

A rare sport on the other side of the world saved his life. Now he wants to give back.

“Chinlone and soccer – same family. There’s just something better about manipulating a ball with your feet, whether it’s keeping it in the air or to score goals with it or whatever. And then to do it as a team, there is something really extraordinary about that – extraordinarily difficult and you know, you’re just part of this weird fabulous thing. You know we are so good at using our hands, but a foot sport is just like wow – its odd in a way and it shows something about humans who would do something so odd and be driven to do so out of nothing more than the joy of it.”

A team combination of sport and dance with no opposing team, Chinlone, a sport native to Myanmar, is essentially a non-competitive exercise not too dissimilar to juggling a soccer ball. There is no scoreboard, no winner, no loser, however the sport is as physically demanding as any. Those who come to know it, practice it, seldom master it, yet find they are nearly unable to live without it.

Greg Hamilton is such a man, and ***Mystic Ball***, the documentary film he made with movie partner Matthew London was his first gift back to the sport. In the years since its creation, it has won numerous awards and prizes, and Greg has continued giving back, as the sport continues to bestow gifts on him.

A year ago this November I spoke to Greg about his long journey through life to Chinlone, and struck up one of those friendships that could only exist in our digital world. I had just seen *Mystic Ball*, and though it had nothing at all to do with soccer, the visual similarities were too striking for me to let it pass. What I found on the other end of an e-mail, after a long long phone conversation, forced my hand. I had to share it. It’s not American soccer, but American soccer could learn something from chinlone.

But the world got in the way. Greg’s global traveling, from film festivals to Myanmar, hindered my deadlines. Our mutual hope that the film would be purchased for theatrical release had me holding the story in hopes of timely publication. But it didn’t happen that way. **And then a few thousand monks started marching...** and here we are.

Chinlone is a search for community, and it should be no surprise that Greg, after beating back the anger of his childhood through martial arts, would be drawn to something like Chinlone, Myanmar, and the people of Mandalay. And once you read the interview, it should be no surprise why people are drawn to Greg. But it started much more simply than that. There was no spiritual lightning bolt when Hamilton happened upon a man juggling an unusual, woven ball in a park in Toronto. But there was a sense he needed to learn more. He had to know what it was. I had to

know why? After the jump begins our 3-part conversation, with parts 2 and 3 following in the coming days.

For the sake of people who will be unfamiliar with 'Mystic Ball' and chinlone, let's start with a little background. You have years of footage in the film, more than a decade. Where does this story begin for you?

What happened was this friend of mine, Matthew, who is in New York, the co-producer, I kind of introduced him to chinlone and he started playing, and then I had an idea because I really wanted to try and do some sort of promotion with it. I had an idea to try and take a team out on tour. This was in about 1997. So we went there and it quickly became obvious that that would be impossible just for the trouble of getting visas and passports and everything at that time for them. It morphed from there to us thinking we could make a little film about it, and neither one of us had made a film before and we figured it would kind of go quickly, of course it didn't.

So that's how it started, and you know initially I was not going to be in the film because for me it was like chinlone filled up the whole screen for me. then when we tried to raise money for the film, everybody said no, there's no story, no drama, and so – you'll appreciate this one. We thought maybe we could get Pele to be a guide, a celebrity guide, right? But he never got back to us so that one didn't go, and then basically just as a default, because I knew a lot about it and had been playing for so long, maybe I can be sort of a little bit of a guide and then bit by bit the film kept asking for more of my story in there so finally I kind of got immersed in it.

In that regard, I really wanted more of you in there. For example we don't really learn that much of your background beyond that quick few minutes that wraps up your biological family and childhood.

Right. See for me, I can't tell you how difficult it was. That aspect of it. like I said, for me it was all about chinlone, and you usually don't look at yourself and think your trip is all that interesting. I don't. So you know I didn't want my story to overshadow that or get in the way of or take anything away from it. If it was left up to me, it would have been 90 minutes of pure chinlone playing. You'd meet SuSu and a few of the players but it would be just like pure playing almost. But of course I couldn't make that film or I couldn't sell it. Put it that way. So, yeah, it was really hard. That part of it was really hard. All of the footage that you see that is before 2001 was never intended to go in the film. It was just stuff we made because we had to make little demos and videos to try and raise money. I was basically home videos.

And this was to fund the tour. Right?

Yeah. It was really expensive. We took crews from America on two separate occasions in two different years.

I was taken by the quality of the footage. It was shot beautifully with thoughtful camera angles. I have to admit I was expecting something much less professional out of the film.

Hmm. Yeah, you need to see it on a big screen with a good projection.

Hopefully in New York in the future?

Yeah, well, we're trying to make that happen (laughs). But yeah, it as far as my story in there, it was like pulling teeth there for a while. The only reason I ended up in there as much as I did was because the film really asked for it.

In that regard, I'd love for you to fill in a few gaps about your past. The film touches on your martial arts, but what were you doing in Toronto? What was your life like, what was your livelihood before you became engulfed in chinlone?

Up until chinlone I played music and did martial art mostly.

So you earned a living playing gigs or teaching martial arts?

I was teaching, but I wasn't making any money from that. But yeah, from playing music and any little odd jobs that could help support the martial arts.

Would you describe yourself as involved in the martial art as you came to be in chinlone?

Oh yeah, absolutely. Another few years and I would have opened my own place. I was deeply involved in that.

And the music?

That was more out of love. If I could make some money from time to time that was great, but I wasn't a studio musician or an everyday gigging musician.

Quick sidebar: what kind of music do you like?

Oh, I love just about every kind of music you could imagine. I love Brazilian music, all kinds of jazz, world music.

Who are some of your jazz favorites? I'm a big jazz fan, so I'm just curious. We won't linger here, but I could talk about jazz forever.

Coltrane, of course. I love Alice Coltrane. Do you know Moacir Santos?

Yeah.

You do!? That's excellent. Do you know Ouro Negro?

It's one of his albums, but I can't go too far there. not quite bossa, not quite anything. People rave about his arrangements.

Yes, well that's an extraordinary album you'd definitely want. **Black Gold**.

Consider it done. Sorry about that. I just get can't let the music go that easy. And see I've found a new album to get.

You know, Chinlone is a lot like jazz.

I was taken by the musical accompaniment at the chinlone festival. The way the players in the circle and in the bands played off each other.

Yeah, and then what happens inside the circle is that the soloist is supported by the other players as accompaniment, and that support is very very intricate. You'd be shocked at how intricate. As a supporter you can help to alter the solo. You can quicken it; you can change the kind of movements the person is stringing together. So, as with an accompanist, you can kind of help shape the whole thing.

