

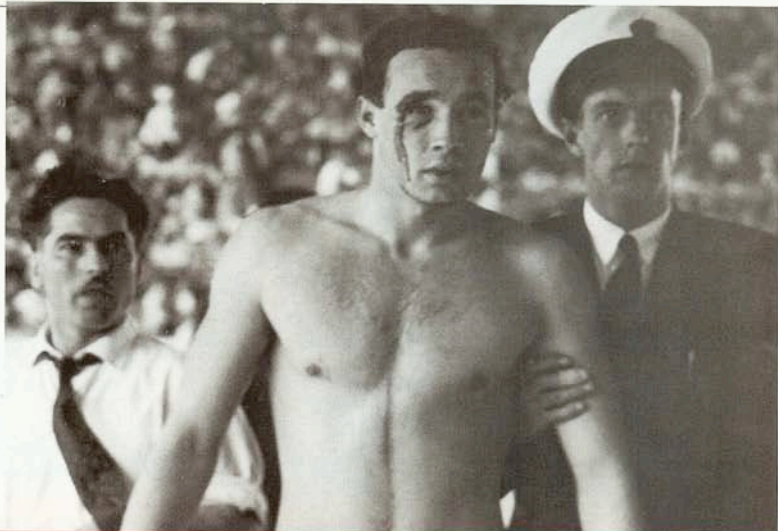


COVER STORY *Art, Angels & AIDS*

# freedom's fury:

## BLOOD ON THE STREETS, BLOOD IN THE WATER

BY CLAIRE GEDDIE



Hungary's Ervin Zador - Melbourne Olympics, 1956

In a movie landscape peppered with stock stories and characters, it should not come as a surprise that truth can be more astonishing than fiction. This has proved to be the case for sibling filmmakers Colin Keith Gray and Megan Raney, whose documentary, *Freedom's Fury*, unites Olympic sport, democratic revolution and Hollywood A-Lister Lucy Liu. Currently enjoying a series of Oscar qualifying runs around the United States, the film is remarkable in both premise and production.

Described by the self-termed "Sibs" as both a "social justice story" and a "love letter to water polo," *Freedom's Fury* focuses on parallel, powerfully cinematic events of 1956 – the year Hungary upended totalitarian Soviet rule. Twelve days after its successful uprising, however, Hungary was brutally reinvaded; more than 5,000 died and nearly a quarter of a million fled the country. To sports enthusiasts, 1956 was the year of the Melbourne Olympics and of the most infamous match in water polo's history. A semi-final pitted Hungary against the Soviet Union a mere three weeks after the massacre. Labeled since as the "blood in the water" match, this athletic evocation of a political grudge culminated in a sucker punch which split open the head of Hungarian player Ervin Zador. In a twist befitting of Hollywood, the Hungarian underdogs trounced the Soviet team, mirroring the success of their initial uprising just three weeks prior.

The Sibs place these events in celluloid counterpoint, seamlessly blending documentary footage and stylized recreations by Raney, who acted as the film's cinematographer. The production draws from more than 5,000 stills and 200 hours of footage, including interviews with Russian and Hungarian athletes and revolutionaries. The filmmakers state, "Our hope is that our documentary shows people that, like water polo, these kinds of struggles require persistence and perseverance. Most of all, we hope it shows young people today that they can make a difference in their world by taking action and by standing up for what they believe in."

*Freedom's Fury*, itself, represents a tenacious journey spanning 20 years. Gray had fallen in love with water polo during high school, and at the University of Michigan played with Hungarian Ben Quittner,

who had in turn been coached by Deszo Gyarmati, captain of that Hungarian team of '56. The significance of the "blood in the water" match was impressed upon Gray, but it was only when the Sibs took an Atlanta Olympics news clipping on the subject to producing partner Kristine Lacey that the ball began rolling.

When Gray pitched the idea to an old college friend who shared his politics, she was immediately interested, drawing links between the 1956 massacre and that of Tiananmen Square in 1989. When that friend invited her colleague to a fundraiser held for the project in 2001, he agreed to act as an executive producer. The college friend was actress Lucy Liu, and her colleague – *Kill Bill* director Quentin Tarantino – described the dual narrative as "the greatest story never told." They were later joined as executive producers by Amy Sommer and Hungarian producer Andrew Vajna (*Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Evita*). Liu helped to fundraise, sell and market the film, even yielding her garage as a post-production facility during the two-year editing process. Vajna provided key funding in purchasing interviews and footage for his own soon-to-be-released Hungarian language feature film on the subject, *Szabadság szerelem* (*Children of Glory*).

*Freedom's Fury* continued to experience twists of fate well into production. On the first day of recording, the film's narrator, seven-time Olympic gold medalist Mark Spitz, revealed that he had trained with Hungarian player Ervin Zador, who had defected to California after the game. Fortuitously, because of the delays in the edit, the film's 2006 premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival marked the 50th anniversary of both the match and uprisings. Zador and Spitz were both present for the screening and the tearful ovation that followed. *Fury's* further premiere in Budapest on September 5 was, notably, held at the Corvin Theater, a stronghold integral to those freedom fighters of 1956.

The film is currently enjoying a run in Hungary, and the filmmakers are now anticipating worldwide release dates, beginning, appropriately, with Melbourne on November 21. Just as the Olympics have continued to serve as an allegorical battlefield of nations since 1896, so does *Freedom's Fury* find itself on the front line. -MPM