

Wednesday, March 20, 2013 21:28:43 GMT

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL | ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Log In Register Subscribe Now

# SPEAKEASY

<< PREVIOUS

NEXT >>

PARTIES FILM TV MEDIA MUSIC BOOKS STAGE STYLE

March 18, 2013, 11:00 AM

## Yes, 'Linsanity' Is Still a Thing



Article

Comments (3)

SPEAKEASY HOME PAGE »

By Jeff Yang



Reuters

Houston Rockets point guard Jeremy Lin returning to Madison Square Garden in December 2012.

[Linsanity](#), the much-anticipated documentary tracking [Jeremy Lin](#)'s rise from obscurity to the global spotlight, starts off by underscoring just how huge and wildly implausible this leap really was.

"When I got to Madison Square Garden, they stopped me at the player's entrance," Lin says in voiceover. "They

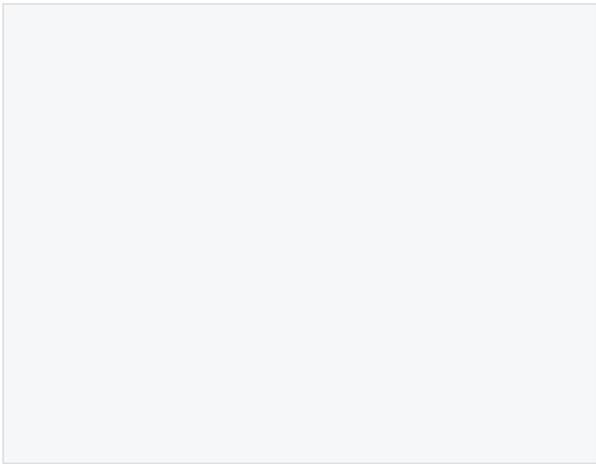
said, 'Where do you think you're going? Are you a trainer?' And then another security guard came over and said, 'Hey...I think he plays on the team!'"

At the time of this ignominious arrival at the home of the New York Knicks, Lin had gone undrafted by every NBA franchise, before being picked up off the trash heap by his hometown Golden State Warriors. A year later, after a season of spotty play marked by regular trips down to the D-League, he was quietly dropped. The Houston Rockets snatched him up, only to waive him again before he ever played a game with the team — informing him of the cut on Christmas Day, no less.

The Knicks were Lin's last chance, and they didn't seem inclined to give him much of one: He barely got practice time with his new teammates, and spent most of his time polishing the bench. That is, until a string of injuries and truly miserable losses led coach Mike D'Antoni to put Lin into a game against the local-rival Nets "out of desperation," as D'Antoni later admitted. Lin exploded for 25 points, five rebounds and seven assists, leading the depleted team to a shocking 99-92 win against the Nets and their hotshot young point guard Deron Williams.

No one knew then that the game was just the beginning of an incredible, impossible ride. Least of all the scrappy crew of filmmakers who'd been tracking Lin's exploits since his freshman year as part of Harvard's unheralded Ivy squad.

For them, the game changed everything.



### About Speakeasy



Speakeasy is an online magazine covering media, entertainment, celebrity and the arts. The publication is produced by senior editor [Christopher John Farley](#), [Alexandra Cheney](#) and [Barbara Chai](#) with contributions from the Wall Street Journal staff and others. Write to us at [speakeasy@wsj.com](mailto:speakeasy@wsj.com) or follow us on Twitter at [@WSJSpeakeasy](#) or individually at [@cjfarley](#), [@alexandracheny](#) and [@barbarachai](#).



Follow Speakeasy on Twitter

Speakeasy on Facebook

### Most Popular

- | Read | Commented   |
|------|---|
| 1.   | <a href="#">In Anti-Rape Debate, Indian MPs Reveal Sexism</a>           |
| 2.   | <a href="#">Michelle Shocked Tour Canceled Over Homophobic Comments</a> |

“At the time, we were just making a bunch of six to eight minute long webisodes — something we could put up on YouTube for his fans,” says director [Evan Jackson Leong](#). “We thought we’d just cover different moments of his life: His childhood, his play during high school, in college, in the NBA, and so on.”

