



## ***Film Review: Home Game***

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By: Marc Greewald      Wednesday, February 28, 2007

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It's been less than two years since the Gaza Disengagement. Yet already it is too easy to forget the vibrant lives and communities that were destroyed. An astonishing new Israeli film by first-time producer, Avi Abelow (an American *oleh*) seeks to keep that from happening. "Home Game" tells the story of the youths of one Gush Katif community, Netzer Chazani, as they struggled to maintain normalcy during the weeks leading up to the disengagement.

At the same time that they are peacefully protesting and praying for a miracle, these orange-clad teenagers are preparing for the annual Gush Katif inter-community basketball tournament. In the fateful summer of 2005, the final game is set to take place on the scheduled first day of the evacuation.

A sports competition may seem trivial in the shadow of the expulsion of Gush Katif's Jews from their homes. But to these teens, the game symbolizes the idyllic, everyday life that they are being forced to leave behind – and which they are determined to maintain up until the very last moment.

The spirit of these young people is truly inspiring. Not only does the film let us hear from them in their own words, it takes us inside Netzer Chazani as the adults and community leaders gather in the final days to discuss how to approach the impending evacuation. They debate whether to spend the final moments fortified in the communal synagogue or to stay in their houses that some had built with their own hands.

While showing the beauty of Gush Katif and mourning its destruction, "Home Game" is not overtly political. The residents are bewildered and anxious about where they will find new homes, but when the evacuation begins not everyone reacts the same way. Some are angry, blaming the IDF soldiers sent to carry out the plan – others are sad but not resentful toward the messengers.

In one poignant scene an elderly resident screams at a field commander demanding that he look into the camera and justify how Jews can evict Jews from their homes. In another equally powerful scene a family invites the soldiers into their home, to sit at their table, which is set with food and drink. At one point a woman crying uncontrollably asks where she and her family will live. Where will her kids go to school?

For the most part the evacuation is peaceful. The residents even have a public gathering in which they hand over their weapons, so as not to allow anyone to even think of the possibility of using them on the army. The film does not judge any of its subjects.

Remarkably, the final game – Netzer Chazani versus Neve Dekalim – goes forward. Amidst the exuberant competition, unity and pride fill the gymnasium. Hopefully, the spirit

that allowed the crowds to sing *Am Yisrael Chai* at such a painful moment in their lives still lives on.

“Home Game,” in Hebrew with English subtitles, will have 500 screenings throughout North America starting this May. To arrange a screening or for more information, please write to: [friendsofnetzer@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofnetzer@gmail.com) or visit them online at: [www.homegamethemovie.com](http://www.homegamethemovie.com)