

YOUTH

Chasing future goals

Documentary on young ice hockey enthusiasts and their parents shows growing interest in the sport, **Xing Wen** reports.

Most of the seats in a theater in Beijing's Haidian district are occupied by young children and their parents who have come to watch the documentary *Burning Ice*, which follows three ice hockey enthusiasts and their parents over three years.

The 7-year-old skaters in the documentary, wearing helmets, elbow pads and pelvic protectors, zip around the ice rink in an indoor arena, trying to propel the puck into the net with the sticks in their hands. Their parents standing on the sidelines grow tense during the match, shouting instructions: "Pass the puck!" "Defense!" "Move, move, move!"

Meanwhile, audiences in the theater seem to reflect that same wave of tension and expectations with each shot at a goal, every crunching tackle, turn and sweeping attack. It is as if the destiny of the spectators on both sides of the screen is being decided by the direction of the small black rubber disc skipping across the ice.

The scene at the theater is about 10 days after the documentary's debut on Jan 7 and, to some extent, shows people's growing interest in ice hockey, a niche sport in China, as the country encourages more participation in ice and snow events.

In 2017, when documentary director Liu Hanxiang went to an ice hockey club in the capital and saw a group of 7-year-old children competing on the rink and their parents highly engaged with what was happening, he decided to film their stories.

At that time, he was a father-to-be. Facing the birth of his daughter, he had no idea how to bring her up and felt anxious about his new family role. Liu had grown up in a village in Shandong province where he had a carefree childhood.

"However, my daughter is going to grow up in a city. I didn't know much about how well-educated parents raise their children in urban places," says the 35-year-old director.

"I thought, maybe I can learn from these parents of the children



A scene of *Burning Ice* shows ice hockey players competing in a game in Beijing. The documentary reveals stories of these youngsters as they pursue their dreams. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

playing hockey on how to be a good father."

With such questions in mind, he started to film their daily lives. In Liu's views, the three families he chose to document respectively represent three broad sections of Chinese parents.

Qu Ruichen, one of the young

players, is spirited, with a gentle mother who tries to provide him conditions that are conducive to improving his competitive level in ice hockey. The stay-at-home mother has transferred Qu to an international school, which is renowned for its ice hockey training sessions, to pave the way for his future study in a

foreign country. To better take care of Qu, she relocated homes several times in Beijing. However, Qu's father doesn't understand why they have to "sacrifice" so much for their son's education.

One of Qu's teammates in the club, Zhai Zinan, has a strong self-motivation in learning the sport as

he wants to be a professional player who can fight his way up in North America's National Hockey League in the future.

Zhai's parents and grandparents have all shown support for his dream and decided to send Zhai to study in a sports school in Canada where he can better equip himself

with the skill sets of a future professional ice hockey player. Zhai's mother even quit her job as a lawyer to live with her son in Canada.

"Most people from my generation had to sit the college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, to enter university, the key to a stable, decent job. However, today's children have diverse choices as they grow up," says Liu.

"At this point, the parents have to help the children to examine their choices and explore more life possibilities," he adds.

The other child, Yu Lifan, has a father who has thrown himself into educating Yu to be versatile. The father says he himself was not competitive in sports during his early years, therefore, he is ambitious for Yu, hoping his son can perform well in the field.

The father-son relationship between them is typical in Chinese families, Liu says. And he uses more than three minutes in the documentary to depict how the son keeps hitting pucks into the net guarded by his father.

"During the battle between the father and the son on the rink, their situations are gradually reversed. After that, they can better understand each other," Liu says.

A viewer on the review site Douban comments: "The documentary reveals the struggles young parents face in educating their children and also shows how the different educational approaches of parents can affect children's self-confidence and behavior. It's a good one for parents and their children to watch together."

Liu's daughter is already 4 years old. Has he found the answers to his questions after the documentary's production? He says: "Not really. What I'm pretty sure about is that if one day my daughter comes to tell me about her dream and shows strong determination, I will help her to examine the dream and support her choice."

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Burning Ice follows the daily lives of three children and the efforts of their parents in helping them to fulfill their dreams.

Technology gives Kenyan students more options

NAIROBI — While studying at a rural high school in the western Kenyan county of Homa Bay several years ago, Terrence Omondi's resolve to plunge into technology-related fields hit a peak, thanks to nudging by tutors and family members.

The 22-year-old telecommunications and information engineering major at a public university near the capital, Nairobi, says his agility, energy and passion has placed him at a vantage position to drive his homeland's digital transformation agenda.

Having emerged as the top winner of the 2021-22 edition of Huawei's Information and Communication

Technology Competition in January, Omondi says he was greatly encouraged in his quest to chase his dream.

"It feels good to have acquired high-end skills like network security, data transmission and configuration through the competition," Omondi said at a ceremony for the digital skills contest.

He was among over 3,000 young people from dozens of local public universities who participated in Huawei's annual ICT competition, which tests the ability to navigate digital space. Omondi and eight other winners demonstrated high-level proficiency in advanced ICT

skills, including networking and managing systems.

The ambitious youngster learned about the contest from a friend last year and decided to give it a try, even as he grappled with a busy academic calendar.

"I had to juggle class work and rigorous study, as well as visit the labs for practical lessons, which were part of the competition," says Omondi.

Omondi says Huawei provided him with a platform to hone his ICT skills, adding that he looks forward to becoming a network engineer and working in a large telecom firm in the country.

A sizable number of female university students also participated in the competition, defying culturally sanctioned limitations to prove their mettle.

Stephanie Cheron, a 22-year-old electrical engineering major at Kenya's oldest university, the University of Nairobi, says she was elated to learn that she was among the female winners of the contest.

"Participation in the contest was in itself a giant leap of faith for my abilities to operate networking systems, transmit and store data in the cloud," says Cheron.

"I knew ICT was a male-dominated

field but I am determined to prove that even women can excel in it. In the future, I intend to apply skills gained from the competition to mentor young girls."

Thousands of Kenyan students who have participated in the competition have gained invaluable skills besides positioning themselves to grab opportunities in the emerging digital economy.

Jerome Ochieng, the principal secretary in the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, says a strategic partnership with Huawei has boosted digital literacy in Kenya.

"Through our partnership with Huawei, we have been able to bridge the skills gap in the ICT sector to help promote growth of the knowledge-based economy in the country," says Ochieng.

He says the competition has also provided a platform to mentor the next generation of specialists in fields like artificial intelligence, block chain, network security and cloud computing.

Kevin Wen, the director of Enterprise Business Group at Huawei Kenya, says a partnership with Kenya's institutions of higher learning has grown stronger to produce a critical mass of skilled workforce that could power digital transformation in the country.

XINHUA

International Education Column

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