

A Fighting Chance

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY KATY MARRINER

ffc australia
Film Finance Corporation

www.metromagazine.com.au



www.theeducationshop.com.au

RIGHT: NERMIN IN THE RING WITH THE AUSTRALIAN CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION 24-YEAR-OLD DANIEL AMMANN. COVER: NERMIN WEARING HIS FAVOURITE RED BOXING GLOVES.



Introduction

This study guide to accompany *A Fighting Chance* (Mark Andersson, 2007), a documentary presented by JOTZ Productions in association with Budaya Productions, has been written for secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English, Health, Physical Education, Religious Education and Media.

.....

Synopsis

Boxing's in the blood yeah, that's it.
– Nermin Sabanovic

AT age forty-two, former Bosnian boxing champion Nermin Sabanovic is making a comeback. Back in Bosnia, Nermin was a dual Olympian and nine times national champion. He won more than 350 fights. Then the Bosnian war broke out and suddenly his celebrated career was cut short. Nermin and his family fled to Australia.

Now that he has won an Australian title and an Oriental Pacific Belt, Nermin believes that he can beat the odds to go on to represent Australia and claim a world title. Nermin reckons he has what it takes.

His family is not so sure. After all, Nermin has been out of the ring for ten years and his ageing body may not be up to it. Nermin's wife Indira refuses to watch his fights, and his eldest daughter Tea believes her father's age makes boxing far too risky. Both of them constantly worry about injury or worse. They want Nermin to focus on

his work as a project officer with the Aboriginal Sobriety Group.

Since his return to the ring and recent victories, Nermin has become an icon of the fiercely patriotic Bosnian community in Australia. Nermin's brother-in-law, Helari Lukavic, is constantly by his side, spurring him on.

Nermin is already a hero, a survivor, a pillar of strength and a well-respected leader in the Bosnian community in Adelaide. What does he have to prove?

About the filmmakers



Mark Andersson – Writer and Director

AFTER stints as a breakfast cook, taxi driver and landscape gardener, Mark Andersson graduated from film school in 2000 with over fifteen short film credits to his name. Since then, Andersson has worked in community television, theatre production, and as a freelance director, camera operator and editor. He has self-funded a number of educational and short documentaries on various topics ranging from homelessness to UFO investigators, that have won awards and screened at festivals in Australia and overseas.

Andersson wrote, directed, shot and edited the award-winning *Stone Country* (2006) about an Aboriginal township in the Northern Territory, and in 2006 he formed the production company Budaya Productions with fellow filmmaker and partner Katrina Lucas. Together they have taught documentary production workshops in Indonesia, as well as filming a documentary and educational DVD on women performing artists in Bali. Andersson is currently filming a half-hour documentary as part of a series on Generation Y for SBS.

Katrina Lucas – Writer and Co-producer

Katrina Lucas worked in academic research, community services and performing arts before trying her hand at filmmaking. She collaborated with fellow filmmaker and partner Mark Andersson on a variety of educational and short documentaries before forming their own production company Budaya Productions in 2006. Lucas is currently co-writing and directing a

half hour documentary with Andersson for an SBS series on Generation Y.

Tom Zubrycki – Producer

Tom Zubrycki has been a writer, director and producer of documentaries since 1977. Zubrycki usually works in an observational style and his films are narrative-based and strongly character-driven. His work has won acclaim internationally and in Australia, with his film *The Diplomat* (2000) winning two AFI awards. Zubrycki regularly teaches courses in documentary production at the University of Technology in Sydney, and in 2001 was conferred an ASDA accreditation for 'outstanding work and excellence in the art of screen direction' by the Australian Screen Directors Association. He is currently a board member of ASDA and represents the interests of Sydney-based documentary makers on the SPAA/ASDA Documentary Council.

Zubrycki's recent credits include: *Temple of Dreams* (2007, director/producer); *Molly & Mobarak* (2003, director/producer); *The Diplomat* (director); the 4-part series *Short Stories* (2003, executive producer); *Broken* (2003, producer); *Vietnam Symphony* (2003, director) and *Making Venus* (2002, producer).

David Banbury – Editor

Since graduating from the Flinders University Drama Centre in 1988, David Banbury has worked as an editor



on a diverse range of documentaries, television series, short films and commercials. Banbury recently edited the documentary *Ayen's Cooking School for African Men* (Sieh Mchawala, 2007) for SBS Storyline Australia, and is currently working on a documentary with another emerging South Australian filmmaker about Vietnamese Hmong girls titled *Please Buy From Me*.

