



# The Chicago International Film Festival

Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival

Education Program Screening: *In The Game*

Director: Maria Finitzo

77 minutes

Please use the below synopsis/study questions to lead your students in film preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the field trip, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays must be sent to Cinema/Chicago in order to be invited to subsequent film screenings. *Schools that do not send in essay requirement will not be allowed to attend future Education Screenings.*

## **Synopsis**

*In the Game* follows the story of Kelly High School's girl soccer team on Chicago's south side. Set in the predominantly Hispanic neighborhood of Brighton Park, Kelly High School is struggling to provide the basic necessities for their students due to major Chicago Public School cuts. The members of the girl's soccer team face an uneven playing field—with no home soccer field, uncertain futures, problems at home, discrimination and poverty—but remain undaunted thanks to their teammates and the dedicated mentoring of coach Stan Mietus. *In the Game* is the story of strong young women and a dedicated coach who uses the game of soccer to teach his players how to face all that life will throw their way, without giving up, without complaints, with grace and with resilience.

## **Inspirational Coaches in Film**

The inspirational coach is a common motif in many sports films and documentaries portrayed as an equally key member to the team as the players themselves. Many times, these coaches are shown rallying their team to greatness by furthering their athlete's potential on and off the field. In the recent Oscar winning documentary, *Undefeated*, Manassas high school football coach Bill Courtney helps reverse the team's losing streak by looking out for his players and their academic futures off the field, similar to Stan Mietus at Kelly High School.

The depiction of a coach as a mentor is particularly common in many high school and college sports movies, where the sport is an extracurricular activity to one's academics. In the biographical movie *Coach Carter*, Samuel L. Jackson plays a high school basketball coach who stops his team's championship season until they improve their grades. Like the soccer team at Kelly High School, the player's academic and professional futures are just as important to the coach as their athleticism in the game.

### **Study Ideas/Questions**

1. Which individual from the film did you connect with most? In what ways did you connect with that person?
2. In the beginning of the film, Elizabeth says, "I want to be known for who I am not for who I want to be." What does this mean? How do you want to be known in the future?
3. What do you think is the message of the film? How is this message conveyed?
4. How do soccer and the Kelly team affect each of these girls' lives? Do you have an activity or hobby that has made an impact on your life in the same way? What is it and how has it helped create your identity?
5. Unlike many sports documentaries, the film does not show the team winning a championship, but presents hard work and dedication in other ways. What are some of the ways determination is expressed in the film?
6. Following their graduation, Maria, Elizabeth and Alicia all try to get their degrees but face many obstacles along the way. What are some of those obstacles? How do they try to overcome these obstacles? Have you ever faced a similar obstacle in your life? If so, how did you overcome it?
7. Coach Stan is more than just a coach but also a mentor to each of the girls on the team. Is there anyone in your life who is similar to Coach Stan? Who is that person and in what ways have they mentored or supported you?
8. How might the film have been different had the team won a championship at the end? Would this have changed how you experienced the film?
9. Besides soccer, family and education are seen as two prominent facets of these girls' lives. Do you notice any similarities and/or differences among their family lives and their respective paths post high school graduation?
10. Were you surprised when Maria got married? Why or why not?
11. If you had to summarize this film in one sentence, what would that sentence be and why?

### **Useful Resources**

Chicago International Film Festival website: [www.chicagofilmfestival.com](http://www.chicagofilmfestival.com)  
In The Game website: [www.inthegamedoc.com](http://www.inthegamedoc.com)

*Guide prepared by Hannah Hoffman, Rebecca Fons – Cinema/Chicago, 2015*