

Jan 28 2013 8:06 AM EST 17,667

Jeremy Lin Schools His NBA Haters In 'Linsanity' Doc

Director Evan Jackson Leong tells MTV News he 'wanted to show the evolution' of how Lin dealt with racism.

By Eric Ditzian (@ericditzian)



Jeremy Lin
Photo: Henny Ray Abrams

What are the chances that **Jeremy Lin** and the Houston Rockets — in the midst of an 82-game regular season — would be playing the Utah Jazz hours after the close of the **Sundance Film Festival** on Sunday, allowing the point guard to pop over to Park City, Utah, for the final screening of his documentary "Linsanity"?

Then again, what are the chances the world would even *know* the name Jeremy Lin? That the undrafted Harvard grad would become an international sensation who gave New York Knicks fans a reason to root for the team during an otherwise abysmal season? That the Knicks would then fail to re-sign him and that Lin — courtesy of a three-year, \$25 million contract — would head to Houston? That an MTV News producer named Evan Jackson Leong had been following around Lin for years for what everyone involved thought would be a small documentary about an Asian-American basketball player who no one had ever heard of? That "Linsanity" would end up getting into Sundance and receiving rave reviews?

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Some things are just too hard to explain. To hear it from Lin's perspective in the doc, it's all part of God's plan. For Leong, who stopped by to chat with his old colleagues at Sundance, all these questions amount to the craziest year of his life.

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MTV News: It's been one year since you left MTV News. At what point did you realize you were sitting on something that was much bigger than you ever expected? Was it that first game where he went big? Was it a couple of games in?

Leong: I think we have to go back and know that we were shooting this when he was at Harvard. I was at MTV; I was using my vacation days to film him. At that point in the documentary, we didn't really have a great ending. We had a bittersweet story. He made it to the NBA, which is amazing in itself, but it wasn't a very good start to his career. That first game, he gave us an ending. And that second game, he gave us an ending, and he just kept going. We were just blown away. We didn't even know what happened. We're like, "Oh yeah, we're shooting a documentary!" And we have all the access before anyone else does.

MTV: People know the NBA story of Jeremy Lin, but what's really cool about the film is you find out these little moments about Jeremy. In the best way possible, he's kind of a dork who likes "Aladdin" and "The Lion King" animated films, he likes to sing karaoke.

Leong: There's the Jeremy that everyone sees, the one that's media-trained and ESPN-ready. But then there's the Jeremy behind closed doors. It's not a bad Jeremy, it's not something you have to hide from, but it's also one that he's very protective of. I think in any documentary, something like this, you spend two or three years with someone, you want to earn their trust. And when you earn their trust they're going to give you things that you might not normally get. I think that's what we built.

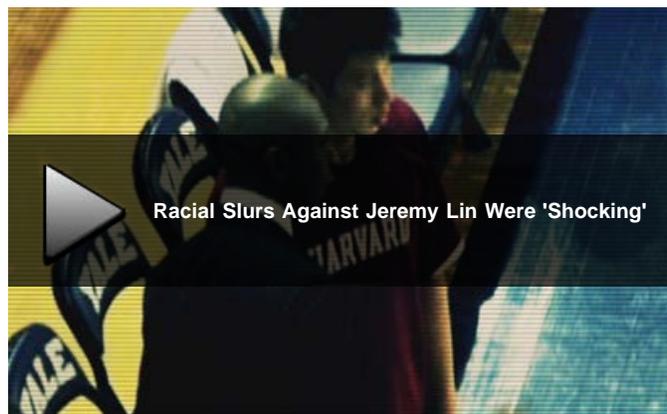


MTV: When is the first time you heard that word "Linsanity"?

Leong: Maybe the second game I heard it, and I texted that to Jeremy and he didn't text me back. And then I realized I don't think he liked it that much. He didn't like the name. He likes Jeremy; he doesn't like using everything as Lin puns.

MTV: Race and racism play a strong role in the documentary.

Leong: I think we all know racism still exists here in America, and that was something you couldn't get away with in this documentary. He's an Asian guy, and there's not a lot of Asian-Americans that high in the media. So when they do reach that level, they are going to be exposed, and there's going to be stuff that comes out. What I really wanted to try and do and show on this documentary was the evolution of how he dealt with that, because it was new to us, but he's been dealing with that his whole life. And I think we can learn from how he deals with it now. In the documentary, you see he has a little bit of a chip on his shoulder when he's younger, a little bit of something to prove. He realizes that playing for that — those reasons — those aren't the right reasons to play. By the end, I think we can all learn from how he deals with race. If everyone looked at racism in that sense, by letting it go and focusing that energy, I think what he did outshines any of that stuff by a tremendous amount.

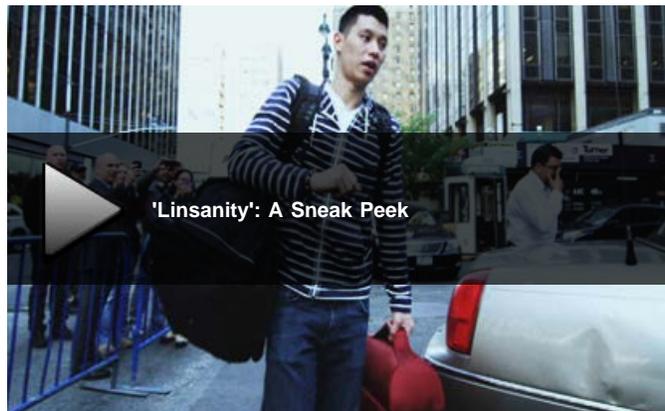


MTV: So was he able to have a sort of enlightened approach to it all?

Leong: He's really at an enlightened stage these days. When people say racist stuff, he laughs. It doesn't bother him to the degree of anything anymore. I'd probably get pretty mad, but it doesn't bother him anymore. There's far bigger things that he has to worry about in his life, and again, he's become that high. You're always going to have haters, and they're always going to be the ones that say stuff.

MTV: You ended the film at a point before the injury that ended his season, before the contract negotiations and all that stuff. Why did you decide to end it there?

Leong: It's a good question, because no one's asked me that one, which is great. We ended it with Linsanity because I wanted to make this a legacy film. Ten years from now, 20 years from now, I want to be able to show my kids, and I hope that he can show his kids, that this is what happened. There's always going to be news about him and those little media controversies. No one's gonna remember that kind of stuff 10 years from now; they're just going to remember those nine games. It's contract stuff, and that's business, but ultimately at the end of the day, I'm not in those rooms, so I don't know what's going on with all that. And also at the same time, by ending with that — you take that journey and end it with that — you can't have a better ending than that.



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