

Looking At How Sports Content Can Bring Different People Together

By **Mike Boylan**
November 12, 2020

Producer and director **Mary Mazzio** discussed her latest documentary, “A Most Beautiful Thing,” and how original sports content can go deeper and explore important societal issues during SBJ and Leaders' Media Innovators virtual series. Mazzio's film tells the story of the first Black public high school rowing team in the U.S., formed in the '90s on Chicago's West Side, and team captain Arshay Cooper. Mazzio called it a documentary “masquerading as a sports movie.” She added, “It's really about exposing underrepresented voices.” While the film shows off a sport that has been a big part of Mazzio's life, having been an Olympic rower who competed for the U.S. at the '92 Barcelona Games, she also was grateful to have the “opportunity to explore impediments that our citizens in places like the West Side endure.” Mazzio said Grant Hill, an exec producer on the film, told her he joined “because it was a positive portrayal of young Black men in underrepresented neighborhoods.” Mazzio mentioned that current events made the film “that much more resonant” and “timely.” And it is sports, Mazzio said, that can “create content that brings the left and the right together.” Mazzio said they are “seeing amazing philanthropy on the back end of this project.” She and Hill also teamed up with FILA to create a limited edition signature shoe inspired by the film with proceeds benefiting A Most Beautiful Thing Inclusion Fund.

Quick Hits:

***On balancing the political aspects of a documentary subject:** “You have to be careful because otherwise you ... will be antagonizing sections of America who don't agree with each other. And I think what we think about is, how do we bring them together in a really, almost revolutionary way, right? By creating content that speaks to non-partisan issues.”

***On her initial concerns with directing this documentary:** “I said, ‘We need to have a conversation. I would love to do this film, but I am not from these neighborhoods.’ And as a senior ranking member of the NAACP said to me, ‘Mary, you have an obligation to answer a call, with our blessings, you do what you do.’ And I think it's all about amplifying others' voices.”

***On choosing to explore rowing:** “Rowing is one of the most privileged sports on the planet and many of our captains of industry ... have held an oar at one point in time.”