That's a great metaphor, which leads me to how and why I found 'Mystic Ball'. As you know, soccer is my game, and while there are the obvious superficial comparisons, it really ends with stretched metaphors. There really isn't much there. You, for instance, had zero soccer background.

Ok, so this is kind of interesting. I grew up in Canada. When I was a kid they didn't teach us soccer at all. I've never played soccer at all. Never. Period. The first time is when I used to hang out with some Jamaican guys in the 70's and I saw them juggling a soccer ball, and I was like WOW what's this, and I tried it out but was no good at it, but something kind of struck me.

Anyway, I'm a rabid fan of World Cup. I'm a fan of soccer now, but not enough to watch it all the time. But World Cup, I'm no good, because I have to watch every game. So I had no skills whatsoever coming into chinlone. No soccer. No juggling.

That blows me away, but it's almost perfect in some way, making the story that much more amazing. How you found this new foreign thing out of nowhere.

Yeah, its interesting. I saw this one guy – of course there's a lot of stuff that isn't in the film – but I saw this one guy and that thing got so deep in my blood. I couldn't find a ball, so I used to crumple up paper and make these balls. I was selling stereos at the time as a way to pay for the martial art. And I started playing with these paper balls or trying anyway. Because just somehow I knew I needed to do

this thing.

So now decades later, you don't have an urge to try soccer? You obviously have this amazing footwork.

I have people coming up to me all the time when they see me playing, especially how I used to play when I would chase the ball all over and it was really more dynamic or chaotic type of thing that what you see in the film. But after 16-17 years, I got pretty good at, kind of running with the ball up in the air, changing direction and stuff like that. So people would always come up to me and say 'hey, so you're a soccer player, right?' And I'd be, no. And then soccer players would come up. 'You play soccer?' No. and they'd be like 'man, you should be playing soccer. You should play for Canada or something.' Yeah, I kind of have mixed feelings. First of all, I'm 53 now, so it's a bit late to start soccer. But I do have this feeling inside that boy, I sure wish I had played when I was a kid. Because I think I would have loved it, and maybe been ok at it. but its just a bit late to be charging around playing it you know?

Yeah. That was one of the things that struck me as the film went over your past briefly. You spoke about being orphaned and getting picked on, and then funneling your anger into martial arts. So many people I come to meet through soccer have similar stories about how soccer saved them or at least gave them an outlet and some focus. And people from different backgrounds who immigrated into America found soccer to be one of, if not the first place they found a community of people, a home if you will.

Yeah right. I look at soccer that way. It really mixes up all kinds of people with different backgrounds nicely. I love soccer. It's great. I was rooting for Brazil this summer, but they didn't look right, and then Argentina just looked fantastic. And I've been rooting for Africa one way or another since the last World Cup with Senegal and all that.

One of my favorite quotes from the film, I believe spoken by you if memory serves, was that "most sports aren't playful," in reference to chinlone being a non-competitive sport. And it just struck me as really much deeper than the statement led on, which by the way happened a lot in the film for me. But to draw it out, that as kids we're all taught just in the language that you go and play soccer, or play baseball.

Yeah. Absolutely. I watched a few minutes of the baseball series that was on, and I think, man, that is just the most non-playful stuff I could imagine, you know? But no, it was when I was watching Utenji, the ball-maker, and this one chubby buddy of his that takes the flip on the ground in the film, and right then it just struck me.

All sports are not playful. Chinlone just has this spirit in it. you start playing it and five, ten minutes at the most everybody is laughing and smiling. But what is great about it is that it's super difficult. It's a real serious challenge, and I'll tell you an interesting thing. I don't say it in the film, but all of those players over there. all of the men definitely, played soccer pretty seriously, and they all say this is more difficult. It's super difficult, more than it might appear.

So will they go out and play soccer still?

Some of them still play soccer, but mostly it turns out that once you fall in love with this, you tend to drop other stuff. Other sports stuff because it's difficult to maintain the level of skill.

The difficulty is another thing that amazed me. The moves were outrageous with bodies contorting and reflexes impossibly quick, yet here were these old guys who could barely walk holding their own inside the circle.

Absolutely. Exactly. Another beautiful thing is that they are included, of course, but they have an older style, just like in soccer I suppose, but they have this older more elegant style that the young guys, who are playing a faster more acrobatic style, really still cherish. Of course the older guys are like 'yeah, well we play better than these younger acrobatic guys.' They tend not to drop the ball as much, the older guys. You get all the young guys watching a bunch of 70-80-year-old guys play and they give them tons of respect.

I loved the guy who played for a few minutes and then dropped out saying, "I'm pooped," but while he is in there, his reflexes are on par with the best, and then he turns to leave and he can barely walk and has to sit down almost immediately.

Yeah. And you may have noticed, his legs don't even straighten out all the way. But he comes everyday and plays for a while and sits and watches. Man, I just am sooo super lucky to have found this in my life. And maybe this is something people find in soccer, but for me, I need to do something that just takes my whole being to do it. And I didn't ever get enough of it in martial art. You know when you're going full-out at something, and one thing I love about chinlone is that I can go full out at it, and afterwards, no one else is humiliated, knocked-down or knocked-out or whatever. Not to, like I said, I love soccer, but most competitive sports I've lost a lot of interest in. Most sports I see as forms of fighting, and fighting isn't always bad, but chinlone I see as a form of loving. For me, you know, I'd like to get closer to the loving part.

Which brings us to one of my other favorite quotes from the film. You said it right after the quick bio vignette. You said, "I could kick people, but that was different."

And it was a masterful piece of editing from my perspective, because it stood for much more, again, than what the basic definition of what the words meant. You were speaking about kicking the chinlone ball, but for me it was a real reflection on your growth through a troubled past.

Well good, you caught some lines good in there. See, I really had mixed feelings on martial art. I loved to do it, to be strong and quick and all that stuff, but at the same time I really didn't like hitting people, which is kind of a dilemma.

The film kind of leads one to believe you got into the martial art to funnel your anger, after being bullied and teased throughout your childhood about your mixed race and being a foster child. Is that accurate?