Unkle Ho – Original Music and Composition

Unkle Ho (Kaho Cheung) is a composer, producer, recorder and performer of music. He is a founding member of the record label Elefant Traks and is also a member of the hip-hop group The Herd. He has toured Australia countless times and played festival shows at The Big Day Out and Splendour in the Grass. In 2000, Unkle Ho lived in the Czech Republic where he became determined to get Gypsy/Romanian music the attention it deserves. He subsequently released two solo albums which incorporate Eastern European sounds.



Using 'A Fighting Chance' in the Classroom

Teachers may select from the following activities to support students' viewing and close analysis of *A Fighting Chance*.

Before viewing the film

- As a class, discuss at what age it is appropriate to retire from playing a particular sport. What factors should play a part in the decision?
- Ask students to share their knowledge of sportsmen and sports-women who have made come-backs after retirement.
- Are you ever too old to follow a dream?

After viewing the film

- Do you think Nermin should have followed his dream?
- Do you think Nermin is a good role model?

- What are the qualities of a hero? Do you think this is the title that Nermin really wins?
- What moments of *A Fighting Chance* did you find inspiring?
- Why do you think the filmmakers decided to name the documentary *A Fighting Chance*?
- What are the central concerns of *A Fighting Chance*?
- Create an A3 collage of words and images that offers a response to an idea explored in *A Fighting Chance*. Use these responses to compose a class mural that reveals the concerns of the documentary.
- Who do you think the documentary is trying to communicate its messages to?



TOP: NERMIN SABANOVIC AT HOME WITH HIS AUSTRALIAN AND ORIENTAL PACIFIC TITLE BELTS. BOTTOM: NERMIN WITH HIS BELT AND TROPHY.

RIGHT: NERMIN CARRIED BY HIS TRAINER TERRY FOX AFTER WINNING THE AUSTRALIAN SUPER CRUISERWEIGHT TITLE IN BRISBANE. INSET BELOW: NERMIN DURING A FIGHT.



Key Scenes

Allow students to work as individuals or in small groups to create an analysis of the content, purpose and production values of a key scene of *A Fighting Chance*.

Nermin Sabanovic

As a high-profile sports figure and a Muslim, Nermin Sabanovic was forced to flee the war in former Yugoslavia with his family. After arriving here in 1993 as a refugee, Nermin decided to turn boxing into his profession. His years of international boxing experience meant he was in a strong position to win the Australian Super Cruiserweight Boxing Title, but a serious road accident a week before the fight forced him into retirement.

- What does *A Fighting Chance* tell the audience about Nermin's boxing career prior to his retirement and comeback?
- To read an article about Nermin

and his career as a boxer visit <http://www.theage.com.au/news/sport/reflections-of-a-ring-life/2005/11/05/1130823438185.html>.

- Nermin is shown sorting through the medals he has collected during his career. What does this scene tell us about his desire to pursue his dream? Recall other moments in *A Fighting Chance* that highlight Nermin's passion for boxing.

The comeback

I feel good man, feel good. I can fight again, see?
– Nermin

I'm fit too, you know, so. The other fellas they make mistake, you know, they think I'm not fit I'm too old. But I'm fit, I'm fitter than them.
– Nermin

Nermin is extremely fit. He trains two hours a day and doesn't smoke or drink. Years of intense training have made him physically and mentally disciplined.

- What does *A Fighting Chance* tell the audience about Nermin's decision to return to the ring? Do you think it is a wise decision?
- Make Nermin's list of pros and cons for resuming his career as a boxer.
- To see Nermin fight for the Australian Cruiserweight belt against James Ellis in 2006, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls8hViv-GBs>.

Nermin's fans

One and only. We love you Nermin, we love you. You're our champion, you're a people's champion.
– Helari

Go Champion! Let's do it! We are with you!
– Nermin's Bosnian-Australian friends

Nermin's status as a celebrated hero within the Bosnian community is clearly a strong motivation for him.

View those scenes that show Nermin has the support of his brother-in-law Helari Lukavic and other members of the Bosnian–Australian community.

- Why is Nermin's return to boxing important to Helari and others? How do they react to Nermin's victories and defeats?
- How do the filmmakers portray Nermin's friends and fans?

Nermin's work

We help people under the influence of alcohol, drugs and other substances, and plus, you know, in any crisis. So, you never know. Anyone can ring us from the streets. – Nermin

I've been living in three cultures here in Australia. Australian community, Bosnian community and Aboriginal community, but most of time, most of my time, I spend in Aboriginal community with Aboriginal people. – Nermin

Nermin is a hero within the Aboriginal community. In nine years patrolling the streets of Adelaide to ensure the safety of Aboriginal people, Nermin has come to consider himself as much Aboriginal as he is Bosnian–Australian. Working on the streets with Aboriginal people has given Nermin an understanding of the issues these people face, and has earned him their respect.

