

TRUTH TO POWER
SCREENS

Readily Apparent Media on Their Basketball Doc

Local production house goes for the fast break

BY SEAN L. MALIN, FRI., APRIL 14, 2017



When aspiring filmmaker Field Humphrey met Patrick Newman and Ben Altenberg at Texas Crew Productions, it was shared cinephilia at first sight.

Austin transplants all, with a decade of independent and commercial filmmaking between them, these artists quickly realized they had in common a fierce desire to develop conscientious, humanistic, and inquisitive personal work. Humphrey, a Georgian who had decamped for college in Mississippi, then New York, and ultimately Texas, was especially anxious to direct "my first film. Patrick, Ben, and I had many discussions about how best to approach it."

Last year, Humphrey, Newman, and Altenberg founded Readily Apparent Media, a locally based production company "dedicated to bringing important topics to light." Positioning themselves in interchangeable roles as one another's producers and crew, the principals operate with the strongly idealistic mutualism of several other renowned production cooperatives: think Borderline Films (*Martha Marcy May Marlene*) with aspirations toward Joshua Oppenheimer's *Final Cut for Real* (*The Act of Killing*).

Two projects soon emerged as front-runners for the company to announce its presence: *The Shake-Up*, an investigation into the failing New Mexico mental health care system to be directed by Altenberg (which recently began production in Albuquerque); and Humphrey's debut, *Let 'Em Know You're There*, a slice-of-life portrait of former NBA star-turned-Pillsbury executive Jim Tucker. Says Humphrey, who is shooting and editing the film: "We were comfortable doing a sports doc, but we also wanted to do something much more than that." Yet, he notes, "even we were surprised how deep the story was, emotionally and personally."

Tucker's tale had come to Humphrey from a "good friend way back in high school in Georgia" who "always mentioned that his granddad played in the league." His friend's suggestion that someone make a film about this player had slipped Humphrey's mind for years, until in the summer of 2016, he was given a stern talking-to. "My friend said 'Listen, man, my granddad is the real deal. He is kind of a badass.'"

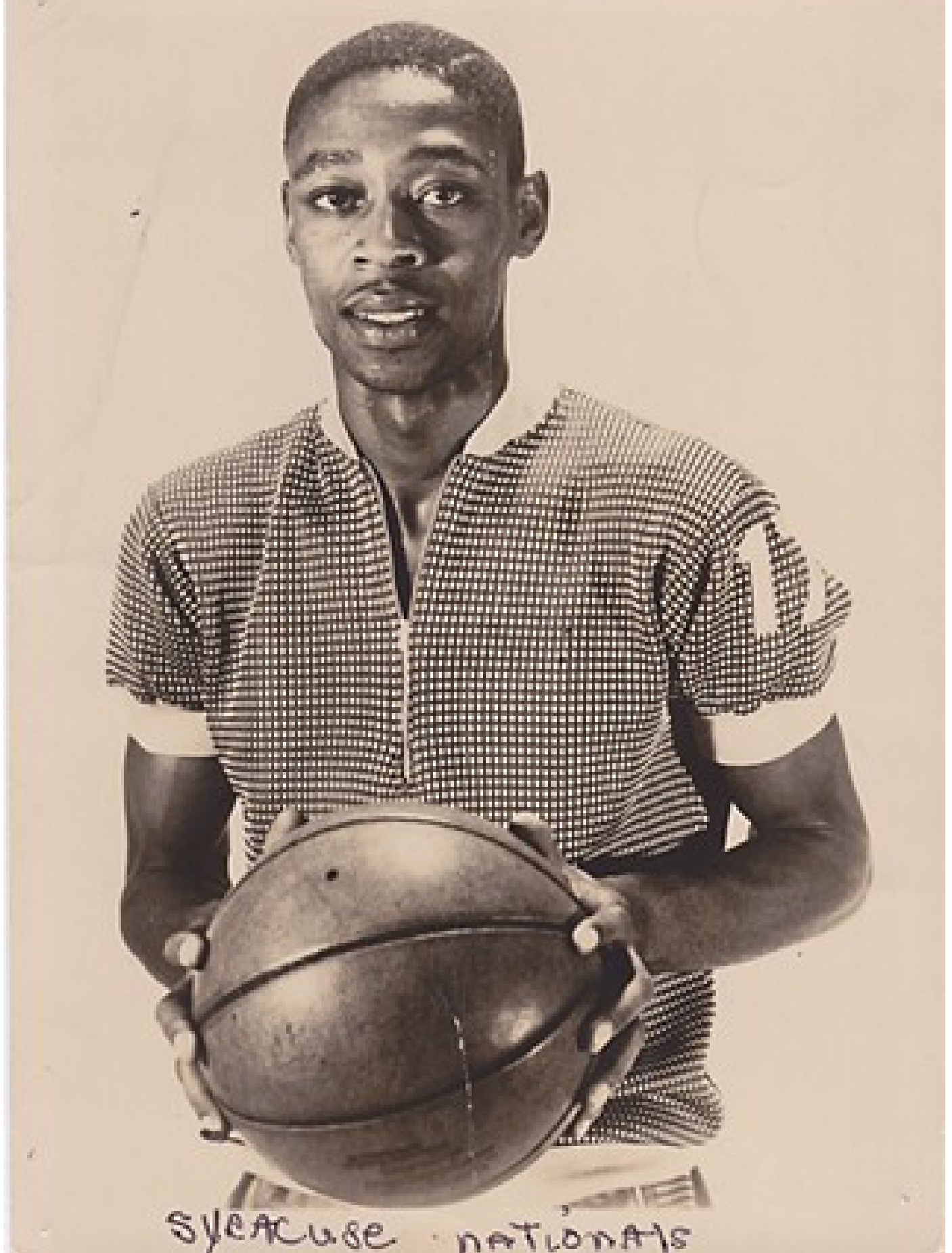
Humphrey learned that his friend's grandfather had the fastest triple-double in NBA history, a slightly obscure but important record being perennially chased by Russell Westbrook. A triple-double – in which players get "double figures in three different statistics during a game," explains Humphrey, "is reserved for the best of the best." Along with Newman, Humphrey started filming Tucker, a Kentucky-born African-American whose mentor in the Syracuse Nationals was civil rights icon Earl Lloyd, "the Jackie Robinson of basketball," says Humphrey.

Tucker, the filmmakers learned, was suffering quietly from Alzheimer's disease at his Florida home. All at once, it seemed, Readily Apparent's debut was accumulating unexpected resonances to the tumultuous present moment: "It talks about race, it talks about mental health issues ... and it talks about a man's struggle with his legacy."

Humphrey, Newman, and Altenberg seized the opportunity in the name of education: Last month, they announced a partnership with the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse, and set up a tax-deductible fundraiser to complete *Let 'Em Know You're There*. With an upcoming festival tour, Readily Apparent is also collaborating with local animators Mighty Coconut to develop beautiful 2-D graphics "to help keep it fun" in between archival footage and never-before-seen interviews.

The group is well aware that less sensitive filmmakers "could make this a very depressing film." But to do so, Humphrey insists, would undermine Tucker's astonishing accomplishments. "Jim is happy that he has done something in life worth remembering, which is something his mother taught him. She hammered into him the idea that if you go through someone's life, let 'em know you're there. He's a hero for how he goes through life."

For more, see www.readilyapparent.tv.



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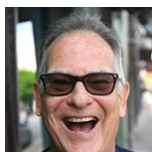
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