

ESPN 30 for 30: AIR BUD

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NOTE: This film will be shot in a documentary style, with contemporary footage, archival footage, and interviews intercut throughout.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

We hear sneakers scuffling, the shouting of players.

We see only legs and feet, running across the court. Nobody in the stands- just practice.

We hear someone take a quick shot- BRICK. It's no good.

The legs cross frame again, back the other way. Shouting gets louder until-

Offscreen, a DOG BARKS. The scuffling stops.

CUT TO:

The basketball hoop- lit up beautifully, gleaming like a religious icon.

The ball sails into frame- SWISH. Nothing but net.

We hold on the silent hoop for a moment, then-

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. FERNFIELD, WASHINGTON - DAY

Cars pass, people walk, birds chirp. An American everytown.

NARRATOR (VO)

Thirty years ago, in a small town in Washington state, something incredible happened.

EXTERIOR SHOT of Fernfield High School Gymnasium.

NARRATOR (VO)

A single refereeing decision in a *children's basketball game* would send shockwaves throughout the world of professional sports.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL GAME

ARCHIVAL AIR *BUD* FOOTAGE - Referees frantically search through their rule book-

REFEREE

There's nothing in the rules that says a dog *CAN'T* play!

We FREEZE on this moment. This is HUGE.

NARRATOR (VO)

And like instant replay, sabermetrics, and performance enhancing drugs, it would force us to question the fundamental nature of sports as we know it.

EXT. SUBURBAN DRIVEWAY - DAY

ARCHIVAL HOME VIDEO FOOTAGE - A golden retriever puppy plays with a rubber ball and a Fisher-Price basketball hoop. A young boy- JOSH FRAMM- plays with him.

YOUNG JOSH

Ok buddy, here you go-

He tosses the ball to the puppy, who nudges it with nose- it goes in! Josh cheers-

JOSH FRAMM (VO)

He was just... a real good boy, you know? He liked to play.

INT. INTERVIEW

We see JOSH- now a much older man, with a saddened look to him.

JOSH FRAMM (CON'T)

He was... he was my buddy.

He smiles- but the smile fades.

SLOW PUSH IN on a STILL of Young Josh and Buddy in their basketball uniforms, all smiles, holding a trophy between them. The picture of happiness.

MICHAEL JORDAN (VO)

Think it was ninety-seven, ninety-eight when it all started.

INT. INTERVIEW

MICHAEL JORDAN

At first it was just rumors. This is before the internet, cellphones and everything. I thought it was a joke. But then one day Rodman comes in with this tape- you know he always had these tapes- one day he comes in all excited. Made the whole team come and watch. It blew my mind. This dog, man... this dog could play.

CHARLES BARKLEY

Yeah, I saw the tape. But I wasn't surprised. Growing up in Alabama, we had dogs doing all sorts of things- playing basketball, driving cars. All sorts of things.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL GAME

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - AIR BUD steals the ball and passes to YOUNG JOSH who lays it up. They high-five as the crowd cheers. We see a group of SCOUTS in the stands-

INT. INTERVIEW

JOSH FRAMM

There were all these guys in suits that started showing up at our games. I guess they were college scouts. But it turned out that in dog years, Buddy was already old enough to go pro. So that's what we did.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE - CHEERING CROWDS with SIGNS- *WE WANT BUD!* and *GET SOME AIR, BUD!*

AIR BUD signs a contract with the NBA at a PRESS CONFERENCE-

NEWS ANCHOR

A historic moment today as the first non-human player has been signed to the National Basketball Association. Air Bud is his name, and he's already causing a sensation- but not everyone is happy about it.

We see PROTESTERS with SIGNS- *HUMANS ONLY! NO DOGS!* and *SIT. DON'T STAY!*

PROTESTER

I honestly don't even understand how this is legal. Can a dog be legally bound by a contract? Is he a citizen now? What's happening?

CUT TO:

STILL of Air Bud, wearing a suit jacket and a New York Knicks hat, shaking hands with smiling NBA Commissioner David Stern.

