by Rosie Garthwaite and Ramzy Haddad

Executive Producers Dennis Paul and Paul Miller

Edited by Lauren Wellbrock, Anne Jünemann, and Adam Sobel

Edit Consultants Anne Fabini and Francois Sculier

Cinematography by Nazim Aggoune and Joe Saade

Original Music by Nathan Halpern

Colorist: Tyler Roth

Re-recording Mixer: Drew Weir

AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS

AWARDS

Hot Springs Documentary Festival: Best Sports Documentary

Hawai'i European Cinema: Best Feature Documentary

Mosaic Intl. South Asian Film Festival (MISAFF): Best Feature Documentary

NOMINATIONS

News And Documentary Emmy: Outstanding Business and Economics Documentary

Critics Choice Awards: Best Sports Documentary

SIMA Awards: Best Feature Doc

NOTABLE REVIEWS

"Required Viewing"

- The Guardian

"Bittersweet story of migrant laborers"

- The New York Times

"A riveting underdog tale"

- Screen Daily

"An Intimate Portrait"

- The Washington Post

"Delivers impressive dignity"

- The Guardian

"Remarkable inside access"

- Variety

"A forbidding vantage point"

- *The Village Voice*

"An important story"

- Forbes

"Poignant & Painful"

- Film Enquiry

"Unique perspective"

- Pure Non Fiction

"An Explicit Glimpse Behind the Scenes"

- The Playlist

"The Workers Cup is an easy film to cheer for."

- Deseret News

"A Must See"

- Irish Film Critic

"Incredible Access"

- RogerEbert.com

STILL PHOTOS

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