



DOCUMENTARY

GAME ON

Film-maker Mirra Bank's THE ONLY REAL GAME, which won best documentary at the NY Indian Film Festival, explores how the people of the troubled, isolated state of Manipur are connecting with the world through baseball

ELLE: How did the idea for this film come about?

Mirra Bank: Two of my colleagues – producer Muriel Peters and Somi Roy (who is from Manipur) – formed an organisation called First Pitch in order to assist Manipur's baseball community. It was First Pitch that enlisted me to make the film, which became a rich, novelistic record of this cross-cultural journey over six years.

ELLE: In a cricket-crazy nation like India, what is it that endears baseball to Manipuris?

MB: No one knows exactly how baseball first came to Manipur. But US servicemen stationed there during World War II played the game in a big way. For Manipuris living in a heavily armed conflict zone, it provides a sense of hope, cohesion, and joy. Also, it promises future jobs as coaches or players on

government-sponsored teams that would compete in India and abroad. This matters a great deal in a state where the unemployment rate hovers around 25 per cent.

ELLE: In the film, the women are the stars of the game. What connects them to it?

MB: The women of Manipur find a sense of unity and hope in baseball – as well as a bridge to the wider world. The most dedicated and talented players, as well as the ones who keep the game alive despite daunting odds, are Manipur's women and girls. In this state plagued by political corruption, poverty, guns, drugs, and HIV/AIDS, they are at the forefront of peace and justice initiatives as well.

www.onlyrealgamemovie.com