- View those scenes that show Nermin working as a Mobile Assistance Patrol Officer. What do these encounters with people on the streets tell us about Nermin's personal qualities? What do these encounters tell us about his commitment to other people and to his community?
- Are you surprised that the people Nermin helps both know of and are interested in his career as a boxer?

Nermin's family

That's my daughter, my youngest

daughter Medina. This is my oldest daughter Tea. Yeah. And this is, this is my wife Indira, my lovely wife Indira. – Nermin

Nermin's decision to relive past glory and contest a world title is against the wishes of his wife and daughters.

- Use the quotations listed below to generate a discussion of how Nermin's family react to his decision to return to the ring.

It's really hard to watch the fights. It's hard to see your dad up there. – Tea

I understand in a way that she doesn't want to be there, like, I don't know if I would want to watch my husband at that age fighting still. It would be scary. – Tea

He never said to me because he know I am all the time upset and maybe six, seven days before a fight he said to me 'I have a fight next week.' – Indira

I'm all the time still worry about him. Because I love him, I have kids with him, I live twenty-two years with him. – Indira

She stopped watching my fights. Since we came to Australia, that's it she said 'Enough for me'. So she can't watch no more. – Nermin

Thanks to my people the Bosnian people. To my family. My kids Medina and Tea. My wife, Indira, she's not there. She says that I'm too old but I'm not. I proved I'm not too old. – Nermin

There's no point to continue, especially, you know, my whole family, my wife and my kids, they suffer a lot, because of all this stuff, and then I suffer a lot as well, you know. – Nermin

- While Indira, Tea and Medina are reluctant to support Nermin's continued involvement in boxing their commitment and respect do not waver. What do the scenes that portray Nermin interacting with his wife and daughters reveal about family love and loyalty?

The Fights

Nermin is offered a large sum of money to defend his Oriental Pacific title in Japan. This is his first chance to be seen on the international stage since his comeback. The stakes are high. Nermin knows if he loses this fight he drops in the rankings and that at forty-two years of age he may never be able to climb his way back.

- Watch Nermin as he trains, fights and then deals with defeat. What do these scenes tell us about Nermin's commitment to his dream?
- 'Nermin is dignified in defeat.' Do you agree?

For a coupla weeks now I've been trying to get Nermin a fight in Japan. It's very good news. We've been chasing the fight for a while. – Terry

- How do the filmmakers portray Terry Fox, Nermin's trainer?

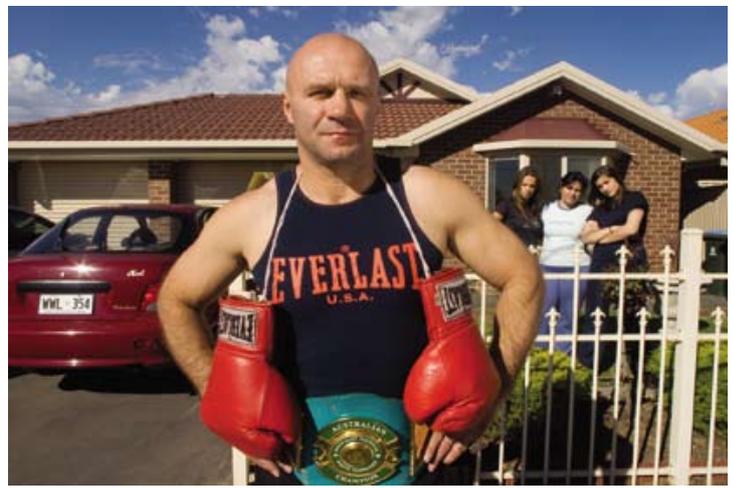
Two months after his defeat in Japan, Nermin is offered a fight for another Australian Title in Newcastle. Knowing he cannot now win a world title, the prospect of being a two-time Australian champion, is a temptation Nermin cannot resist.

He's from Newcastle. He's the Australian Cruiserweight Champion. It all depends on this match. If I win, I could go to America. – Nermin

- What does this response tell us about Nermin the person and Nermin the boxer?
- How do Nermin's family, trainer, friends, the media and his opponent react to his decision to take this bout?
- Listen to Nermin's acceptance speech and as a class discuss how Nermin is revealed to be a victor even in defeat.
- Do you agree with Nermin's decision to call it quits after this fight?

Production Values

- How have the filmmakers decided to portray Nermin?



- *A Fighting Chance* begins with archival footage from Yugoslavia in 1988 and then cuts to Nermin winning another bout in Australia in 2006. What expectations does the opening sequence create? How are you positioned as a viewer?
- Examine the narrative structure of *A Fighting Chance* and consider how the documentary charts Nermin's story.
- *A Fighting Chance* makes frequent use of still photographs. Examine the images in this guide and discuss what each still photograph tells the audience about Nermin.
- List the settings used by the filmmakers. What do these settings reveal about the participants involved? What do they suggest about the filmmakers' purpose?
- Use a table to complete an analysis of the production values of the fight scenes. Discuss your findings with the class.
- Why do you think the filmmakers included news footage from Nermin's last fight in Newcastle? Do you find the approach effective?

