

Alfred University alumnus, filmmaker talks to students about his latest project

10/24/17



Trent Cooper talks to Alfred University students about one of his latest film projects.

ALFRED, NY When Trent Cooper witnesses racial intolerance and prejudice, such as what he saw while making one of his latest documentaries, he gets upset, and the emotion he feels drives him to take action.

“When I see injustice like this, it makes me angry and I want to do something about it,” Cooper told a group of students and staff gathered Friday evening in Alfred University’s Holmes Auditorium for a screening of *Us Against the World*. “And I giggle to myself because I have the means and the platform to do something about it.”

The means and platform are Cooper’s career as a filmmaker, which has produced some critically-acclaimed sports documentaries. In some cases, as with *Us Against the World*, the stories have shone a light on social issues and the human struggle.

Cooper graduated from Alfred University in 1993 with a degree in political science and has spent more than a decade as a filmmaker. He directed his first feature film, *Larry the Cable Guy: Health Inspector*, in 2006, and in 2010 he directed Kevin Spacey, Camilla Belle and Johnny Knoxville in the comedy-drama *Father of Invention*. The last few years, his focus has been on producing sports-themed documentaries.

A producer of original content for the National Football League, he helped direct the Emmy Award-winning documentary, *All or Nothing: A Season with the Arizona Cardinals* for Amazon Studios. The series which won a 2017 Sports Emmy for Outstanding Serialized Sports Documentary -- presented an inside look at the lives of Cardinals’ players, coaches and owners over the course of the 2016 National Football League season. After serving as a director on the set of the *All or Nothing* series, Cooper directed a pair of documentaries for NFL 360: *Going Global: Odell Beckham Jr.* (2016); and *The Conversation* (2017). The latter followed sports journalist Jeffri Chadiha as he traveled across the country examining the impact of former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s national anthem protest.

Us Against the World represents some of his best work so far. The 10-part documentary series, directed by Cooper for Uproxx Studios, follows the lives of a handful of promising high school basketball players (all racial minorities) who re-locate to Lott’s Creek, KY, to play at Cordia High School for coach Rodrick Rhodes, a former NBA player who starred at the University of Kentucky. Hoping to escape the violence of their inner city hometowns in New York City (one player is a refugee from Africa) and build a future playing basketball, the youngsters find themselves subjected to racial intolerance.

Rhodes, an African American, was hired in 2011 to coach Cordia, and five years later led the Lions to a state championship. Later that year, the school board opted not to renew Rhodes’ contract and some believe race played a

factor in the board's decision. Most of the documentary follows Cordia's players as they attempt to defend their state title without their coach on the bench.

Cooper said that while on the surface, *Us Against the World* is a film about sports, the story goes much deeper.

"Sports are just the backdrop. It's the human interest aspect of the story that I'm looking for," said Cooper, who hopes that talking about issues of race through film, in his case -- can help make a difference. "It's getting better. We're shining a light on (racism and prejudice) and it's chipping away."

Us Against the World as a complete 10-part documentary was released on-line by Uproxx a little more than two weeks ago and has since been viewed by millions. Cooper told the audience how the internet has changed this profession. "Three weeks ago, (Uproxx) showed a two-minute trailer. It went viral and four million people saw it. That's what has happened in my industry: you can reach audiences that are unimaginable."

View the complete 10-part series *Us Against the World*, at: <http://uproxx.com/shows/us-against-the-world/>

Cooper encouraged students to take advantage of their time at Alfred, as it will represent such a small segment of their lives. He urged them to discover and follow their passions, as he did when he fell in love with filmmaking and dedicated himself to it.

"I came here to play football and halfway through my time here one professor, Dr. (Robert) Heineman (professor of political science) reached me and got me passionate about school for the first time in my life," Cooper said.

"Some light is going to go off for you and you'll say, 'that's what I love.' And when your work ethic matches your passion, that's when it will happen for you."

This week saw the release of another of Cooper's latest projects. *On A Mission* (released Tuesday, Oct. 24) is a seven-minute documentary that tells the story of Konrad Reuland, a former tight end who played three seasons in the NFL for the New York Jets and Baltimore Ravens. Reuland died last December at 29 of a brain aneurysm and his organs were donated, providing a life-saving heart transplant for baseball Hall of Famer Rod Carew.

On A Mission can be viewed at the following sites:

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/NFL/videos/10155700679296263/>

Twitter <https://twitter.com/NFL/status/922905100493864961>

Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVKtB20jTuc>