

KICK

A film by Julia Schwalb



2026 // USA // ENGLISH // 83 MINUTES



WORLD PREMIERE
Opening Night

Festival Screenings:

Wednesday, November 11, 6:15PM | World Premiere - IFC Center
Thursday, November 14, 4:00PM | Second Public Screening - Village East by Angelika

Press Materials:

<https://tinyurl.com/KICKfilm2026>

Publicity – Obscured Pictures

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SYNOPSIS

Rooted in intimate present-day vérité, KICK follows Nikki Hiltz in the months leading up to the US Olympic Trials, where a single race could determine the course of their life. In the isolation of Flagstaff, Arizona, Nikki and their partner Emma Gee run more than 70 miles a week at 7,000 feet above sea level, shaping their lives around the demands of elite competition. For Nikki, the stakes could not be higher: they have a chance to realize a lifelong dream and earn a place on Team USA. If they succeed, they will also become the first out transgender runner to compete at the Olympic Games.

Magnetic, goofy, and fiercely competitive, Nikki sees themselves as "just a track nerd with a dream." Yet since coming out as trans nonbinary, they have found themselves embroiled in a culture-consuming battle about fairness and inclusivity in sports. As the Olympics draw within reach, Nikki must navigate performance anxiety, mounting pressure from critics and supporters alike, and difficult questions about identity, including whether to pursue possibly disqualifying gender-affirming care while competing at the highest level of sport.

Alongside Nikki is their partner Emma Gee: Gen Z, brazen, and the outspoken fighter to Nikki's conflict-avoidant uniter. The first out athlete at BYU, Emma has had to fight harder for acceptance, including from her disapproving Mormon parents. While Nikki seeks refuge in competition, Emma champions a more confrontational approach, urging a reluctant Nikki to use their growing platform to advocate for themselves and their queer community more forcefully. As Nikki's star rises, Emma, a talented athlete navigating the uncertain transition from collegiate running to the professional ranks, struggles through a disappointing season to define her own path. Living and training together, the couple's relationship is tested by ambition, diverging careers, and their competing beliefs about what visibility demands.

KICK captures the exhilaration and heartbreak of elite competition alongside an intimate portrait of a young couple navigating identity, ambition, and love. At once a thrilling sports film and a coming-of-age love story, it explores what happens when the pursuit of one dream begins to reshape every aspect of two lives.

At its heart, the film asks a universal question: what, if anything, must we sacrifice in pursuit of our dreams?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Nikki Hiltz, America's fastest 1500m runner, has spent their life chasing a singular dream: becoming an Olympian. We meet them in the months leading up to the US Olympic Trials, where that dream finally comes within reach. As the race approaches, Nikki grapples with questions of identity and the expectations placed upon them by supporters and detractors alike. Their partner Emma, whose own ambitions and competing beliefs about visibility complicate Nikki's pursuit, transforms what begins as a sports story into an intimate portrait of a relationship under pressure.

As a filmmaker, I aim to reveal nuance in issues that appear black and white. Transgender athletes have become one of the most divisive conversations of our time, weaponized to stoke fear and push us toward regressive gender norms. Yet leading with sport and personal narrative, KICK pierces through the noise to tell a universal story of someone fighting to achieve their dream.

The close friendship Nikki and I formed has allowed our team unfettered access to all aspects of their life – therapy sessions, journal entries, medical interventions, and their relationship with Emma. With this comes a responsibility I do not take lightly, especially as someone who is neither a runner nor trans. Acutely aware of my lens, I have built a team of producers, including prolific trans filmmakers Zackary Drucker and Alex Schmider, to ensure we balance the singularity of Nikki's story with a culturally conscious approach to community representation.

In a CREED meets BRING IT ON, KICK is at once a thrilling sports film and a coming-of-age love story, following a gifted young athlete chasing their dream as they struggle to discover who they are in life and love. Grounded entirely in vérité, our narrative pushes the bounds of nonfiction storytelling toward a cinematic, narrative feel. Everything is shot on Arri with Cooke anamorphic lenses, evoking the feel of a Hollywood blockbuster. The kinetic pace and tension of a sports epic are met with humor, pop songs, and the youthful vitality of an early-aughts coming-of-age romance.

