

Steelers: the world's first gay rugby club

A documentary by Eammon Ashton-Atkinson

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Australian TV reporter makes heartwarming documentary debut on the world's first gay rugby club

Steelers, the debut feature documentary by Network Ten's US correspondent Eammon Ashton-Atkinson will make its Australian Premiere at the Queer Screen Film Fest in September 2020.

The film was born out of a desire to counter homophobic comments by Australian rugby league player Israel Folau, where he said "hell awaits" homosexuals in a 2019 Instagram post. Rugby plays such a powerful force in many countries, including Australian and British cultures. Players like Folau are idols and their words shape how young people view their own identity. *Steelers* shows that rugby is a place where the LGBTQ community is welcome and can thrive.

The documentary follows a team from the world's first gay rugby club, the Kings Cross Steelers, which started when a group of friends discussed the idea in a pub in London in 1995. 25 years later there are more than 90 clubs worldwide (including 5 in Australia) and every 2 years they compete in the world tournament of gay rugby - the Bingham Cup.

Ashton-Atkinson's heartfelt film follows the Steelers, a club he used to play for, as they travel to Amsterdam in an attempt to win the tournament. The documentary focuses on three characters: Andrew McDowell - prop by day, drag queen by night; Simon Jones who gets a much needed support network from the club after battling with depression; and the female coach Nic Evans who fights sexism, even in the gay community.

First time director, Ashton-Atkinson, narrates the film and shares his own story about how joining the club drastically changed his life. Ashton-Atkinson is television reporter for Australia's 10 News First, working as a foreign correspondent. In the film he shares his own battles with depression which arose from relentless bullying in school in Australia -- including revealing how

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he was outed at a private school when someone secretly filmed one of his first sexual experiences.

Director, Eammon Ashton-Atkinson: "I really struggled with my sexuality growing up. I got bullied a lot as a kid and much of it happened during sports class. So it was no surprise I grew up hating sport and never felt like I was welcome there. When I moved to London and joined a gay rugby team, I never imagined the joy it would bring and how much it would drastically change my life. I met my husband. I was forced to look back at my past. And I finally found a place where I belonged."

The film was supposed to have its world premiere at British Film Institute (BFI) Flare Film Festival 2020 in London in March, where it was selected Best of Fest and sold out 2 screenings - but the event was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The documentary had its debut at the New Zealand International Film Festival in July where the All Blacks shared the trailer to the film on their social media channels amassing more than half a million views worldwide.

"Rugby is a massive part of sporting culture in Australia and I hope this film challenges fans of the game to rethink their perceptions of masculinity and take another look at how they see queer people. I also hope it challenges queer players who have held back to realise they are entitled to their place on the pitch."

Queer Screen Film Fest will take place from 17-27 September 2020 and will be available for anyone in Australia to watch online during that time. For more information visit queerscreen.org.au.

For more information on *Steelers* screenings, cast and crew biographies and to view the trailer visit steelersthemovie.com

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- A selection of press images can be downloaded [here](#)
- Follow *Steelers* on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) @steelersthemovie
- Trailer [YouTube](#) embed link <https://youtu.be/OP8hG3FuVXg>

Eammon Ashton-Atkinson, Director and Cinematographer: is an Australian news reporter living in New York working as a foreign correspondent for Network 10, one of Australia's largest commercial television networks. Previously he was the Europe Correspondent based in London. He moved to London in 2016 where he joined the Kings Cross Steelers and met his husband, John. They were married in May 2018. *Steelers* is Ashton-Atkinson's debut feature length documentary.

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Short Synopsis

Being gay and playing sport doesn't usually mix - especially one as tough as rugby, right? Wrong. 'Steelers' is a confronting and emotional, yet heartwarming story about the world's first gay rugby club that started in London in 1995. Told through the eyes of an Australian reporter who moved to the UK to escape depression, we learn that sometimes happiness can be found where you least expect.

Long Synopsis - from BFI Flare Head Programmer Michael Blyth

In 1995, in a pub in King's Cross, a group of friends discussed the idea of a gay rugby club. From that casual conversation, the first gay rugby team was born. 25 years later, there are 60 clubs worldwide and once every two years they get together for the world tournament of gay rugby – The Bingham Cup. Eammon Ashton-Atkinson's heartfelt documentary travels to Amsterdam as the King's Cross Steelers attempt victory at the 2018 event. Along the way, we get to know some of the team. There's Drew, inside centre by day, drag queen by night; Simon, who found a much-needed support system at the club, and head coach Nic, who isn't shy of shedding a few proud tears when talking about her boys. It's an inspiring testament to the power of teamwork and friendship.

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Eammon Ashton-Atkinson: Director, Cinematographer and Editor

Eammon-Ashton Atkinson is an Australian news reporter living in New York working as a foreign correspondent for Network 10, one of Australia's largest commercial television networks. Previously he was the Europe Correspondent based in London. He moved to London in 2016 where he joined the Kings Cross Steelers and met his husband, John. They were married in May 2018.

Steelers is Ashton-Atkinson's debut feature length documentary. Apart from having shot, written, edited and directed the film himself, he also narrates it. Through the film he tells some very personal stories about being bullied and outed at school, which led to loneliness and depression in his adult life, before he eventually found happiness at the Kings Cross Steelers rugby club.

For his cast, Ashton-Atkinson assembled members of the Kings Cross Steelers who embody the central themes of the film including mental health, identity and fighting misogyny. Through each character's story the audience learns how this gay and inclusive rugby community has helped people overcome their struggles.

Nic Evans : Director of Rugby, King Cross Steelers Rugby Football Club

Nic Evans was the head coach of the King Cross Steelers from 2014-2017. She was born and raised in Caerphilly, Wales where she learned her love of rugby from her grandfather. Evans eventually went on to play rugby internationally, gaining 7 caps for Wales. When she's not yelling from the sidelines she's lecturing in Higher Education in Sport, Physical Education and Social Justice. Nic and her partner are the adoptive parents of three beautiful children.

Nic's story explores her struggle as a female coach fighting misogyny, even in the gay community.

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Simon Jones : No 10, Kings Cross Steelers Rugby Football Club

Simon Jones grew up in Birmingham where he played rugby for Moseley Rugby Club and North Midlands since he was 7 years old. He moved to London in his mid twenties and played for Old Haberdashers RFC for eight seasons before joining the Kings Cross Steelers. When he's not on the pitch he's a lawyer for Google and is close to his mum, two brothers and his sister.

Simon only recently came out as gay. His story explores the struggles he faced with depression after a childhood friend, whom he had fallen in love with, responded badly.

Andrew McDowell : Prop, King Cross Steelers Rugby Football Club and drag queen

Andrew (Drew) McDowell grew up near Cape Cod, Massachusetts, USA for most of his life. He went to Bryant University, graduating with degrees in finance and computer information systems. McDowell has been playing competitive rugby for the past 19 years. Andrew moved to London when he was 25 and started playing for the Kings Cross Steelers. He says the club is his home and family and has had the privilege of playing nearly every position except for hooker and full-back. When he's not on the pitch he works in the asset management industry as a risk professional or hitting the stage in glittery pink heels.

Drew's story explores the issues of identity and masculinity within gay sport. After organising a fundraising concert for the club one year, Drew discovered his love of drag, and 'Drewalicious' was born.