

'Home Game' powerful on many fronts

By MATT SAMUELS

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There is a popular cliché in the sports world that urges teams to defend their home court. That concept is taken to a new level in the powerful documentary "Home Game" by Israeli filmmaker Avi Abelow.

The film chronicles the life of the Netzer Hazani 12th-grade basketball team as they play their final tournament before graduating. But this was no regular summer, as the small Gush Katif community was also battling for its life in the final days before the 2005 disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip.

Instead of canceling the annual tournament, organizers decided to play the games as a final protest to the fateful evacuation. The film, which was taken from more than 80 hours of home-video footage from 16 families, shows the struggles the teenagers went through and how they made the best of their difficult situation.

Abelow had the original idea for the film after taking leave from a consulting job in Tel Aviv to travel to the Gush Katif area. Abelow was able to see what was happening firsthand and brings a unique insider's perspective to his audience in 'Home Game.'

"There are so many powerful and important scenes that convey the atmosphere at the time," Abelow told the Jewish Herald-Voice last week. "Our challenge was to create as moving a film as possible using the dozens of hours of random video footage that had neither one storyline nor any specific characters.

"Even more challenging was the goal of transforming a movie with rich political content into an apolitical film that people of all religious and political persuasions can gather around and watch together."

While some of the film features footage from the basketball tournament, most of the time is spent showing how members of the community dealt with the evacuation. Teenagers protest by painting areas of the community orange, while others refuse to pack a single bag



The Netzer Hazani 12th-grade basketball team.

and force the IDF to take them away.

One of the film's narrators is a young girl, Einat Yefet, who filmed the struggles for an Israeli television station. Yefet said she was first reluctant to be filming her community as it went through its most trying time, but she realized it was an important duty to help let the world know what was going on.

Although the film's ultimate end-ing is documented in history, "Home Game" is not all about tragedy. Abelow does a great job of showing the strength, courage and even sense of humor of many of the film's main characters.

Abelow said his main purpose of the film was to get a dialogue going in Jewish communities, raise awareness and use it as a catalyst to help build bridges in Israeli society. Earlier this year, Abelow had a special screening for the heads of Israel's largest youth organizations.

"The response has been phenomenal," Abelow said. "Everyone, regardless of their political views or religious orientations, has come away from the movie saying how powerful it is and how important it is for all Jews to see."

After Passover, Abelow said, there will be 500 screenings in Jewish communities across North America.

"For me," Abelow said, "this movie is important in order to stimulate intra-Jewish dialogue so that we can begin to feel empathy for one another regardless of our differences.

"The power of "Home Game" is that it takes a topic that has and still divides us as a people, and it portrays it in a way that hopefully helps unite us as a people regardless of our differences. The movie is not about the politics; it's about the people and about recognizing our fellow Jews."

For more information on the film, please visit www.homegamethemovie.com.