Yeah, but to be more precise, I'd been street fighting for a long time and had gotten quite good at it. You know in the schoolyard over some beef, name calling, or whatever. I actually used to fight for people because I had a bit of a nack. So there was that. And it was partly because I wanted to fight with style. I saw Bruce Lee and all of these Chinese kung-fu movies, and I thought well damn, this just looks way better than the way I'm doing it. so that is one reason. And another reason was because to be honest I became deeply afraid inside that I was going to kill someone, because I had had some bad things happen. I thought somehow I need to - I had a lot of rage inside, and when you have rage and you can fight and there's enough people around who can push your buttons, then, you know what I mean? So I really wanted to be able to control it and know when enough would be enough. So that's another reason. You know there's always lots of reasons for stuff like this, and I think just plain ego had something to do with it as well.

How old were you when you started martial arts?

I started when I was maybe 15 or 16, and then I messed around with a few different things and then when I was maybe early 20's I started to get serious about it.

So how much time between the martial arts kicking into a high gear until you found chinlone?

Probably about 10-11 years.

So that puts you in your early thirties when you found chinlone?

Yeah I was, ummmm 1981, I was like 28 when I first saw it and 30 when I started to play.

The time you first saw the guy in the park kicking the ball around, correct?

Yeah. That was '81, and I knew I had to learn this thing, but I couldn't get a ball for two years. And then when I did get a ball and started to do it, and I felt how difficult it was, and in spite of all the coordination and stuff I had from martial art, how much it was just so difficult. Then right away I thought, ok, this is gonna give me an edge over the other people I'm sparring with. Your mind is always trying to make sense of things in some way, so I thought, yeah, this is what this is, a super good training tool. That period lasted for probably about a year, year and a half.

Playing everyday?

Playing everyday and still doing martial art every night and training.

And you're working a job during the day at some point in there?

(laughing) yeah. Yeah. But then I started making jewelry and stuff. I design stuff, so I could do that around the other stuff. It was more flexible than having a full-time job. And it worked. It really started to give me an edge over the people I was sparring with, but then it really absorbed me. This thing was just so much fun. You know the thing is I like to do something that is an end in itself, as opposed to preparing for something.

The sports analogy being you want to play in a game, but not necessarily practice?

Sort of like that, yeah. In martial art, so much of it you are just doing stuff in the air, shadow boxing and working on form, especially in the Chinese kind I was doing. So so much of it was preparing for when you might fight, and it just wasn't good. Whereas chinlone, with every kick its complete. I go out and play, and even if I'm playing by myself, it's a complete thing in itself. The play is complete. Obviously there is no score, but I'm not preparing for anything. It's just a complete thing, like making love. It's complete unto itself. So I really loved that aspect of it.

You said it took two years to get a ball. Take me through that process.

Well, there's no balls here in Canada. What happened was I went to Asia for the first time in '83, and when I was in Thailand I saw similar balls there, and I got one and started playing. I was in and around Thailand and Southeast Asia for about a year for that first trip, and then I came back to Canada and decided I wanted to go live in Indonesia. I was back here for a year or less before I moved to Indonesia and stayed over and around there for 5 or 6 years and played over there.

Yeah, ok, so the film doesn't really spend anytime on that – on your living in Asia. So you actually spent years living over there, not in Myanmar, Burma or chinlone country, but the general region.

Yeah, but in that whole time I only made one trip to Burma in '86, which you see in the film. There are some photos from then. But it was too much for me then. I just didn't have enough skill to learn anything really. And so, all it did was inspire me and I went off and continued this style I had on my own or maybe with a few friends, sort of like you see in the film. Although I was in the area, Indonesia or Thailand, it was much different. It wasn't like being around the Burmese style.

And how did you support yourself while living over there?

I was designing things. I designed textiles for awhile and was designing jewelry in Thailand. I used to make things and bring them back over here sometimes and sell them. I was trying to sell jewelry in Japan. (laughing) Whatever would work.

So you found a ball and played with it constantly. We see in the film how the ball is woven by hand similar to how many people will think of a wicker basket. Being made of natural rattan, I'm curious how long a chinlone ball can last?

That's a good question. It depends on how hard you are kicking it and what surface you are playing on. Obviously if you are playing on asphalt, the ball will come apart fairly quickly. But then it's a tough question because it depends on the quality of the cane. But I would say that you have at least 6 months or a year, maybe a couple of years, depending on how well you take care of it.

That was just one of those little curiosities I had.

Oh, please, ask anything.

Check back tomorrow for the rest of the interview. Check out the film's **website** to learn more about chinlone and join the mailing list for updates about Greg's journey and to find out when DVDs will be available.

one man finds the reward from a rare sport is family

Chinlone, who knew? Greg Hamilton's dedication to his sport is something we can all - RBNY? - learn from. We pick up the conversation after the jump.

Juggling a soccer ball versus a chinlone ball. Break it down for me.

Oh man, how to address that. I mean you could juggle a basketball or a baseball, but they aren't at all the same, you know. This thing is specially designed for this and the feeling and everything, it's kind of like an instrument.

I figured we wouldn't be able to put that together. I can't help but associate the two, but we're coming from two completely different things, no matter how similar it may seem on the surface. It keeps coming back to chinlone being this entity unto

itself. That's one reason I was drawn to the film. I've never seen anything like it.

Yeah, and with juggling a soccer ball, you have to remember, is that that's not really what the ball was designed for. I've thought about this a lot. A soccer ball, I think and correct me if you disagree, juggling it is a side thing that people do with it.

Yes, absolutely. It works itself into the game here and there, but it's more often a training technique.

So you can do it with it, but... ok, it's like this, using a chinlone ball to play soccer with. It wouldn't be good. Its gonna be too light, and just, you know what I mean? The chinlone ball, the weight, the dimensions, the physics of the ball have been designed over hundreds of years specifically for juggling. And specifically more than just juggling but for this team sport. I don't talk much about the intricacies in the film because there is just so much, but to play with six people in a 22 foot diameter circle, you can't believe the amount of coordination there needs to be, between the six people so you don't kick each other. The amount of peripheral vision, the amount of tuning into the other players. It becomes a real intimate tangled affair. The amount of agility you need to get out of the way of the soloist especially. You are constantly really reading the other players on a deep level and being in an anticipatory sort of a mode, being ready to save the ball. You are always on the edge of your perception trying to see where you are going to have to be to save a ball so you can be there because things are happening so fast, so much faster than they appear in the film.

I'm reminded of one of my favorite moments in the film where the crowd at the festival is laughing at you and how you are flinching at the ball as Su Su is doing the moves down really close to the ground.

