

# Forbidden Team

## Interview with Rasmus Dinesen & Arnold Krøigaard

28 June 2004 | *The Global Game* treated *The Forbidden Team*, along with the documentary *The Other Final*, in a review essay in [issue 11](#). The film's directors, **Rasmus Dinesen** and **Arnold Krøigaard**, have kindly responded from Copenhagen to a list of e-mailed questions. The film concerns preparation of a newly formed Tibetan national football team for a scheduled friendly match with [Greenland](#) and includes the political and emotional complications associated with that quest. *The Forbidden Team*, released in 2003, has shown in Greenland and Europe and at film festivals. One can view the movie's [trailer](#) online.

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**GG:** How long was the idea of a Tibetan national football team in preparation and was it necessary politically to play an international side of similar political status in the eyes of FIFA—in this case, [Greenland](#)?

**RD & AK:** It all started on a bicycle ride in Tibet. **Michael Nybrandt** had a dream one night that he should be the coach for the Tibetan national team. The dream haunted him for a while until he found out that he had to react to the dream. He sent an e-mail to Tibet's government-in-exile in India. They forwarded the mail to **Karma Ngodup**, who is the main character in the film. Karma replied to Michael, and they met sometime in the year 2000. We met the team for the first time in January 2001. It was totally Michael's decision to play Greenland; for him it just sounded right, and Greenland accepted immediately to play the friendly game. | [back to top](#)

**GG:** Intense emotions were on display throughout your film from the Tibetan players and from team manager Ngodup. The emotions came from men, which in Western culture and in sporting cultures we are taught not to expect. Was the difference that you were in an Eastern context or that the issues created great intensity?

**RD & AK:** For us the issues created all the intensity. It meant everything for Tibet to play that game—to hear their national anthem, to see all the Tibetan flags at the arena and feel the national identity that comes from playing for your country in a national kit. The game itself was really touching; it was really like a very big quest for peace and love and harmony. Everybody, and we are talking around 5,000 people, was smiling big-time the whole day. | [back to top](#)

**GG:** I was intrigued by **Jens Espensen's** comment: "The idea of this project has always been that you might be a small nation and not very good—but whatever you do you must do for real." Ideas of nationhood are complex, especially in international football, in which Senegalese play for France and Brazilians who play in Germany consider playing for Qatar. Having made this film about Tibetan football and their unique situation within FIFA and the world community, what is your view of the relationship between sport and national identity?

**RD & AK:** I guess for every country it means something playing for your national team, but it is shown in very different ways. This could also be a discussion about hooliganism. I think a lot of thugs needs identification, and they feel welcome in groups that wants to fight for their national side—but it is still identity in a more violent way. Then we have **Ailton** the Brazilian from [Werder Bremen](#) who is about to

change nationality to Qatar, but I just heard that FIFA won't allow cases like that to play football for their "new" country. Ailton also has his identification still in Brazil, but he got an offer he couldn't refuse. It means something not to feel lonely; it means something to have your own country; it means something to win the World Cup. | [back to top](#)

**GG:** The comments by the Tibetan monk on the connections between football and Buddhism were also intriguing. Can Buddhism and a competitive sport like football coexist?

**RD & AK:** Of course they can. Maybe Tibet will never win tournaments, but as their assistant coach Kelsang has said many times, "It is not about winning, it is about getting better." | [back to top](#)

**GG:** As filmmakers, what were the challenges of working in [Dharamsala](#), [Dehradun](#), [New Delhi](#) and other locations in India?

**RD & AK:** It gave us a lot being in India. Everything is very visual: the sunset and dawn, the mountains, the cows on the field, the monks that love football. But it was also very tiring not to know what is happening in five minutes, electricity breakdowns, when is our meeting with the [Dalai Lama](#) and so on. It was hard to get the answers to a lot of questions. But all in all it was a very mind-blowing and wonderful experience making this film. | [back to top](#)

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