NARRATOR (VO)

With a labor dispute between the players and the league looming over the 1998 NBA season, some viewed the signing as a cynical ploy to undercut the players' ability to negotiate. But New York Knicks Head Coach Jeff Van Gundy was undeterred.

INT. INTERVIEW

JEFF VAN GUNDY

We definitely took some heat for the signing at first. But it was never about the lockout. I knew Bud had real potential.

JALEN ROSE

The players for the most part, we weren't really against the league's decision. We were like okay, you got this gimmick, fine. Sell some more tickets to the circus, you know. We figured it would all die down in a couple weeks.

He chuckles-

CUT TO:

EPIC STILL of AIR BUD DUNKING- and SHATTERING the glass backboard.

JALEN ROSE (CON'T)

Guess we were wrong.

MUSICAL MONTAGE - AIR BUD DUNKING.

It's DUNK after DUNK after DUNK-

INT. INTERVIEW

BOMANI JONES

Just raw athleticism. *Extreme* athleticism. The kind of thing where you see it happen with your own two eyes and you watch the replay and still- it's like- *I don't believe that's possible.* But it was.

QUICK HITS of PATRICK EWING and BUD scoring-

NARRATOR (VO)

Along with veteran center Patrick Ewing, Air Bud helped lead the team on a historic playoff run.

STILLS of AIR BUD playing defense against REGGIE MILLER, JALEN ROSE and the INDIANA PACERS in the 1999 Eastern Conference Finals. BUD SNARLING as MILLER tries to get past him-

REGGIE MILLER

Everyone remembers the dunks, but he was incredible on defense. He'd show up out of nowhere, maybe come up through your legs, poke the ball out of your hands with his nose. He'd do things that other players just couldn't do.

JALEN ROSE

I would never admit this at the time, but I think- and a lot of people agree- I think he should have gotten defensive player of the year. But to be the first rookie to win it, *and* a dog? That was too much for people.

STILLS of AIR BUD and the Knicks going up against the SAN ANTONIO SPURS in the NBA FINALS-

AIR BUD LEAPING into the air to block a three pointer from STEVE KERR-

NARRATOR (VO)

Despite Air Bud's impressive season, the defensive player of the year went to future Hall of Famer Alonzo Mourning.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (VO) (CONT'D)

The Knicks ended their season in a championship loss to a dominant David Robinson and the San Antonio Spurs. Even so, Air Bud's fame and fortune only grew.

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

ARCHIVAL VIDEO- AIR BUD, wearing SUNGLASSES, is mobbed by a cheering CROWD as he's walked to the team bus by JOSH. SECURITY GUARDS try to contain the frenzied crowd-

FAN

We love you bud!

FEMALE FAN

I wanna have your puppies!

The female fan pushes past the guards and kisses Bud on the snout-

INT. INTERVIEW

JOSH FRAMM

Did Bud like the attention? Heh.
What do you think?

STILL of a woman hugging AIR BUD. Josh stands in the background, watching with a concerned look. We slowly PUSH IN on JOSH'S FACE-

JOSH FRAMM (VO)

You know, everybody- everybody just saw the outside. They saw Air Bud, the big star, you know? They didn't know anything about Buddy.

INT. INTERVIEW

JOSH FRAMM

Dogs are social animals. He just felt like he had to be on all the time. Not just at the games, but out there partying every single night. And that started to take a toll.

SERIES OF STILLS- Air Bud in a nightclub, wearing sunglasses, surrounded by hangers-on, table littered with bottles of champagne and a WATER BOWL for Bud. At first he is having fun, but as the photos progress he gets more and more tired.

INT. INTERVIEW

JEFF VAN GUNDY

We were aware that Bud had an active social life. But his performance on the court was undeniable. And as far as we all knew, he had everything under control.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCES

ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE of PRESS CONFERENCES as the NFL, MLB, et al announce they will allow animal players- The NFL signs a PIT BULL to play on the RAIDERS, while a WEIMARANER joins the MILWAUKEE BREWERS.