Right. Yeah, but I'll tell you its so fast, the interactivity. Its like boxing and counterpunching. Once you are inside that circle and start playing its just really like you cant blink or wipe your eye or else. That's when the ball comes and you're supposed to save it. and in a case where Su Su goes down like that, the ball is just a few inches off the ground already and because of the form aspect you have to kind of look cool in the circle. You can't just be hunched over, you know. That's one of the reasons I used to stick out... more (laughing) than I do now. It takes a long time to get that kind of feeling. It's like getting the right kind of accent in a language.

That's a really good way of describing it.

Yeah, so, then of course, you can imagine the pressure of having to follow a Su Su solo. (laughing) You know these great soloists are quit incredible.

Speaking of Su Su, neither of us can help but bring her up, she is so amazing and talented with chinlone. Talk to me about how you were able to develop all of these

amazing relationships with a veritable who's who of chinlone.

For sure. For one thing they have been doing this thing for eons and no one from outside the country has taken a real serious interest – serious enough to make a film about it or a book or whatever. So right off there's this very strong feeling they have because of that. And then by the time I came there I had been playing by myself for 16-17 years, so they could feel it wasn't just a little infatuation thing. I don't know, somehow we really fit together well.

Right there. that's what for me was the second half of this film, or the second story, the second layer, and it is why I kind of wish there was even more of your story in the film, because it is so clear to me that you do fit with them, and if me or someone else were to go and cover chinlone, it just wouldn't be the same. Just this search or journey you seemed to have since your youth, looking for a home, and then you find it literally on the other side of the globe. When you finally find these people, you can tell by the look in your face that you are home. And the film flashes to images of you playing alone in your apartment in Toronto between trips and you look so sad. It really was almost miraculous, you finding this family you never had.

Yeah, absolutely, and just a little beyond that, I don't know, but in a few other ways, nothing to do with race or anything, I just never really felt like I fit in well here, and just the level of sincerity and the simple and straight forward feeling over there is just what I like you know. I wouldn't call myself a real sophisticated person. I just like simple, straightforward, here is where it's at. I'm like a dog that way. If your nice to me I'm happy and wag my tail, and if it goes the other way I'm ready to bite. So anyway, that's how they are like over there. They are really sincere and it was just a really nice fit.

I think I said this in one of our emails, but I was almost surprised at the end of the film that you hadn't moved permanently to Mandalay.

Yeah, well, I'm trying. Life is so strange. From making this film, I got to play chinlone less than I ever did before making the film. If it wasn't for the film, I would have moved back to Thailand by now. I just like living over there better. America is just getting so weird. Down there and here in Canada. And you can tell I don't like cold weather (laughing). So I'm trying to move over there, but politically it's really hard to move into Myanmar full time, but if I live in Thailand, its just like going next door, and its much more open about foreigners living there. But hell yeah, I'm trying to get back over there because this is terrible for me. there is a huge seperation from where I wanna be, and there's no teams for me to play with over here.

How often are you able to communicate with people over there?

Well, that is a really bad part. I don't have any contact with them. As I said in the film, none of them have email, none of them have telephones. So I have to go through translators or a hotel even to contact them and it's just tough. Like right now, I'm trying to put together something in Dubai in November and this whole trip of trying to contact them. You wouldn't believe how complicated it is. I have to commit to certain things and I need to contact the players. It's a huge hassle. And they just don't get it because they're not used to how we live over here, how people need to be contactable.

In that regard, I was curious about the access of the film crew with that difficulty communicating. Obviously they welcomed you with open arms at some point, letting the cameras all over the place. How did that work when you first came to them.

It wasn't easy or just like a snap. One of the first people I contacted was Utangi, the ball-maker. And he was just totally suspicious because see people couldn't believe that somebody would come all the way from Canada and America and want to study and play chinlone, because I don't really talk about it in the film, but in Myanmar, chinlone is not looked up to, it's looked down on.

Really?

Oh yeah yeah. They call it their national sport or traditional sport, but they don't support it. It's kind of considered to be a poor people's thing. And unfortunately it's like this all over the world, but if people start to get money, then they want to play golf or tennis, which seem like these glamorous sports. And then soccer, they know about soccer and Beckham and all of that business, so a lot of them are like, 'what the hell am I going to play this for if I can be part of this big other world?'

That just has me amazed after watching the film.

Yeah, people were very suspicious. Even the government was like 'no, these guys can't be... these guys are up to something else.' So it took time to gain people's trust like that ball maker. It's a really different culture. Just because of a funny little thing Su Su and I almost didn't end up becoming friends. We almost became enemies.

Wow, and you guys are really close in the film. What's that story?

Oh, it was early on, and we were going to make one of these little videos of her practicing. So I made an appointment. But then somebody - and some of this footage is in there - somebody told us about this Monk's funeral about 50 miles outside of Mandalay and there was going to be this huge chinlone festival, and 'ah you shouldn't miss it.' And it was on the same day, so I tell this driver we were

using to go to Su Su's house and let them know we wouldn't be coming to make this little video of her. And this is long before this film, right, but he didn't go. So we go to this monk's funeral. Some of the footage is there when you see these two girls with hoops playing. It's just a flash really. The next day we were leaving and I went to see U Than Gyi to pick up my supply of balls and shoes and stuff and Su Su and her father were there, and he was pissed, man. (laughing) he was like 'you make an appointment with us and you don't come. hey, you're dirt man.' So I had to do a bit of groveling over the next trip or two and finally I got back in their good book. You know the little things. The little cross-cultural mistakes one makes. All of that: coming to that and getting in tune with the different culture. It certainly was not as simple as it appears in the film. But in general, people weren't all suspicious. That was the high up people in government and such that we had to go through. It just so happened with U Than Gyi in the beginning. But once the players saw how interested we were, they were really open hearted.

And I'm sure your skill and involvement in chinlone had to help as well. Even in the film, you mention how people wanted to play with you because it was such an oddity.

Oh for sure. It's the nature of the sport, to be open hearted and stuff. It is considered this really great way of making friends, which it is, because you don't have any competition. Like in the festival, people play on different teams, so I might play on your team sometime; you might play on mine; we might play on someone else's team if they are missing some players.

Yes, that one moment where you tear your calf muscle and the young lady seems to know she is the one to come in as you exit the circle. Is that standard. Are there substitutes pre-chosen and ready?

Oh no, its usually never like that because people almost never get injured and have to come out. That is extremely rare. No, that was pre-planned because I didn't get that injury in that game. I actually had the injury, but just for the story we had to make it look like it happened in that game. But I already had it, so that is why this woman, Chinlu Long, was already dressed and ready to come into the game because I thought I would probably have to come out.

How long do each of the games last?

