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***In Football We Trust* Premieres on *Independent Lens*
Monday, January 25, 2016 on PBS**

The Remarkable Story Behind the “Polynesian Pipeline” to the NFL



Credit: Tony Vainuku.

(San Francisco, CA) – *In Football We Trust* is an insightful and moving documentary that transports viewers deep inside the tightly-knit and complex Polynesian community in Salt Lake City, Utah, one of the chief sources for the NFL’s influx of Pacific Islander players. Shot over a four-year period with unprecedented access, the film follows four young Polynesian men striving to overcome gang violence and near poverty through the promise of American football. Directed by first time feature filmmakers Tony Vainuku and Erika Cohn, *In Football We Trust* premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, January 25, 2016, 10:00-11:30 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

Despite overwhelming obstacles, Polynesians are 28 times more likely than any other ethnic group to make it in the NFL. Some refer to this phenomenon as a “calling” or a gift from God; others credit genetics, socio-cultural influences, or the push and pull of global sports capitalism. Many Polynesian families view football as their ticket out of economic hardship and gang life, but *In Football We Trust* reveals those expectations to be unrealistic.

The four players featured in the documentary are:

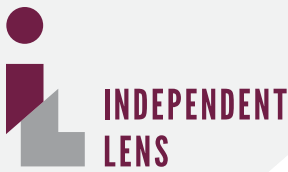
Harvey Langi is the second eldest of nine children and starting running back for Utah’s best high school team. He has scholarship offers to play football from multiple top Division I schools, but family expectations combined with early media attention ultimately lead to a crossroads.

Leva and Vita Bloomfield are brothers struggling to live up to the legacy of their father, a former Brigham Young University running back who also founded the first Polynesian gang in Utah. Despite efforts to disaffiliate from the gang, the original family ties make it nearly impossible for the brothers to stay away.

Fihi Kaufusi is a two-way lineman who lives in his ultra-religious aunt’s crowded two-bedroom apartment with eight other children. Despite his apparent talent, a terrible knee injury makes it



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difficult for Division I coaches to seriously consider Fihī's potential. As a result, he is faced with the decision of whether to give up the sport he loves in order to serve a religious mission.

"The young men in this film face enormous pressure — not only to succeed in the highly competitive sports culture in which they are immersed — but also from their families, many of whom have dreams of NFL stardom and financial success," said *Independent Lens* Executive Producer Lois Vossen. "But the hard truth is that these dreams often don't come true."

In addition to the stories of the four young athletes, the film includes footage and interviews with current and former Polynesian NFL players:

Troy Polamalu, a Samoan American, was a long-time Strong Safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was a consensus All-American at USC, an eight-time Pro Bowler, two-time Super Bowl Winner and 2010 NFL Defensive Player of the Year. Polamalu is an advocate for Polynesian athletes and considered one of the best ever at his position.

Haloti Ngata, a Tongan American and alumnus of Highland High School, is a defensive tackle for the Detroit Lions (previously with the Baltimore Ravens). He was a consensus All-American at the University of Oregon, five-time All-Pro, five-time Pro Bowler, and Super Bowl Winner.

Star Lotulelei, a Tongan American and alumnus of Bingham High School, is a defensive tackle for the Carolina Panthers. At the University of Utah he was an All-American, winner of the Morris Trophy, and Sun Bowl MVP.

Vai Sihakema was a running back and kickoff return specialist for the St Louis Cardinals, Green Bay Packers, and Philadelphia Eagles. The first Tongan to play in the NFL, Sihakema attended Brigham Young University. A two-time Pro Bowler, Sihakema is now a successful sportscaster in Philadelphia.

Visit *In Football We Trust* on pbs.org (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/>), which features more information about the film.

About the Filmmakers

Tony Vainuku (Director) comes from a culture of third world traditions and a family of athletes. His first career aspirations began on the field as a budding professional football player from Salt Lake City, UT. After high school, he spent some time in the corporate world before enrolling at Westminster College in Utah to study business marketing in order to launch businesses around his passions of directing, writing, and filmmaking. After graduating with a B.S. in business marketing, Vainuku founded Soulprofile Productions, a multimedia company specializing in the creation of web ads, promotional video content and music production. In 2011, Vainuku founded and launched Soulpro, a lifestyle apparel brand built on the philosophy of Passion is Purpose®. In its three years of business, Soulpro has grown across the western United States and been actively



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involved in collaborating with and promoting hundreds of musicians, artists, athletes, and entrepreneurs.

Erika Cohn (Producer and Co-Director) a native Utahan, grew up attending the Sundance Film Festival, where she first began her career. Although her films differ in place and time, religion and culture remain a recurring theme and her passion for social change the driving factor. In 2008, Cohn traveled to Cambodia where she shot *Giant Steps*, a documentary about the reinstitution of art after Khmer Rouge rule, which aired on PBS. In 2010, Cohn was associate producer for the FRONTLINE/AMERICAN EXPERIENCE co-production *God in America*, a six-part historical series exploring the intersection of religion and public life in the nation. Cohn has received numerous accolades for her work, including a Directors Guild of America award for *When the Voices Fade*, a narrative profile of the Lebanese-Israeli war of 2006, and was recently admitted into the CPB Producers Academy. Cohn has been a featured panelist/speaker on independent film financing at film festivals and university conferences and mentors youth filmmakers across the globe. She attended Chapman University in California, where she graduated with degrees in film production and Middle Eastern Studies. Cohn is an avid documentary photographer, shooting primarily the lives of women in conflict zones, and serves as a US Ambassadorial Film Scholar to Israel.

CREDITS

Director
Producer & Co-Director
Executive Producers

Tony Vainuku
Erika Cohn
Geraldyn Dreyfous
Mark Lipson
Gavin Dougan
Dan Fegan
Michael D. Ratner
Ericka Concha
William Haugse, ACE
Ken Schneider
Tony Vainuku
Justin Melland

Editors

Director of Photography
Music

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).



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