NARRATOR (VO)

After Air Bud's success in the NBA, other sports organizations followed their lead and moved to allow non-human players into their ranks. And while Air Bud was no longer the only animal on the field, he was ready to prove he was still the top dog.

MONTAGE- Air Bud playing other sports-

LEAPING to catch a fly baseball-

HOLDING A FOOTBALL for a kicker with a goofy, golden retriever smile-

INT. INTERVIEW

CHUCK KLOSTERMAN

Bud was like the Bo Jackson of the animal players. He could do it all. And for him it was just absolutely effortless.

HOWIE LONG

It was incredible. Here was somebody who didn't really even have to practice- at all- but when he played, he made these guys- incredible, world class athletes- look average.

CUT TO:

Tecmo Bowl but with an 8-BIT AIR BUD in place of Bo Jackson, absolutely destroying the competition, along with 8-BIT DOG BARKING sound effects.

SETH ROGEN

Oh yeah- that was SUCH an awesome game, man. If you picked Bud, you couldn't lose. It was like cheating!

CUT TO:

MONTAGE OF STILLs of Air Bud's meteoric rise to stardom-
Air Bud signing AUTOGRAPHS with his paw-
DUNKING in the NBA-
in a COKE COMMERCIAL-
on the cover of SPORTS ILLUSTRATED-

INT. INTERVIEW

BOMANI JONES

By 2001, Air Bud was the biggest name in sports. Massive contracts, endorsement deals- people were calling him the greatest of all time. And there was some merit to that.

MONTAGE CONTINUES -

taking CARMEN ELECTRA to a MOVIE PREMIERE-
AIR BUD CATCHING A FOOTBALL in his mouth to score a touchdown-

CUT TO BLACK.

SLOW FADE UP ON:

EXT. BRENTWOOD MANSION - NIGHT

GRAINY VIDEO FOOTAGE- Lights are on in the mansion- we don't see anything, but we HEAR a dog BARKING-

Over the exterior broll, we hear a 911 call-

911 OPERATOR (VO)

911, What is your emergency?

JOSH FRAMM (VO)

Hello- uh, there's a dog here, he's being very aggressive.

911 OPERATOR (VO)
Have you been injured sir?

JOSH FRAMM (VO)
Um, yes but... it's just a small
bite. Not serious.

911 OPERATOR (VO)
Ok sir, we have someone on the
way, just stay on the line. Is
this your animal sir?

JOSH FRAMM (VO)
Yes, he's- he's my dog Buddy... It's
Air Bud.

911 OPERATOR (VO)
I'm sorry- you said *Air Bud* ...
bit you?

JOSH FRAMM
(beat)
Yes.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. LA FREEWAY - DAY

ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE - Helicopter shot of a white Bronco
driving down the freeway, followed by a fleet of police cars
and one Animal Control vehicle in the lead-

NEWS ANCHOR (VO)
Continuing our live coverage of a
low speed chase on the 110
Freeway. The driver of the vehicle
is believed to be canine sports
star Air Bud, who is wanted for
questioning in a case of assault
on his legal guardian, Joshua
Framm.

CUT TO:

STILL of the Bronco on the freeway, cop cars filling the
background, with Air Bud at the wheel.

INT. INTERVIEW

CHUCK KLOSTERMAN

It's one of those images that's just burned into everyone's memory. Everyone who saw it will never forget that moment.

CHARLES BARKLEY

Dogs can do all sorts of things.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGE - Air Bud is on trial. He sits with his DREAM TEAM of lawyers wearing a grey suit. Across the room, we see the PROSECUTION TEAM.

NARRATOR (VO)

With Josh's testimony and the 9-1-1 call a matter of public record, the Los Angeles DA's office went into the case feeling quite confident. But things would soon change.

INT. NEWS STUDIO

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - FOX5 News Anchor Pat Mahoney reads the news.

PAT MAHONEY

Updates today in the Air Bud trial. Alleged victim Josh Framm has suddenly reversed his decision and is refusing to testify, leaving the prosecution without their star witness.