It wasn’t easy for Leong and producers [Christopher C. Chen](#) and [Brian Yang](#) to even get Lin to agree to that. “We got introduced through mutual friends,” says Chen. “We exchanged a couple of emails, began a casual relationship. But whenever I asked about putting him on film, he’d say no. He’s a really humble guy — he kept saying that all he was interested in was playing ball.”



**Tao Jones**

It took “dozens of meetings,” says Leong, before Lin got comfortable with the idea of getting in front of the cameras. “We’d get together, get something to eat, and talk about what we might want to do. Finally I told him, ‘Look, I don’t know what this documentary is. I don’t want to tell you what it’s going to look like. But if you’ll put in the time to make this happen, and trust in me to do it right, I can guarantee that I’ll do your story justice.’”

It helped that Leong, Chen and Yang together offered as ideal a mix of potential backgrounds as one could ask for if you were trying to get Jeremy Lin to agree to do a documentary.

Leong had made music videos for Asian American rapper [Jin](#), one of Lin’s favorite musicians, and his most recent project had been a documentary on [Christianity in Asia](#). Chen had produced “[The Year of the Yao](#),” a documentary on Chinese basketball superstar Yao Ming — who Lin cites as one of his role models. In addition to being a veteran actor with a recurring role on CBS’s “Hawaii Five-O” (he convinced series star [Daniel Dae Kim](#) to provide LINSANITY’s narration), Yang was a lifelong amateur basketball player and commissioner of New York’s “Dream League” adult-hoops organization. And all three grew up in the Bay Area, which meant they literally knew where Lin was coming from, having followed his exploits since he led [Palo Alto High](#) to a shocking California Interscholastic Federation Div II title against nationally ranked prep powerhouse Mater Dei.

Lin finally agreed to let the project go forward, giving Leong surprising license to shoot scenes with his family, friends and church. There are moving sequences that show how hard Lin has toiled, from childhood on, to meet his own expectations and overcome those of others. There are moments that will make you quirk your eyebrows or laugh out loud, like a quilted-up Lin ranking his collection of cartoon-character-themed comforters in order — “Lion King is my favorite. Garfield is second, Sesame Street is number three” — or belting out a credible version of “A Whole New World” from [Disney](#)’s “Aladdin” at karaoke. And there are plenty of moments that make you want to stand up and cheer.

“It was all going great — we were getting really good footage,” says Leong. “The problem was that we just didn’t have an ending. The fact that he got to the NBA, that was great, but that first year...let’s just say it was a bittersweet success. And because we didn’t know what to do, we just kept shooting.”

Christopher C. Chen laughs. “And then it was February 4, and The Game happened.” he says. “We were all calling each other saying, ‘Are you guys WATCHING this?’”

It was then that they realized their microbudget webisode series might just be

- 3. [Just How Expensive Is Galaxy S 4 to Make?](#)
- 4. [Kate Upton Tentatively Accepts High School Prom Invite](#)
- 5. [Parsing the Fed: How the Statement Changed](#)

### Most Recent

Articles    Comments

- 1. [Next James Bond Film Coming in 3 Years](#)
- 2. [Michelle Shocked Tour Canceled Over Homophobic Comments](#)
- 3. [Kate Upton Tentatively Accepts High School Prom Invite](#)
- 4. [Listen to ‘Glee’ Take On Radiohead](#)
- 5. [Exclusive Clip: Philip Roth on His Writing Process \(Video\)](#)

### WSJ Email Newsletters

[Speakeasy Today](#)

[Life & Style](#)

[Tastings](#)

[This Week's Most Popular](#)

[SIGN UP](#)

[Symbols and Alerts](#)

[Manage Email Preferences](#)

#### SPONSORED LINKS

##### Free Reference Tool

Get Dictionary Definitions Fast! Get The Free Reference Toolbar. [FreeDownloads.us.com/Reference](#)