- How does music contribute to the telling of Nermin's story? Visit <http://www.unkleho.com> to find out more about Uncle Ho, whose music features in *A Fighting Chance*.
- Why does *A Fighting Chance* close with footage of Nermin at work? Is it an effective way to resolve the story?
- *A Fighting Chance* is about real people and their lives. As a class, discuss the demands of making an observational documentary like *A Fighting Chance*.

Extended Responses

- 'Nermin is the perennial underdog – highly driven yet very likeable.' Do you agree with this assessment of Nermin?
- '*A Fighting Chance* is an inspiring documentary.' Do you agree?
- '*A Fighting Chance* offers an insight into the world of boxing.' Discuss.
- Do you think Nermin's story encourages a greater understanding

of Muslim cultures within Australia?

- '*A Fighting Chance* challenges both boxing and cultural stereotypes.' Do you agree?
- Write a feature article about Nermin Sabanovic. Before you begin writing, decide on the publication that will feature your article. Are you writing for a tabloid newspaper or magazine? You could write for a broadsheet newspaper like *The Australian* or for a local newspaper. It could even appear in one of the supplements that come with the weekend newspapers. When you have made your decision, think about your likely audience and the format of your article. Use vocabulary and adopt a tone that best suits the publication that you have chosen. Download appropriate images from the internet to include in your article. Ask your teacher to act as your editor and don't forget to devise an attention-demanding headline.
- Working in a small team, produce a news report about one of Ner-

ABOVE: NERMIN AND HIS DAUGHTERS AND WIFE OUT THE FRONT OF THEIR HOME IN ADELAIDE. NERMIN IS WEARING HIS AUSTRALIAN TITLE BELT

min's bouts. Your report would be broadcast on either the radio or television.

- Storyboard a promotional preview for *A Fighting Chance*.

Making a digital story

Do you know someone who has pursued a dream despite the odds?

Create a digital story about his or her journey.

A digital story uses multimedia tools and visual and audio resources from personal archives. Most digital stories are approximately two to five minutes in length. Digital stories are a unique and powerful way to tell a story.

You will need to write a script and source photographs and other keepsakes to compose the story. Then there are other decisions. Who will read the script? What sounds and music will be part of the digital story? What is an appropriate title? Don't forget a dedication and end credits.

Further information about digital stories can be found on the web site of The Australian Centre for the Moving

Image at <http://www.acmi.net.au> and typing the term 'digital stories' into a reliable search engine.

Going Further

- Investigate the differences between amateur and professional boxing.
- Create a glossary of boxing terms.
- Find out more about a division of boxing. Present your findings to the class.
- Locate Bosnia on a map of the world. Find out more about the unrest that forced Nermin and his family to flee to Australia.
- Use the internet to find out more about the work of The Mobile Assistance Patrol and the Aboriginal Sobriety Group.
- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation about a sportsperson who has made a comeback after retirement. You could choose someone like Lindsay Davenport, Tony Lockett or Darren Beadman. These are all examples of sportspeople who returned to the sport that they had played prior to retirement.

Then there are those sportspeople who retired from one sport and de-

ecided to pursue another. For example Michael Jordan retired from basketball and then went on to pursue a career in baseball. Eric Heiden retired from speed skating and took up cycling. Anthony Mundine swapped rugby league for boxing.

- Use the internet and print texts to read the stories of sportspeople who have continued to live their dream despite obstacles and setbacks.
- *Cinderella Man* (Ron Howard, 2005) is the story of James J. Braddock. The ex-prizefighter who returned to the ring in the 1930s and beat the odds. His amazing return to form became the source of inspiration of many down-on-their-luck Americans. Teachers may choose to show the film or suitable excerpts from the film to their class to continue a discussion of the themes raised by *A Fighting Chance*.
- Further information about the filmmakers and the latest news on the documentary can be found at <http://www.budaya.com.au>.

Katy Marriner.



This study guide was produced by **ATOM** (©ATOM) editor@atom.org.au

For more information on **SCREEN EDUCATION** magazine or to download other free study guides visit <http://www.metromagazine.com.au>.

For hundreds of articles on Film as Text, Screen Literacy, Multiliteracy and Media Studies, visit <http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>.

Notice: An educational institution may make copies of all or part of this study guide, provided that it only makes and uses copies as reasonably required for its own educational, non-commercial, classroom purposes and does not sell or lend such copies.