

FILM

# Transgressive

Be it love or sports, these cinema queers play by their own rules

**E**ban and Charley limped through the queer filmfest circuit drawing plenty of raised eyebrows and little prospect of distribution.

It wasn't so much the subject matter per se; "intergenerational love" (aka pedophilia) has been popping up in movies quite a bit lately. But audiences used to seeing such dramas end in suicide or murder after much suffering by all parties might be disappointed.

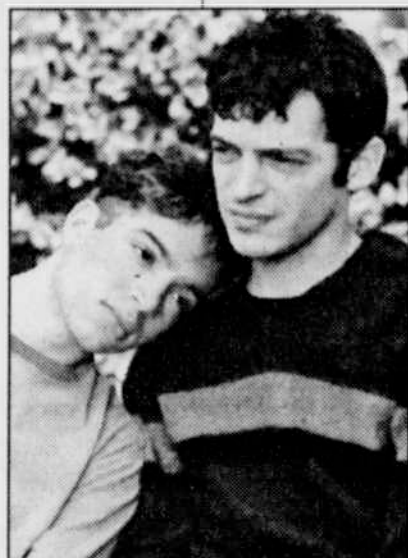
Low-key nearly to the point of torpor, *Eban and Charley* rejects the sensationalism inherent in this most enduring of cultural taboos. The film's title characters, a 29-year-old soccer coach and a 15-year-old boy, are presented as consenting if hopelessly naive parties to what seems to be a doomed affair.

Set at the Oregon coast, the film follows Eban's (Brent Fellows) return in disgrace to his parents after being fired for falling in love with one of his students. At the local CD store he meets Charley (Giovanni Andrade). The two play guitar, read poetry and fall in love.

In the mist-enshrouded coastal community, their relationship at first goes unnoticed, allowing them furtive strolls on the beach and hand-holding walks in the country. Of course, the town is not as sleepy as it seems, and the affair eventually comes to the attention of their not-exactly-thrilled parents.

Beautifully shot on digital video in Portland, Astoria and Seaside, *Eban and Charley* emphasizes mood and emotional nuance at the expense of action, a strategy that will alienate some but reward those willing to surrender to

the film's increasingly hypnotic spell. Both lead actors acquit themselves well in difficult roles, coming to life under the camera's pitiless recording of their every tic and turn. This brings its own kind of tension as we get to



He's old enough to be...his way older brother

know the characters and their neediness. The prospect of their comeuppance becomes almost nerve-racking.

Love it or hate it, this movie at least should stimulate debate on a subject that's been too demonized for rational discussion. Angry and hurt at the thought of losing Eban, Charley says with crushing sincerity: "I don't think age should matter. When you're 74, I'm going to be 60. We'll both be old men."

The film is most provocative in its challenge of the common cultural trope of older oppressor and younger victim.

—Gary Morris

**T**he *Iron Ladies* is based on the true story of a volleyball team—composed of a lesbian coach, gay men, transsexuals, transvestites and one token straight—that came out of nowhere in 1996 to win Thailand's national championships. In his first feature, television

commercial director Yongyoot Thongkoon has admitted to playing fast and loose with the hard facts, but what we see in the film is certainly a diverse and intriguing bunch, dramatized or not.

Mon (Sahaparp Virakamin) is a volleyball enthusiast who frequently finds himself turned down at tryouts because he's gay. His chipper, proudly girlish friend Jung (Chaichan Nimpoonsawas) convinces him to try out for a team being organized by Coach Bee (Siridhana Hong-sophon). When both are selected, the rest of the players quit in protest.

Bee asks Mon and Jung if they know any more open-minded players, and they eventually come up with, among others, a flamboyantly gay army sergeant (apparently, "don't ask, don't tell" is one hassle Thailand's government didn't feel the need to bother with), a transsexual nightclub performer and a "straight-acting" closeted gay man.

As Bee leads them to greater discipline and victory, petty rivalries and strife both internal and external test their solidarity. Once the players finally get it sufficiently together to taste their greatest success on the court and

prove their myriad detractors wrong, the homophobia of ill-meaning individuals in the upper echelons of the Thai sports world threatens to end their winning streak.

The most successful sequences are those in which we see the characters in action. Just as *Raging Bull* or *Personal Best* fascinated even viewers totally uninterested by boxing or track, one needn't be a volleyball nut to get drawn into the film's thrill of victory/agnony of defeat quandary.

Unfortunately, the sections of *The Iron Ladies*

that do not take place on the court are rife with awkward, strident proselytizing. Characters are repeatedly given grandstanding speeches, as if displaying a cross section of gay maledom kicking ass on the macho-dominated volleyball court isn't enough to let the audience know that the film's "message" is one of diversity and tolerance.

Still, mixing this heavy-handedness into a story both simple and engaging doesn't make

*The Iron Ladies* any worse (or better) than a *Rocky* or a *Days of Thunder*. It's a watchable, competent, imperfect genre picture.

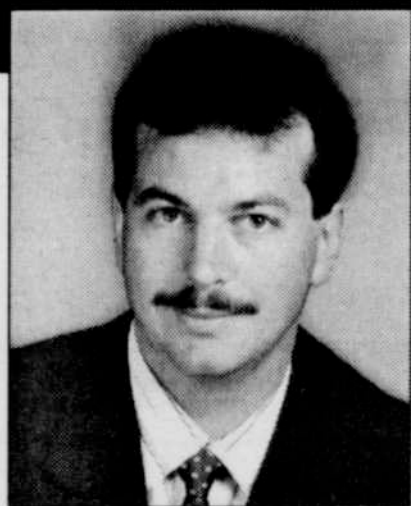
—Christopher McQuain



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