Louganis Surfaces on TV

April 1, 1997 By Michael Adams

When Greg Louganis' autobiography, Breaking the Surface, perched on top of 1995 best-seller lists, the book seemed a perfect candidate for TV moviedom. Featuring a Polynesian-American learning-disabled child adopted by a white family, a tortured father/son relationship, an abusive lover, rape and a climax of stunning international success at two Olympic games, how could it miss?

Well, try homosexuality and AIDS, two subjects the networks increasingly seem to love -- except when combined. Almost everyone in Hollywood gave the script a pass. "What I'd constantly hear," says producer Jim Green, who tenaciously championed the project, "was, 'Oh no! Not another HIV story!'"

Although Louganis' health status plays a relatively minor role in the script, the issue took on massive weight for Hollywood suits. "Broadcast networks feel they've put enough AIDS stories out there," Green says. "We had to convince them that the whole drama did not hang on HIV, although we don't hide from it."

Green asked the USA Network, which had said no once before, to take a second look. In the end, Louganis' stature as what Green calls a "national treasure" helped boost the film into production (it airs March 19). Still, he allows, the controversy surrounding the diver's head injury at the '88 Olympics -- the blood in the pool, his failure to inform the doctor who stitched his wound of his HIV status -- created roadblocks. People mistakenly felt he'd put others at risk by not disclosing. "There are a lot of negative feelings about Greg out there," says Green. "It wasn't until the sales staff read the script that they felt comfortable about selling it."

Alan Hines, the film's writer and coproducer, sees the story as Louganis' coming of age -- with HIV his greatest challenge. "[Being diagnosed] helped him come out publicly. It made him an activist, even though he's not entirely comfortable in that role."

Regarding Breaking the Surface, Hines recounts that there was great concern among the producers about how many times the word AIDS was used, how soon it should be introduced, how graphically it should be discussed. "Basically, I think the compromises we made were about the limitations of television, not because of prejudice," he says.

Still, where TV AIDS stories are concerned, Hines confirms that quotas prevail. "Even if it's a minor element in a film, that's all the network will see," he says. "And if they have one on the lineup in a season, they probably won't do another one."

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/louganis-surfaces-tv