

Three Boys Dreaming

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

ISBN-13-978-1-74295-016-7

<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>



OVERVIEW

Three Boys Dreaming (Michael Cordell, 2010, 83 minutes) follows three indigenous boys over four years as they chase the dream of becoming professional AFL footballers. At stake is fame, prestige and a starting salary of \$150,000 a year.

The film begins with the inaugural 'Kickstart Camp' in Melbourne in 2005. The cream of young indigenous players from around Australia are brought together for a week-long talent camp where they get a sometimes brutal taste of what it takes to become an AFL star. They meet elite coaches, train at an AFL club and learn what to eat, and what not to eat. Cathy Freeman and Michael Long tell them how to behave if they expect to be drafted by a club paying them a small fortune.

Among the boys is Daniel Jago, a good-natured fifteen year old from Smithton in the remote North-West of Tasmania. It is his first trip to Melbourne and the first time he's been on a plane. He has silky skills combined with a robust attack at the

ball. His simple, understated ambition is to play AFL footy and 'maybe get married and have a few kiddies'.

Daen Lomas, an indigenous boy from Sydney's West also demands attention. Of all the boys at the camp his cheeky confidence and mischievous grin stand out. He has the skills and the ambition, but against him is a difficult family life with an absent father battling heroin addiction.

The dark horse is Perth boy Chris Yarran. He is so shy he barely says a word, even to other boys at camp. His father is serving a lengthy prison sentence and perhaps it is this, or some other sense of insecurity, that keeps him hiding under the peak of his cap. But when he plays footy, he comes alive.

It is these three boys whose stories and dreams we follow for the next four years. Key events in the football calendar are the U16 National Championships, the elite AIS/AFL Academy, the U18 National Championships, Draft Camp and finally, the AFL Draft

itself. Under the glare of coaches and recruitment managers each of the boys has a very chequered pathway as they try to join the highest ranks of Australian sportsmen.

But it is the boys' emotional journey that is most captivating. One boy grapples with the death of his father and faces criminal charges for an assault. Another is beset with a more common affliction – lack of ambition and an unwillingness to do the hard work required to succeed. The third boy has a steely determination, makes it all the way into the AFL and is recruited by the famous Carlton Football Club. He kicks a goal in his very first senior game.

In the background is a gallery of parents and coaches doing their best to help the boys achieve their potential. In a country of indigenous disadvantage the boys' ambitions are extraordinarily bold.

Much more than a film about sport, this is a universal film about dreams and ambition. And what happens when life gets in the way.



CURRICULUM APPLICABILITY

Three Boys Dreaming is a resource that is suitable for use in middle-senior secondary classes in:

- » English
- » Media Studies
- » Indigenous Studies
- » SOSE/HSIE
- » Health and Physical Education

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

What is your ambition, your dream?

Write it down, but do not show it to anybody.

Underneath it write what you think you will need to achieve your dream. For example, if your dream is to be an actor, then one thing you need would be acting talent!

Add any more elements that you think you might need to fulfil this ambition.

EXPLORING IDEAS AND ISSUES IN THE FILM

The film looks at three indigenous teenagers who hope to make a career out of professional football at the highest level. That is their dream. One of the three achieves this dream. Why?



01 Use this table to summarise the key features of the three and discuss what you think determined the main difference between achieving this dream and not achieving it.

ASPECT	DAEN	DANIEL	CHRIS
Skills			
Family/parenting			
Community support			
Education			
Personal qualities			
Difficulties faced			
Attitudes			
Realism of expectations			
Peer support or pressure			

02 What do you think was most significant in determining the difference in outcomes of the three boys? Justify your view.

03 Chris, who makes it to the elite level, has come through the Clontarf school. We see that Clontarf 'uses' sport to keep indigenous students at school for as long as possible. How significant do you think this was in helping Chris to achieve his dream?

04 Huge expectations are placed on the boys. They also place huge expectations on themselves. Are these too great? Explain your ideas.

