

India's Manipur passionate about baseball



Youths from the Indian state of Manipur play baseball. Courtesy of Baseball Dreams, LLC

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My Sunday best ...

"Baseball is like breathing."

Those words from a Manipur resident sum up the emotional tug of "The Only Real Game," a terrific documentary that will be featured at the Sedona Film Festival on Thursday and will have a one-week run at the Harkins Camelview 5 in Scottsdale beginning March 7.

The film takes a look at the pull of baseball in Manipur, a remote Indian state that borders Burma and is one of the more-heavily militarized places in the world, defined by a dangerous separatist movement and a corrupt government.

The roots of the sport were planted there in World War II, when U.S. Army air cargo troops assigned to fly supplies to China were stationed in the area and played baseball as often as they could.

Locals loved the game and over the years passed it on to their children, who would play even under the threat of martial law.

Eight years ago, a group of New York City baseball fans moved by Manipur's struggles and passion for baseball, formed an organization that inspired Spalding to send over equipment and Major League Baseball, through its Envoy program, to send representatives to train coaches and players.

The heart of the movie is the interaction between Manipur's hungry-to-learn residents and MLB's coaches: **David Palese**, a New Jersey-based college baseball coach, and **Jeff Brueggemann**, a former minor-league pitcher in the Minnesota Twins organization. That the story is played out with a backdrop of violence and turmoil makes it even more powerful.

"The Only Real Game," directed by documentary award-winning filmmaker **Mirra Bank**, is a wonderful nod to the philanthropic side of Major League Baseball. But the real heroes are the residents, who deliver a great reminder about the value of sports.

"Once I go to the field," one said, "I am in another world." ...