35 minutes a game. The first 5 minutes there is no music and you kind of warm-up and stuff. Then there is 30 minutes with music and during that time with the music there is either 6 or 7 different parts to the music where as a player you should alter your playing accordingly.

And you know those changes are coming?

If you understand the music well-enough, which I don't yet even. It's very strange music. It's very intense. They don't stick to an even tempo like we are used to. There tempo just shifts all over. It's really improvisatory. And another interesting thing about that music, It's designed to bring out fighting spirit. It's actually an ancient kind of battle music. I don't say this in the film, but I didn't used to like it at all. It was discordant. I would sit there during the festival and watch all of these games and with the music, I would have been just as happy if they didn't play it. But, the first time I went in there and played, oh man, the music just got inside me like crazy and now I love it. From the first time I went in there then I understood because I had never played to the music before. So yeah, that music is designed to make you brave.

Do you have recordings of it?

Yeah, lots.

I can picture you playing in your hallway alone and listening to the music.

Yeah, I have done that. It's not the same, though. The thing with the festivals is that they are really different than when you're just playing in your back yard. You remember the game at the end of the film? Well in a game like that everybody is just having fun,, you laugh, you're teasing each other, because you know, the thing is so hard, that even the best players end up in these ungainly awkward positions and miss the ball and stupid ways. Everybody. So, everybody else laughs at them and cuts up. its just like that. When you play in the festival, its really pretty serious. You have a big audience, a lot of them are monks. So people aren't joking around. Maybe a little bit, but not like when you're just playing more for fun. And the music, and so, how do I say this? It can be really embarrassing and disheartening to do badly. (laughing) And everybody tastes it. I've seen the best of them taste it. And it's interesting with the teams. It's a lot like soccer – in those 30 minutes, a team will kind of ebb and flow. Sometimes everything is clicking and the ball stays up forever, and sometimes nothing is clicking and the ball keeps dropping. It could be the best players in there. of course that keeps it interesting too, for players and the audience. So the music really helps you to get up off your butt and try the same thing again. (laughing) Sometimes you're just like 'ok, I'm never going to try that one again in front of all of these people.'

So where do you stand with the world tour and more immediately, this Dubai trip?

Oh man, I don't know where to start. I've been working on this for quite awhile. I was supposed to do something in Dubai a year ago, for some big festival that would

have lasted a month. I was over in Myanmar for about 4 months – in one way it was great because I was playing with Su Su and all of those players like everyday for a few hours. It was magnificent. So I was there trying to put this team together to take to Dubai. Well, the ruler of Dubai died the day the festival was supposed to begin. He died in Australia, and they turned around and cancelled the festival that drew 3.3 million people the day before. So, one of the things that happened for me was that I ended up going about 30,000 in debt, (laughing) because of all of the arrangements. You know I had to get passports for about 12-15 people and that was already about 300 a pop, and having them staying over there in a different city, and oh blah blah blah. And now there's another thing. Actually it's Soccerex (www.soccerex.com). They want me to bring a team. I was there at the last Soccer X which was in Dubai, and I had the highlight reel that is on our website. They loved it and invited me to bring a team to the next one, and I'm trying to work that out right now. And if I'm there, I have – you know soccer people have just been phenomally interested in this.

That's why I'm surprised I've never seen this. There's all these different freestyle soccer clubs and squads that travel around to promote this or that. It's basically as chinlone as soccer could get. I can't imagine there wouldn't be serious interest in bringing chinlone on an exhibition tour of some sort. I guess getting the players here is a different matter though.

Yeah, I have looked into that. I'm in the process of a really big thing right now. And this past summer I was supposed to go to World Cup with a team. We had all kinds of interest, but unfortunately we came to it late, and of course World Cup is set up years in advance and they had a lot of problems with the opening show. They ended up canceling as I'm sure you know, and it was this whole thing. Huge problems. Did you go?

I didn't. I had planned to, but at the last minute I was unable to go.

Yeah, well I was unable to go and just sat on the edge of my seat. I had a guy over there who was working with me who was like 'I just spoke to all of these people' and yada yada yada, German TV, on and on. So I had my bag packed. It was really stressful, thinking I might be going and then watching time passing. But its gonna get out there on a big level, and I'm getting huge, huge interests from teachers who want to bring it into the schools. Just working working working. And for me, its all about getting the players out there, not the game necessarily. They never get a chance to travel; they never get, they never get anything. If you play this you're addicted to it and there are a lot of families living more poorly because the man of the house is addicted to chinlone.

And obviously then, this film is a means to exhibit the game and the players and drum up support and enthusiasm to see it in person.

Well, now, yeah. Let me tell you a few things about the film. It is getting a response that I never ever expected. People are getting really emotional and inspired by it and I never imagined there would be an emotional response to the film. As an example, I was just out at the Vancouver film festival – I was at the Rio film festival a few weeks ago and they liked it – but in Vancouver they just went nuts for it. It won the most popular Canadian feature against feature films, not just documentaries. You just wouldn't believe the kind of emails I get from people. So much love. So much love in the audience.

Have been contacted by production outlets in regards to distribution rights?

Yeah, but we need to make some decisions. We'll likely split it up in regions. We have a Canadian company who is serious about it and an American company who would like to distribute it worldwide. Distribution for documentaries is not easy though. Aside from Michael Moore, Super Size me, and penguins, they usually don't go into theaters.

editor's note: a distribution deal should be coming soon.

What about US film festivals? I've noticed there doesn't seem to be any Stateside festivals for the film yet.

(laughing) well, let me tell you a funny thing. I think every American film fest we have applied to has rejected us. It's really kind of weird. Both us are scratching our heads, Matthew and I. He's American. Sundance, Tribeca, all of them have rejected us. A bunch of Canadian ones have taken us, there's a few European ones. I'm actually going to Leipzig next week for their festival. But I don't know what the deal is. America has taken a fairly hard stance against Burma, and I don't know. It's a little bit of a mystery to us. There's a whole bunch of them. You apply to all kinds of them, and you have to get accepted. But no luck in America so far.

That's seems very weird to me.

Yeah (laughing), weird to us too. Sad, because America is an extremely important market. For theatrical, if you want to get theatrical in other countries, you almost have to get it first in America.

editor's note: 'Mystic Ball' has since been shown in the United States, most notably at the Chicago International Documentary Festival, where it won the Audience Award.

When was the film finished? When did you first start applying to festivals?

We started before we were finished, which in some ways was a mistake, but we kind of finished the film in April [2006]. And then we had the world premiere at Hot Docs here in Toronto, the really big doc festival.

From a filmmaking standpoint, this being your first foray into that industry, do you see yourself making more films?

