

Texas-based sports movie retells story of the Prodigal Son

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DALLAS—Writer/producer/director Andrew Stevens found the inspiration for his latest film during a Sunday morning church service.

Breaking the Press offers a modern retelling of the parable of the Prodigal Son, set in the context of Texas high school basketball. (PHOTO/Courtesy of Mustard Seed Entertainment LLC)

The pastor was delivering a sermon on Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son when he veered into his experiences as a coach. Stevens quickly arrived at the idea of retelling the parable within the world of Texas high school basketball. The sports setting became an ideal backdrop for a modern take on the parable, which he refers to as "a story of universal love and...unconditional forgiveness."

Stevens' Sunday morning daydream developed into *Breaking the Press*. He began discussing the project with a longtime friend, Dallas financial manager Charles McKinney. Stevens was presenting ideas for financing the project when McKinney interjected with a surprising offer; Stevens recalls, "Charlie basically said, 'I'm in for half. Are you in?'"

With McKinney on board as executive producer, the project moved quickly. Principal photography was completed in 15 days. Production remained in the Dallas area, using local churches and high schools gyms as set locations.



Drew Waters of NBC's *Friday Night Lights* plays Coach Joe Conaghey in *Breaking the Press*, a modern retelling of the parable of the Prodigal Son, set in the context of Texas high school basketball.

(PHOTO/Courtesy of Mustard Seed Entertainment LLC)

Stevens built his cast with some of the region's best-known actors. Drew Waters of NBC's *Friday Night Lights* and Farah White of *Bandslam* play Joe and Laura Conaghey. Tom Maden and Chad Halbrook portray their teenage sons, and Richard Dillard, from HBO's *Temple Grandin*, rounds out the lead cast as Coach Tex Summer. The large ensemble cast includes Juli Erickson, Bryan Massey, and Burton Gilliam.

Many cast members commented on how refreshing it was to be involved on such a project. "There's a lot of films out there, and a lot of them don't make the world a better place," Farah White said. "It is nice to put something out there that is positive."

Breaking the Press centers on the struggles of the fictional Conaghey family. Joe Conaghey's high school basketball team hasn't come through with a winning season, which throws the young coach's job into jeopardy. His problems are worsened by the fierce on- and off-court rivalry between his two sons—hard-working older son Matt and gifted but arrogant younger

son Josh.



Drew Waters (center) of NBC's *Friday Night Lights* plays Coach Joe Conaghey in *Breaking the Press*, a modern retelling of the parable of the Prodigal Son, set in the context of Texas high school basketball.

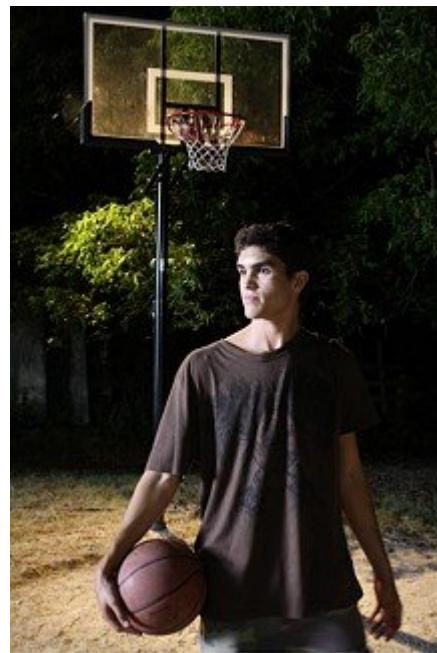
(PHOTO/Courtesy of Mustard Seed Entertainment LLC)

When Josh is offered a spot on the team at a prestigious Dallas high school, Joe and his kind-hearted wife, Laura, reluctantly give their permission. Josh quickly falls in with a fast, image-driven crowd, not realizing that his newfound popularity—and his position on the team—is both fragile and costly. Veteran coach Tex Summer, who arrives in town to assist Joe and his struggling team, narrates the story.

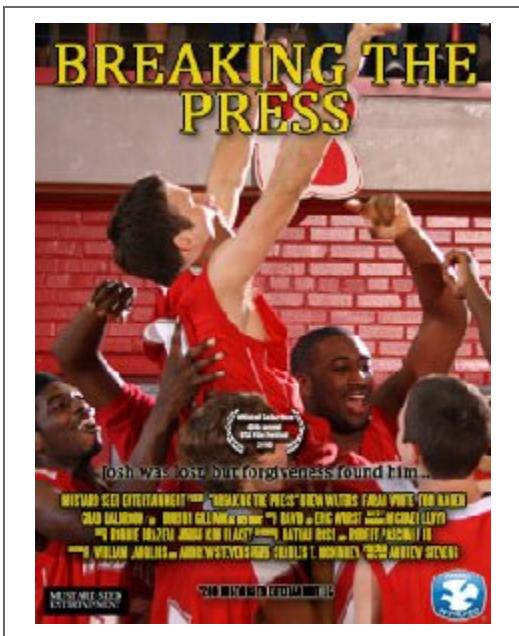
The film's creative team had no intention of slacking when it came to the sports aspect of the story. "My number one thing was that the basketball had to look real," said McKinney, who choreographed all the on-court sequences. Rolando Blackman, Popeye Jones, and Dallas Mavericks general manager Donnie Nelson all have cameos in the film.

McKinney offered *Breaking the Press* the chance to partner with the [Heroes Foundation](#), a charitable organization that allows at-risk children in Dallas to become involved in athletics. McKinney co-founded the charity

with long-time friends Mark Cuban and Mike Modano. Six years after its establishment, the Heroes Foundation has grown into one of the most prominent inner-city sports programs in the nation. Almost all the young athletes who appear in the film are Heroes' players, many of whom are being recruited by top-ranking college programs.



Tom Maden plays Josh Conaghey—the Prodigal Son in a modern-day retelling of Jesus's parable, *Breaking the Press*. (PHOTO/Courtesy of Mustard Seed Entertainment LLC)



Faith-based films are known for conveying a positive message, but the genre also has a reputation for being didactic and presenting a too-good-to-be-true vision of the Christian life. Stevens, however, wanted his characters to be as realistic as the on-court action.

The story "could have been hokey, but it wasn't," actor Richard Dillard said. The film does not glaze over the Conaghey family's failures and imperfections: Joe briefly swears at his team in a moment of anger; Josh needles his older brother over the idea of sexual purity.

When Drew Waters spoke with several viewers after an advance screening, he recalled, "Everybody said the same thing: Thank you very much for not throwing the religious part in our faces."

For all its focus on sports, *Breaking the Press* is, at heart, a story of forgiveness that stays true to the parable that inspired it. Actors Tom Maden and Chad Halbrook, who play brothers onscreen, are both the sons of ordained ministers and were already very familiar with the biblical parable. Halbrook relates on a personal level, having grown up playing basketball on select teams around Dallas.

“People get caught up in themselves—especially in high school. It’s very easy for young, talented players to get so wrapped up in themselves that they forget everyone around them,” he said.

Maden, in his role as the Prodigal Son, believes the message of forgiveness makes the film universal. “The Prodigal Son is one of the most well-known (parables) because everybody screws up,” he said, “It relates to everyone.”

Breaking the Press is due out on DVD from Fox in the fourth quarter of 2011. For more information, e-mail info@astevensent.com.