



BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE ELECTION
A documentary film by
Monique Mbeka Phoba and Guy Kabeya Muya

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Between the Cup and the Election

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Kabeya Muya

2008

56 minutes

French with English subtitles

Democratic Republic of Congo/Belgium

SYNOPSIS

"It's my first time voting, as for all young Congolese. We haven't voted in this country since independence in 1960."

Inspired by the 2006 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire, a group of film students sets out to make a film. With the help of veteran filmmakers Monique Mbeka Phoba and Guy Kabeya Muya, the young students track down members of the 1974 Leopards, Zaire's national soccer squad, the first team from sub-Saharan Africa to qualify for the World Cup. After a dismal first round performance -- the Leopards were outscored 14-0 in three games -- the players returned home in disgrace and drifted into obscurity. The team's captain, however, has fared better and is running for political office in Kinshasa. Deftly weaving past and present, BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE ELECTION offers a personal and endearing study of the intersection between sport and politics.

SCREENING

New York Premiere, African Film Festival

Congo Week, Maysles Cinema, New York

Festival Cinema Africano Asia America Latina, Milan

Documentary Screens, Libreville, Gabon

Festival of Tübingen, Germany

Pan African Film Festival, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Film Afrika Leuven, Belgium

Festival Lagunimages, Benin, Pan-African Festival, Algiers, Algeria

Fortnight Film Francophone, France

DOK-Leipzig, Germany

International Film Festival and the African Islands, Reunion

DOK-Munich (Germany),

Africa in the Picture, Netherlands

Festival of Solidarity, Kinshasa

Women's Film Festival Women Of The Sun, South Africa



BIO

Monique Mbeka Phoba, Director

Monique was born in Brussels in 1962. She studied economics and science and graduated with a thesis on "The cooperation between the European and African audiovisual industries". During her studies, she conducted a radio programme on African culture and at the same time wrote for various African publications. Her experience as a filmmaker started immediately with documentaries. Since 1995, she has lived in Benin, where she works on the production, distribution and promotion of African cinema.

Guy Kabeya Muya, Director

Guy graduated in Drama. He studied audiovisual techniques in Mbalmayo, then visual communication and animation in Douala, in Cameroon. He was a trainee in post-production at Les Films de la Passerelle in Brussels and at the Lagunimages Festival in Benin.



Directors
Monique Mbeka Phoba & Guy Kabeya Muya



Film Students
Clarisse Muvuba Mwimbu and
Demato Matondo Makondele

Zaire, the Leopards, and the 1974

World Cup

by Austin Merrill, April 9, 2010

Ask nearly anyone living outside of central Africa to name the biggest sports news to come out of Zaire in 1974, and you're likely to get the same response: the heavyweight title fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman, held in Kinshasa in October of that year. The legendary bout—packaged by Don King, funded by Mobutu Sese Seko, and known to all as the Rumble in the Jungle—reinstated Ali as world champion and outlandish showman, while giving rise to the rope-a-dope strategy that would see Ali through to the end of his career.

But for those living in Kinshasa and throughout the rest of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), the year 1974 is important for another, more bittersweet, sporting moment. That summer, Zaire's national soccer team, the Leopards, became the first team from sub-Saharan Africa to qualify for the World Cup, which that year was hosted by West Germany. The story of the Leopards' rough ride in the tournament—they were outscored in their three games, 14-0—and the players' slide into ignominy upon their arrival back home, is the subject of *Between the Cup and the Election*, which is making its U.S. premiere Friday afternoon, April 9, at 1:00 (and is showing again on Sunday at 5:45) at Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater as part of the 17th New York African Film Festival.

The filmmakers, Monique Mbeka Phoba and Guy Kabeya Muya, get off to a rocky start in telling their tale. The film opens with Phoba voting for president in Kinshasa in 2006, as she explains in a voiceover that it was the elections that made her decide to fulfill her dream of making a movie. From there, she and Muya are unapologetic about the school-project nature of their quest, and they are clunky at times in their attempts to interweave the soccer and politics threads of their story.

But even if you find yourself cringing a bit in the early going, stick with it. The core of the film is filled with terrific archival footage of the 1974 World

Cup, of Mobutu-era Zaire, and of the Leopards, the team that was, at the time, the pride of Africa. The larger story of the players' collective vanishing act from Congolese society after they crashed out of the World Cup is a sad but important demonstration of the fleeting nature of celebrity, no matter the trade or the country in which that fame was won.

Phoba and Muya track down a handful of the surviving members of that 1974 Leopards team, and the players are refreshingly candid as they speak about their impressions of playing in Germany, the weighty expectations placed on them by Mobutu and their fellow countrymen, and the backroom bribery and arm-twisting that went on during the World Cup. (One former Leopard says they let Brazil score a third goal in Zaire's final game because the Brazilians had requested it at halftime so they could advance to the next round. "We got nothing for it," he says. "We did it for pleasure.") Each member of the national team was given a house and a car by Mobutu to thank him for his service to his country. The filmmakers take a tour of the neighborhood where all the Leopards once lived, and they even find the only player who still has the car he was given, a green Volkswagen. (After his playing career he used it for years as a taxi driver.)