That's a good question. Up until I saw the effect the film was having on audiences, and just creating a lot of love and beautiful feelings, I would have said absolutely not. I don't want anything more to do with it. But things change when they start to look good and feel good, right? So, yeah, I'm kind of thinking about it. TO be quite honest, I was just talking to Matthew today about this. Chinlone still has not been shot as well as I think it could be. I really want to do some more shooting of chinlone; that's very important to me to capture this thing well. None of the people – and we worked with some really great camera people – really got it. They didn't get the real beauty of chinlone or the real point of it. So it was an uphill battle to get them to shoot it properly. I basically knew how it needed to be shot, but it was difficult, even though I was the director, to get them to do what I wanted them to do. So that is one thing I definitely want to do. (laughing) So I'll go shoot chinlone some more. And I have a few other ideas, and one more serious idea for another film, but, we'll see. It is partly, just like you were wondering, if we get good distribution and if that works out well. And another thing I need to bare in mind is what I really want to be doing is playind chinlone. Filmmaking just absorbs you, so if making another film is going to take me away from chinlone, I might just not want to do it. (laughing).

It's almost as if the filmmaking would have to become your new chinlone.

(laughing). Yeah, which it couldn't. no. no. that's no, it couldn't. no it couldn't do that. No. I just wouldn't even want it to, no. uh-uh.

I love how strong your reaction is too that.

Yeah, no man, I have this, no, uh, uh. Nope.

How long did it take for you to get engrossed in the chinlone community? Or more precisely, how long until you found that small circle you refer to as your favorite place?

It took quite awhile. A few years until I found a coach and we kind of synched up. Because I had other coaches and it just you know it wasn't a good fit. I'd get some stuff but we just weren't connecting on all levels. So it took 4-5 years of going

there and being there for a few months a year until I really started to connect to the sweet spot for me in terms of a coach and a place and a group of people to really play with.

Yeah, that seems obvious, but the film doesn't give me that feeling. We're kind of thrown in there and it seems as if you just dropped into the culture and were off, playing in the festivals. It's amazing to me the time and effort you put in for this. Which I guess is kind of the whole point, not just for your relationship with the sport, but for chinlone itself.

Oh yeah, you just wouldn't believe how hard it was. One of the hardest things was translators. I've gone through 20-25 translators being over there and making the film. When you have somebody in between you and people that you're friends with, and that you are doing something on in such an intimate and intricate level, it makes it really difficult. It's like having a translator between you and your girlfriend.

You could see you picked up a little bit of the language, but I assume then, obviously, that you're not fluent?

Oh Yeah, obviously, waaay not fluent. Just a little bit. And another thing I don't think comes through, but maybe it does, is that you see I get some coaching over there; I learn some stuff, and then I'd have to come back to Canada. (laughing) I'd try to keep it alive, but it was like watching these little embers die out. I'd lose the skills, because unless you practice them every day, and you need a team to practice that style, then I'd just watch them die away because I didn't have anyone to play with. You need someone who knows how to receive passes and especially give you passes. So I go back over there and I'd be all rusty, which was embarrassing for me because I don't think the people over there understood it. I don't think they do even yet, because they are so used to being inside this whole web of players and teams. I don't think they can imagine what it is like to be over here alone without anyone to play with. I'd get back there and be pretty out of shape probably and lost some skills and feeling stupid. And they're like 'What the hell, I thought he was practicing. He was supposed to be better, working on his stuff.'

What is their knowledge of the outside world, just in general?

Nothing. Nothing, ok.

Do they know the cliché question, like who the President is? Bush?

Yeah, but they just know him as a villain. And they see some movies and stuff, but no, their vision of the outside world is almost non-existent. It's one of the least westernized places you could go. So no, they don't get what it's like. That's one of

the reasons I want to get them out of there – to give them a taste of what its like.

What do you think their response would be if you were eventually able to bring them to America? Under the proposed circumstances they'd be greeted with crowds and fanfare when they performed.

It would blow. Their. Minds. I just want to be there when the minds are blowing, it's gonna be great. Because for one thing they've been doing it for so long. In one way, there is this deep-seeded loneliness that I have perceived clearly with chinlone and the people who play it. I mean, we watched World Cup over there together in 2002, so they know all about that, and they see how much the world respects people with skills, with their feet. And here they are having easily as good as skills, and they are nobodies in terms of the world. Its like, 'What? Who? Where?'

There almost seems to be a comparison between you and them in that last statement. In terms of how they found chinlone. Did they come to chinlone as you did – that loneliness factor, needing something without maybe knowing it?

Well, to play this thing well, you have to devote yourself to it for quite a few years, especially to play well inside the circle, ok. So you do that, and then you don't have any way to make any serious money. There just isn't.

Unless you're Su Su?

Yeah, and its only the women who have the chance at that through the solo performance style.

That's the reason. Men could do it; there are a few men who can do amazing solo stuff, but who wants to watch a man when they can watch a beautiful woman? That's just how it is. But so this loneliness that I'm talking about... I think that for me I have this feeling of ok, I came there and have all of this interest – enough to want to make a film and stuff – and it's a funny analogy, but its almost like plain-looking girl who nobody paid any attention to, but to me and to these people, we see it, but everybody else around just sees us doing something they can't fathom any would want to do. But once they get out in the world and see how much everybody loves what they are doing, and admire and respect all the skills that they have, it's just going to be a really deep, beautiful thing for them

Is the end goal then to find a way for them to maybe be able to find a new way to support their families?

Absolutely. 100%. A whole lot of this has to do with – because look, for myself, I have various ways to make money, so, I don't have to do this to make money. I could do some designing stuff or whatever, but for them, this is crucial, and if I can

find ways that community can make money from this, its just going to make a huge difference in a lot of people's lifestyles. And on top of it, like I was saying, because it was a problem for me too, you have to play in the afternoon because its too hot otherwise during the day over there, it kind of means you cant have a full-time job. Plus festivals come up. A lot of the people are poorer than they would be if it wasn't for chinlone.

Is that one of the reasons chinlone is looked down upon? In a slighter, but similar way a addict would be looked down upon for wasting their life in pursuit of their addiction, drugs or otherwise?

No, I wouldn't say it like that. It's always been a popular game with poor people. For one thing, all you need is a ball. You don't need a special pitch; you don't need rackets or equipment or any of that. You just need a ball and you can play in bare feet. So partly because of that and partly because its traditional, and traditional culture has taken a hit all around the world because of the overpowering and overwhelming American culture for example. So traditional culture is kind of under threat just because how glamorous all the American movies, music, and lifestyle seems to be. So chinlone is caught up in that and its really quite amazing they have managed to keep it alive.