05 Two of the boys do not achieve their dream. Is this failure? If so, why? If not, why not?

06 We see a lot of specialised input and support for the boys who are in the training squads. There does not seem to be any support once they fall out of the system. Do you think the system should be more involved with those who do not make it all the way through? Or is it appropriate for those who leave to go back into society and look after themselves? Explain your view.

07 Filmmaker Michael Cordell has said that he was interested in exploring these three because they were indigenous, and that meant there was an added pressure in their lives. Do you think the film shows any advantages or disadvantages to being indigenous in modern Australia?

08 *Three Boys Dreaming* is a 'fly on the wall' documentary. Look at the comments by Michael Cordell on the right-hand side of this page about the making of the film. Identify the difficulties he faced.

‘I always found it an interesting statistic that 10 per cent of AFL players are Indigenous yet the Indigenous population is only 2 per cent of the entire Australian population. That struck me as unusual. Clearly it's an aspiration that many young Indigenous men have, and so I struck on the idea of following a few boys over a number of years who were having a crack at trying to play professional football.’

‘More than anything, I wanted to make an optimistic film about Indigenous issues, or at least that touched on Indigenous issues.’

‘While AFL and football and professional football is the world, the film is about many more issues than that. There are lots of layers in it – it's about ambition and talent, families and parenting, and of course it touches on many issues that affect Indigenous people, although not exclusively.’

‘I wasn't working at it full time over the four years, but I'd keep track of the boys, and there were key events like different state championships and the draft, so there were key set-piece events that I knew I had to cover that involved some of the characters. Above and beyond that it was [about] keeping tabs on what they were doing and going and doing interviews.’

‘I had to choose which boys to follow, so the hardest job of all was finding where the story was and who to concentrate on. Some people who might have made great stories were so shy or had such trouble communicating that it was really difficult making a film about them. At least one of those characters who's in the film was so quiet and shy I barely spoke to him at the Kick Start camp but he ended up being the one who got drafted by a senior club. So there were all sorts of storytelling challenges along the way. Really, until I sat down in the edit suite, I wasn't quite sure how much I had; I was quite nervous that I wouldn't even be able to stick together a one-hour film, but it's ended up being an 85-minute epic.’

‘As a documentary filmmaker your entire film is based on a relationship with the key subjects, and I'm a fifty-year-old middle class bloke from inner-city Sydney and I'm trying to communicate with three young teenagers who are Indigenous and from very different socio-economic backgrounds ... but the key thing about all these things is that it's not necessarily about age or gender or background, it's really about empathy. And I think if people sense you care about their story, that you're listening to them and respect their story and are interested in telling their story, I think they tend to open up.’

09 Do you think he has overcome the problems in his film?

10 The film has many elements. Look at these and comment on how well each of them works in the film.

- » Narration
- » Interviews with the boys
- » Interviews with family members and friends
- » Comments by outsiders
- » Camera style
- » Structure of the film
- » Sound
- » Filming style/s

11 Reflect on what you know about the three boys. Do you think one has been more fully explored than the others? Explain your view.

12 In his comments on the previous page, Michael Cordell says that he wanted to make an optimistic film. Do you think he has achieved that? In developing your answer consider the structure in particular of the ending of the film, the last images we have of the three boys, and in what order we see them.

13 Identify any areas where there is a message in the film – for example it may be about ambition, or family, or character, or being indigenous. List these, and briefly summarise beside each what it is that you think the film’s message is.

14 Look back at what you wrote about your ‘dream’ in the introductory activity. Would you now change anything about what it will take to achieve your dream?

ASPECT	THE MESSAGE OF THE FILM ABOUT THIS ASPECT IS ...





Cordell jigsaw



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AUSTRALIA

This study guide was produced by **ATOM**. (© ATOM 2011)
ISBN-13-978-1-74295-016-7 editor@atom.org.au

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