In the end, and in spite of its unpolished feel, *Between the Cup and the Election* offers as much insight into Congolese political culture as it does into Congolese soccer. Kibonge Mafu, the Leopards' captain at the '74 World Cup and a man who has probably fared better than his teammates in his post-soccer life, was running for political office while the film was being made. His campaign posters, plastered all over Kinshasa, show a photo of him with Pelé, who once called Kibonge one of the most talented players he'd ever met. Later, the camera follows along as Kibonge joins a gathering of old Leopards—earlier we'd seen them jogging around on a rough dirt pitch during a veterans' game—who are begging another political candidate to fight for the needs of former soccer players if she wins office. She smiles and makes a few impossibly disingenuous promises—promises that seem forgotten as soon as she shakes her last hand and turns away from the camera.

Shorties: Drugged-Out Doors, Disgruntled Soccer Players, & Parched Africans

April 1, 2010, Brandon Judell

Presented by The Film Society of Lincoln Center and African Film Festival, Inc., the 17th Annual New York African Film Festival's motto is best exemplified by a quote from black historian Saunders Redding: "Freedom is a precarious thing, a sometime thing, a completely unpredictable quantity." And an unshackled cinema can be its best friend.

At the Festival is this spectacularly ambitious student film representing the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Helmed by Monique Mbeka Phoba and Guy Kabeya Mua, it was filmed in 2006 to spotlight the country's first free elections since its independence.

To explore the importance of this vote, the directors take a roundabout approach, following the lives of the members of the 1974 Congolese soccer team, the Leopards, the first sub-Saharan squad to compete in the World Cup. The Leopards lost to the Yugoslavians, but they still came home as heroes to their nation, "victors" who were exploited by the dictator Mobutu, who ruled Zaire with an iron corruption for 32 years.

The Panthers did receive houses, cars, and jobs, but it was downhill from then on for most. Several died, several are living in poverty, and one is running for office, but their history is in danger of being forgotten.

Since the documentary is only 56 minutes in length and tries to cover a whole lot of ground, the individuals interviewed often blur into each other with just a few exceptions, such as the wife of a player; she explains that her unemployed husband refuses to be filmed because he's embarrassed by his poverty. She has to go around begging.

She is not alone. The screen is filled with the

bright colors of indigence: brilliant hand-me-down T-shirts, lustrous trash-filled streets, and energetic kids hoping to become soccer stars themselves. Hope is the message.

As the movie nears its end, one of the directors exclaims, "This film had no bridge, but we made it to the end." The other adds, that against all odds, "we have immortalized the Leopards' story." Definitely, here is an offering where content and intentions rule. -- Brandon Judell



Movie Review: Between the Cup and the Election

BY: MTV Iggy

Between the Cup and the Election, is one of four soccer films playing at the African Film Festival — quite fitting since this year the World Cup will be in South Africa. Its directors Monique Mbeka Phoba and Guy Kabeya Muya have tracked down a number of the former Leopards, the first sub-Saharan football team that qualified for the World Cup, hosted by Germany in 1974. For anyone who remembers, the '74 World Cup was an absolute nightmare for the Leopards and their fans: They lost 0:9 to Yugoslavia, followed by 0:2 against Scotland, and exited after a final Brazilian blow-out at 0:3. But that's not all: According to one of the players, government officials pocketed their pay after waiving it in their faces, and perhaps worse, they had to return home to a displeased and violent dictator.

The film's *raison d'être* is told unevenly and distractedly — one of the filmmakers tells us the 2006 Congolese elections (the first in a very long time!) were the reason she wanted to make the film and subsequently, but not convincingly, tries to link current politics and football. But still there are gems to be found in here, for footballers and Congo fans alike.



We hear stories of the golden days of football in Zaire, and the players' eyes light up when they talk about the car and house they were each given as a sign of gratitude by the president back then. And believe it or not, one of those cars, which appears to be a green Fiat, is still up and running. But now the majority of the players live in poverty and bad health. There is concern and outrage amongst the former soccer icons that others have already died without a state official as much as showing up, and we see local political candidates feebly promising to make things better in exchange for support.

We also hear the hilarious story of how the German chefs at the World Cup, claiming an inability to provide good food for the Congolese (or maybe they were just curious), asked the Congolese chef to cook while they watched. The Congolese chefs then prepared a Congolese delicacy for their boys: smoked monkey! As one of the players, still outraged, remembers: that did it for the Germans

("Whites think monkeys are closer to humans") who from then on considered the African players to be barbarians. But the finest moment arrives when one of the former Leopards admits they let Brazil score a third goal against them, so that the Brazilians, who might not have qualified sufficiently with only 2 goals to advance to the next round, would go on to clobber the Scots who had been nothing but racist against the Zairean team. When asked by the filmmakers how much money they were offered by the Brazilian delegation that approached them during halftime, he flatly says: "We got nothing for it. We did it for pleasure."—
Jacobia Dahm

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Present

BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE ELECTION
'ENTRE LA COUPE ET L'ELECTION'

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Public French-speaking Belgian Radio-Télévision
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International Federation of Football Association
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Music

« Vive les Léopards » by Rochereau/TABU Ley

« Ndugu Yangu » by Trio Baruti

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