It's interesting, in Thailand they had a similar style. Sabatachra is the game they play over in that area with a similar ball. They are trying to get in the Olympics, which I think they will succeed in doing at some point. You have three a team. Its super fast, super super acrobatic. Personally, I don't think it's a good spectator sport because you don't get long volleys or anything, but ok, a lot of people love it. I used to play a long time ago. Anyways, they used to have a circle style in Thailand that has almost completely died away. It was never as spiritual as the Burmese one, but it was similar, and its basically died away because they started playing this competitive western-influenced one. So a lot of Thai people who have seen this film – mostly friends because it hasn't been released over there - are very nostalgic about something they feel has been lost in their culture, and so that connects to other parts of their traditional culture that is disappearing, and some people have very strong feelings about that.

Do you see any danger in taking chinlone out into the world?

No, I don't. let me tell you this. I don't mention it in the film, but there is a competitive form of chinlone, ok? And it is done in a way similar to gymnastics or figure skating. There is one team that plays at a time and they are given marks by seven judges. If the ball falls you lose marks, and there are several technical ways to lose points as well. You have to do a series in order, each player taking turns

after the one before. Its really hard and really technical, and its not as beautiful or fun to watch as freestyle in the festival, and its not nearly as popular. But, one of the things it does do is really raise the level of the players. So all of the really great players you see in the film, including Su Su, have done competition. So to get back to the question, there will be some change when it comes out into the world, of course, but it has changed and this brand of chinlone has maintained its tradition. I really feel like its something really good for the world, because personally, I think there is too much competition in the world. Competition is starting to come up in everything. Look at these reality shows. Everything is becoming a competition and I don't think its healthy. I think there is good competition and bad competition. Making music a competition, for example, I don't see there being any point to it, but people do it. So I think there is something in chinlone that is really important for the world – I really do believe that – and if people could just get together and play and be playful, not have to see who is the best and knock out all the rest and just learn more about supporting each other and cooperate and come together. More of that spirit in the world would be a really good thing. So, ultimately, yeah some people are going to take chinlone and either try and do the competition they do over there or maybe make up a new competition or something, but ultimately it should have some good effect. And the effect it can have for children, learning something like that where you have to strive and struggle together to keep the ball up and work together at something that is very hard and yet it's inclusive - I think this is really good. The world's gonna do what the world's gonna do, right, but at least I think I can do it with some love and respect. Look at soccer, Surely there are some bad things about soccer since it has gotten so big, but look at the World Cup. It's just magnificent. I just think that play is one of the most beautiful aspect of what we do as adults. All young animals play, but that humans play as adults I think is something that is really special and wonderful about us. People can tune into these guys playing with a ball is something really wonderful. It says something about the world and about humans.

That when its all said and done, material culture be damned, people can still stand together a kick around a ball.

Yeah! And that the whole world would tune into watching world cup. There's something absolutely fantastic about that transcends all these wars and weird things that are going on. It gives me some hope and a good feeling about humans.

I couldn't agree more, and I think that is why this film, as you've found, has touched a lot of people like myself who have the weird connection to playing with a ball. On the surface that grabs you – just the silhouetted image of the children playing on the beach grabbed me – but once you get deep inside the story of the

game and the story of your journey finding the game, its really quite amazing.

Chinlone and soccer – same family. There’s just something better about manipulating a ball with your feet, whether its keeping it in the air or to score goals with it or whatever. And then to do it as a team, there is something really extraordinary about that – extraordinarily difficult and you know, you’re just part of this weird fabulous thing. You know we are so good at using our hands, but a foot sport is just like wow – its odd in a way and it shows something about humans who would do something so odd and be driven to do so out of nothing more than the joy of it.

Well that seems like a good of place as any to stop. I think we could do this all day.

Oh yeah, all day, no problem. Hey, thanks Adam, I appreciate it so much and I’m happy that you liked it and you know I’d just like to tell you that you’ve really seem to have seen it deeply and just seen some of the things I haven’t heard other people mention, and I’m really happy about that.

Well, thank you. Please know that the appreciation is beyond mutual. We need more people out there like you. Safe travels as you kick those balls around the globe.

Check back tomorrow to find out what Greg and ‘Mystic Ball’ have been up to since we discussed the film. Head over to the film’s **website** to learn more about chinlone and join the mailing list for updates about Greg’s journey, a possible chinlone U.S. tour, and to find out when DVDs will be available.

This week you read what ranks as maybe my favorite conversation I’ve had here at TIAS. It’s one thing to speak to soccer writing’s professional all-stars like Grant Wahl and Steve Goff, but it’s all together something different and special to be able to speak to a man like Greg Hamilton. Certain people, certain work, transcend the medium for which they reside in this terrestrial world. Greg, his film, his work, and his soul all qualify. To conclude our chase, after the jump Greg brings us up to speed on what he has been up to since we spoke last November...

Dear Adam,

I believe we last talked just before I was going to Leipzig, Germany for the Dok Leipzig Film Festival. I attended this festival and although I really liked Leipzig, I was a bit disappointed with the how ‘Mystic Ball’ did at the festival. I was hoping to arrange a chinlone team performance in Dubai – but that didn’t happen. I went on to Myanmar and stayed for about 10 days to meet with the players and arrange passports for some of them. We’ve recently screened the film at the Oslo International Film Festival in Norway, the Whistler Film Festival in BC, Canada,

where we won the 'Audience Award for Best Film', the Chicago International Documentary Festival got us another 'Audience Award.' People started playing chinlone again after the screening as soon as they had balls – both young and old.

One major highlight was the World Indigenous People's Film Festival in Alaska. Really great experience up there, we got the only standing ovation at the festival. I often bring a few chinlone balls with me to sell after the screenings, because after seeing the film, people often want to get a chinlone ball but I know there is no where to get them. Spontaneous games broke out as soon as a few people had the balls. So cool.

Taking the film around to festivals has been an incredible experience on a lot of levels. The feeling of love and appreciation from festival audiences has sometimes been emotionally overwhelming for me. Finally in Portland I wasn't able to hold back the amount of feeling inside me and ended up crying in front of the audience at the beginning of the Q&A – tears of frustration that the chinlone players in the film are not yet able to share in this love and respect coming from audiences and tears from seeing and receiving so much beautiful good-hearted energy from so many people (at the same time). It really is a powerful thing! And I think that when you grow up with a bit of a hole in your heart from not being able to live with your parents – when you sometimes come across unexpected family feeling, love and acceptance from strangers, it can give a sort of bittersweet happy feeling that squeezes from the inside.