EXT. LA SUPERIOR COURT BUILDING - DAY

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - Josh is mobbed by CAMERA CREWS as his lawyers lead him down the steps of the court building-

INT. NEWS STUDIO

PAT MAHONEY

We turn now to our legal analyst Jim Patterson for his take. Jim?

JIM PATTERSON

Well, no doubt this is a huge setback for the prosecution.

(MORE)

JIM PATTERSON (CONT'D)

This, along with the persistent rumors that one the LAPD's investigators has made anti-canine comments in the past, is really putting the outcome of the trial into question.

PAT MAHONEY

Seemed like a real "slam dunk" just a few weeks ago, didn't it Jim?

JIM PATTERSON

Heh heh, it sure did, Pat.

INT. INTERVIEW

JOSH FRAMM sits silently, looking into the camera-

SUPER: ON THE ADVICE OF HIS LAWYERS, JOSH FRAMM HAS DECIDED NOT TO COMMENT ON HIS DECISION NOT TO TESTIFY IN THE AIR BUD TRIAL.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE- The Jury Foreman stands to read out the verdict. We see that one of the jurors is a Welsh Corgi.

JURY FOREMAN

On the charge of assault, we find the defendant, Air Bud, not guilty.

An audible GASP is heard in the room. Air Bud grins, his lawyers hug him. The judge bangs his gavel-

JUDGE

Order, please!

The room quiets.

JURY FOREMAN (CONT)

On the charge of driving without a license, we find the defendant, Air Bud- Guilty as charged.

JUDGE

Air Bud, based on the facts of this case, I hereby sentence you to be neutered.

The courtroom ERUPTS into CHAOS-

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

INT. INTERVIEW

BOMANI JONES

After the procedure, he came back for a little while. But you could see- he was just a shell of his former self.

STILLS- AIR BUD at a BASKETBALL GAME. He's on the sidelines, laying down, looking sad. And worst of all- rolling over.

REGGIE MILLER

It was hard to see, you know. He was such a tough competitor, but after that- he lost that edge. He didn't even bark anymore.

EXT. STADIUM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - A bodyguard leads Air Bud out of the stadium on a leash. No crowd, no fans. They get into a midsize SUV and drive away.

NARRATOR (VO)

After a lackluster season, Air Bud's contracts were not renewed. His endorsement deals were terminated, and he faded from the public eye.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. OLYMPIC TRACK AND FIELD MEET - DAY

A line of female runners ready to compete in a race. We PAN to reveal BEATRICE- an OSTRICH. The human competitors eye the ostrich suspiciously. The ostrich HISSES.

NARRATOR (VO)

Despite the dramatic end to Air Bud's career, the pioneering influence he had on professional sports around the world is undeniable.

BOOM- the STARTER GUN GOES OFF. The race is on- and the ostrich takes the lead.

DRAMATIC MUSIC SWELLS INTO A MONTAGE of OTHER ANIMAL PLAYERS-

HOCKEY Pucks bounce off a WALRUS GOALIE. The walrus GROWLS-

A KANGAROO lands a STIFF JAB against VASYL LOMACHENKO-

A SLOTH PUTTS on a GOLF GREEN-

A CHIMP TOSSES A KEG OVER A 15 FOOT WALL as he competes for THE WORLD'S STRONGEST PRIMATE against THOR BJORNSSON-

A BEAR stands across from UFC Champ Khabib Nurmagomedov in the octagon.

REFEREE

(gestures to fighters)

Are you ready? Are you ready?

Let's get it on!

Both fighters make their way to the center of the octagon-

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

SLOW MOTION- Waves roll in on a beautiful California beach.

A TENNIS BALL sails into frame, bouncing in the surf.

BUDDY, now with some grey around his snout, bounds into frame. He's an old dog now but still has some spring in his step.

He picks up the ball and trots back past the camera, smiling.

Cut to reveal OLD JOSH. He kneels down as Buddy brings him the ball. He takes it from Buddy's mouth, gives him a gentle pet on the head.

JOSH FRAMM

Good boy.

THE END.