##### Cheap Rockets Basketball

Compare prices now and save up to 75% on quality Rockets Basketball! [Rockets-Basketball.BEST-PRICE.com](#)

##### blogs

Find blogs  
[twely.co.uk](#)

something much bigger. How big, nobody knew. Lin continue to amaze fans and stifle detractors night after night, putting up superstar numbers against some of the best in the league, his run climaxing in an epic game against Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers. (I was privileged to cover the game firsthand; the night before, Bryant had famously scoffed at reporters asking how he'd handle Lin, saying "I don't even know who he is." After Lin torched Bryant with 38 points, it's my voice you can hear in the movie asking a question at the postgame press conference: "[Hey Jeremy, do you think Kobe knows who you are now?](#)" In the movie, Lin admits that he'd assumed someone was going to ask that question, and had an answer prepared in his head: "Kobe who?" But upon reflection, he decided to go the high road, and offered up a polite demurral — "You'll have to ask him" — before noting that Bryant had extended a hand to help him off the floor during the game, a mark of quiet, in-game respect that Lin had appreciated.

Yang says that when word leaked that they'd been working on the documentary, "all kinds of offers came flooding in, crazy stuff, reality shows, you name it." The team resisted the temptation to cash in, knowing that Lin had placed confidence in them specifically because they had promised not to allow the documentary to become a distraction. "This is a guy who wasn't even reading all the magazine articles about him, when he'd become the biggest news story in the world. He said he was going to save them all for after the season and be surprised."

But the phenomenon that the media dubbed "Linsanity" always had a time limit. Even if Lin had continued to produce at the same staggering level, the intense attention focused upon him would inevitably flag. The filmmakers likely left millions on the table after Lin suffered a season-ending knee injury, and thousands more when the Knicks failed to offer him a deal countering Houston's four year, \$28.8 million bid for his services. But Leong is philosophical about the outcome, quoting the great Alfred Hitchcock: "In narrative films, the director is God. In documentaries, God is the director." You don't plan anything, it just happens."

And as for Lin, who's having a quietly successful year on a team that more than any in the league knows how to market an Asian player to both U.S. and international audiences, the move has been a positive one. Though he admits he'll always miss the Garden's fans, he finally feels like his position in Houston is secure, and the future is bright. As he told me in an interview after LINSANITY's SXSW screening, "We feel like we have something special in Houston, something that we're building. It'll take time, but we're really young. But I think we have the pieces to possibly [win it all] sometime down the road."

Sometime in the next three years, hopefully? "I hope so," he grinned. "I hope so."

So keep your eyes peeled, sportsfans. LINSANITY may well end up having a sequel.

\*\*\*

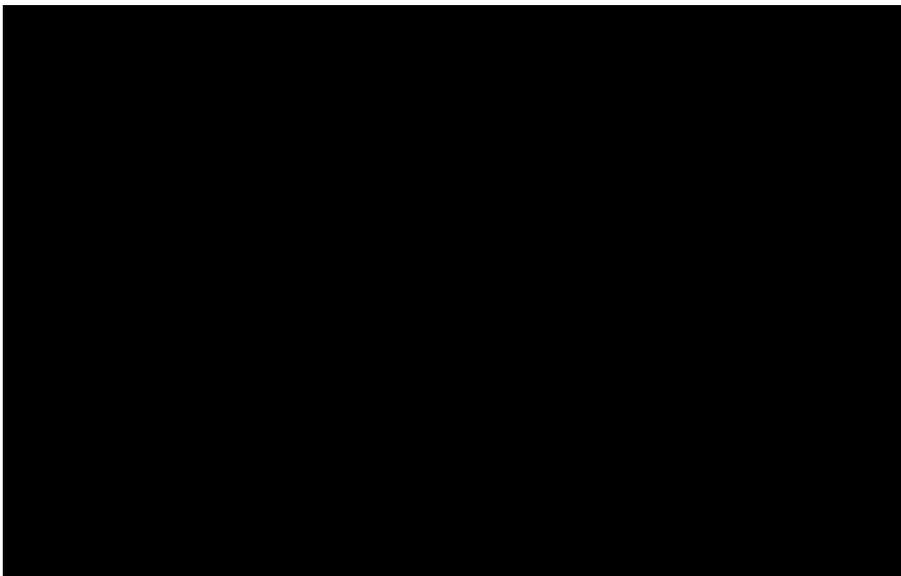
### **The Tao Jones Index**

Must-click quick-hits from across Asia and Asian America.