Late May I went to Myanmar for the Waso Chinlone Festival – as you know the largest Chinlone event of the year. This year the festival was 40 days long – everyday non-stop. It would begin at 9am and go till after midnight – with no breaks at all. Team after team, all with live music and an announcer. The festival was great and incredible as usual. I only had 3 weeks to practice and get in shape for the festival, which is not enough time – I need at least 6 weeks of playing and training everyday to get back in shape and to be able to perform well inside the circle (don't forget, I'm playing with the very best players in the country!). This is always a period of serious agony, mixed with happiness to be back with my friends playing together, and embarrassment at how bad my playing always is after I haven't been back for a long time.

The festival started and I had one difficult play with Su Su and her family team (her younger brother and sister and a cousin and a couple of cousins). Sometimes plays can be hard and not all the way in sync depending on the team and how much they've played together. Then another good play with Motta, Ko Maung Maung and some of the members of the Dream Team. One of the plays at the festival was definitely the best play I've ever had in my life. The audience loved it and of course

so did my teammates. Everyday I was playing in a very beautiful and peaceful monastery. I had a group of about 9 or 10 monks who would come to the festival whenever I played to watch and give support. That was a really beautiful honor.

I got to play a number of times with U Si (he is the old guy in the film that comes riding up on his bike and I say "I wish I'd had a grandfather like him"). He is 85 or 86 now and still plays everyday. Every time he came to play, everyone would become super happy – especially the monks. They let me fully support him – that is really something because for someone like him or a little kid, your support has to be very precise. I don't have words to describe the feeling of elation I got every time we played.

You know the ball is weirdly painful if it hits you in the face or groin, even a light tap will easily cut open your lip. So of course you can imagine how much you wouldn't want to bang the ball into an old guy's face or groin. I've felt bad enough in past from kicking the ball into Su Su's chest – which I've done way too many times! Funny thing is, whenever anyone gets hit in the face by the ball – everyone claps and cheers! I was puzzled about that for years and finally one day someone told me that it's because the person was stupid and should have moved their face! They have a really good sense of humor. When I told some people that I was worried about playing on a team with really old guys because I might kick the ball into them – I was told not to worry about it – the old guys will like it! Good sense of humor plus really tough too – a good combination!

I went to Seoul, Korea for the EIDF Film Festival. This is an amazing film festival – all of the films are broadcast on EBS, the Korean equivalent of PBS. Each film gets over half a million viewers! I had people coming up to me in the street in Seoul asking me if I was the guy on TV! Not only that, all the films were free admission when they played at theatres! I received some great comments from people who had seen the film and sent in messages to the TV website. Here are a few of the good ones I'd like to share with you ...

"We had a superficial understanding of Myanmar - just thought it is poor, and we thought this movie is very powerful because it shows us that there is something more important than pursuing capitalism."

"Before seeing this film, I thought that power in the world is so concentrated in western countries - but I now found that there is a power which poor countries have and this power is expressed as the truth of love. I thought it was perfect - his passion and the content."

"I think that there is an empty space in everyone's mind, and there is an empty space between people and society. I think the director solved this problem through

playing chinlone. I wish the director good luck, long life, and to play chinlone until he dies.”

“I think that if capitalism and limitless competition are taken out of sports, and in that empty space the beauty comes in, that can give us happiness and aesthetic impression. The sports which are familiar to us are all western. I want to find a sport like chinlone.”

“I am very surprised that a game like this exists in the world of limitless competition ... life sucks.”

They also made a Korean subtitled version of Mystic Ball that I now have a copy of.

Mystic Ball was at the Boulder Asian Film Festival in August, and just played at the Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival in Idaho.

Now I’m back home and just back from a 2-hour play by myself in the park (remember how I found the sport Adam?) – beautiful day and I got 32 mandala (the kick where you circle the ball as it bounces off your other leg). It was the most ever for me in one session. Pigeons swooping in formations and the odd, fine-looking woman passing by (should be more!). Old Chinese people stopping to watch, and of course kids; they are always interested when the chinlone ball come out.

It’s good to be alive. I feel super lucky to have a thing such as Chinlone in my life. Ecstasy, elation, pain, bliss, frustration, challenge, constantly pushing the edge of what is possible and the pure sweetness of feet, ball, gravity and grace becoming one. This really is another way of making love! I’m not sure if I ever mentioned this to you – I feel that I’m doing a kind of magic when I play. I think that there is something similar with the resonance or symmetry between the way the universe works – planets and stars orbiting each other, spinning and being affected by gravity – like the atomic model of electrons and atoms ... and the way chinlone is played.

That is part of the reason I named the film ‘Mystic Ball’. The truth is, and I guess it shouldn’t be surprising, that after many years of thinking about this – I still can’t find the words or terms to express this clearly. How extraordinary that something like this can be so playful and fun! It’s one of the things I most love about chinlone – it has the same kind of playful, complete in itself feeling, that I see when two dogs are playing happily together. You know the way they automatically adjust to each other’s size, strength and speed – so the play is balanced and not a matter of domination. Wow, my heart is beating hard now just thinking of playing later this afternoon! To be able to frolic and play hard without any aggression and without

anyone else suffering – is a kind of bliss. More of this kind of feeling I believe the world needs badly. I think that our true and deepest nature as humans is to play – I mean why is soccer and other sports so popular? We somehow seem to be made for these kind of things – I don't believe it is the competition per se, I think it is the 'play' - the connection socially, physically, and spiritually.

Coming up we have film festivals in Mexico and New Zealand. We are working on a distribution deal right now and also getting the DVD ready to be sold.

We just got accepted into the 52nd Corona Cork Film Festival in Ireland. Below is an excerpt from an email from the director of the festival...

"I should apologize for the delay in getting back to you, but the fact is we were somewhat swamped with entries this year, over 3,400 including 386 documentaries, of which we selected 30. I should say that of all the documentaries we viewed, Mystic Ball was by far the most pleasurable, a wonderful and beautiful insight into another culture. It will be an honor to include it in our program."

I'm going to go over for that one, I've always wanted to go to Ireland.

As I'm sure I told you before, I've never played soccer. I love it though. So I'm not sure what kind of feelings playing it gives people. I hope it gives people the feelings I get from chinlone. Everybody deserves to feel this good, even if the moments are fleeting. I've worked so they don't have to be.

Ciao, Greg --