**The Complicated Chinese Family Tree:** Comedy duo Dan and Carmen offer up a video that illustrates the [absurdly complex taxonomy](#) of Chinese extended families. Seriously, no one can remember all the obscure terms and titles we use for our fourth-cousin-thrice-removed.

["I'm an Asian American"](#): Douglas Kim, a management consultant (and competitive poker player: He made the final table of the World Series of Poker), shows off his satirical chops with this parody retake on Ben Folds's "Rockin the Suburbs."

**North Korean propaganda video, dubbed with hilarious parody translation, fools many major periodicals:** A DPRK propaganda short called "The Dark Reality of Capitalist Societies" found its way to YouTube, albeit dubbed with a snarky, satirical English "translation." Sadly, publications ranging from the Washington Post to Slate, Wired, The Week and the Daily Telegraph believed the translation to be legit, and reported it as such. Maybe next time they should...[Ask a Korean?](#)



[Houston Rockets](#), [Jeremy Lin](#), [Linsanity](#), [New York Knicks](#), [South By Southwest](#), [SXSW 2013](#), [Tao Jones](#)



Previous in Speakeasy

**'The Good Wife' TV Recap: Father Doesn't Know Best**

Next in Speakeasy

**Chrysler Tells Some Owners: Park Your Cars, They Could Catch Fire**



[SPEAKEASY HOME PAGE](#) »

SPONSORED LINKS

**54-Year-Old Mom Looks 27**

Follow this 1 weird tip and remove 20 years of wrinkles in 20 days.  
[theSmartConsumerLiving.com](#)

**Video Job Interviews**

EEOC & OFCCP Compliant Interviews that Save \$ and Reduce Time-to-Hire  
[www.HireVue.com](#)

**Houston Rockets Tickets**

Just Buy Houston Rockets Tickets Houston Rockets NBA Tickets  
[Rockets.JustBuyTickets.com](#)

**phoenix suns**

Buy Tickets To Watch Your Favorite Stars. No Service Fee. 866-551-TIXX  
[www.SuperStarTickets.com/Suns](#)

**Add a Comment**

Name

Comment

We welcome thoughtful comments from readers. Please comply with our [guidelines](#). Our blogs do not require the use of your real name.



## Comments (3 of 3)

[View all Comments »](#)

9:48 pm March 18, 2013

**Blackie Chan** wrote:

Never underestimate the power of the human spirit, can overcome all obstacles.

9:42 pm March 18, 2013

**HoustonFan** wrote:

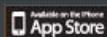
Kevin Mchale you sucks dont know how to coaching Linsanity!got fired!!!

9:38 pm March 18, 2013

**NYCKNICKS** wrote:

We miss him here man!Knicks suxk without him!

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



[Subscribe](#) / [Login](#)

[Back to Top](#)

### Customer Service

[Customer Center](#)

[New! Live Help](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[WSJ Weekend](#)

[Contact Directory](#)

[Corrections](#)

### Policy

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Data Policy](#)

[Copyright Policy](#)

[Subscriber Agreement & Terms of Use](#)

### Ads

[Your Ad Choices](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Advertise Locally](#)

[Place a Classified Ad](#)

### Tools & Features

[Apps](#)

[Newsletters and Alerts](#)

[Graphics & Photos](#)

[Columns](#)

[Topics](#)

[Guides](#)

[Portfolio](#)

[Old Portfolio](#)

### More

[Register for Free](#)

[Reprints](#)

[E-books](#)

[Content Partnerships](#)

[Conferences](#)

[SafeHouse](#)

[Mobile Site](#)

[Jobs at WSJ](#)

Copyright ©2013 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.