With this approach, I hope to immerse viewers in Nikki's world, enabling them to drop their guards and leave behind their preconceived notions. Nikki's elite athleticism, charm, and thoughtful contemplation encourage empathy and understanding. KICK invites a new interrogation of our deeply ingrained and divided convictions around gender in sports and beyond.

– Julia Schwalb

FILM SUBJECT BIOS

NIKKI HILTZ

Nikki Hiltz has built their life around an almost obsessive pursuit of excellence. A lifelong perfectionist, they train relentlessly, dissect every race, and hold themselves to a standard few could withstand. That singular focus has propelled Nikki to the top of American distance running, but it can also make the attention around their gender identity frustrating. Nikki wants their running to speak for itself. Yet as they become more comfortable living openly and proudly, they also find confidence and community in embracing the parts of themselves they once compartmentalized. And as Nikki debates pursuing gender-affirming care during an Olympic season, they are forced to grapple with two increasingly urgent desires: the lifelong dream they have sacrificed everything to achieve, and the growing need to live as their most authentic self.

[Instagram](#) (162K) | [TikTok](#) (140K)

EMMA GEE

A Gen Z, blonde, Leo queen, 26-year-old Emma Gee met Nikki via Instagram DM four years ago, and they've been inseparable ever since. An elite runner herself, Emma was the first athlete at Brigham Young University to come out as LGBTQ. Unlike Nikki, Emma's traditional Mormon parents were not supportive, and she learned to meet rejection with humor, bravado, and a "fuck the haters" mindset. She's the comic engine of the film and Nikki's fiercest protector, always pumping them up and correcting anyone who dares misgender them. But beneath the humor is a deeper insecurity. As Nikki's career takes off, Emma struggles with living in their shadow, fiercely proud of the person she loves while quietly wanting the same recognition and sense of purpose for herself. With Nikki as both her partner and coach, their lives and ambitions are deeply intertwined, raising a complicated question: how do you champion someone else's dream without losing sight of your own?

[Instagram](#) (25.2K) | [TikTok](#) (23.1K)

FILMMAKER BIOS

JULIA SCHWALB | DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Julia Schwalb is a filmmaker creating character-driven, socially conscious, journalistic documentaries. She is drawn to stories that reveal humanity and nuance in divisive conversations. She has produced a variety of projects for broadcast, cinema, and streaming platforms, including Netflix, CNN, Hulu, Discovery, and more – covering stories from families separated by the US-Mexico border to UFO sightings in Zimbabwe to Olympic feats in Paris. KICK is her feature debut.

SAMANTHA BLOOM | PRODUCER

Julia Schwalb is a filmmaker creating character-driven, socially conscious, journalistic documentaries. She is drawn to stories that reveal humanity and nuance in divisive conversations. She has produced a variety of projects for broadcast, cinema, and streaming platforms, including Netflix, CNN, Hulu, Discovery, and more – covering stories from families separated by the US-Mexico border to UFO sightings in Zimbabwe to Olympic feats in Paris. KICK is her feature debut.

GRACE ZAHRAH | SUPERVISING EDITOR/PRODUCER

Grace Zahrah is an Emmy Award-winning producer and editor best known for her work on Oscar-shortlisted and multi-award-winning RETROGRADE, directed by Matthew Heineman; PRIME MINISTER (Sundance 2025), directed by Lindsay Utz and Michelle Walshe; and SIRENS (Sundance 2022), directed by Rita Baghdadi. Zahrah edited POSSIBLE SELVES, directed by Shaun Kadlec, which premiered on PBS in 2024. A former Karen Schmeer Fellow and DOCNYC 40 Under 40 honoree, Zahrah is based in Los Angeles.

ZACKARY DRUCKER | PRODUCER

Zackary Drucker is an Emmy-nominated director for the HBO documentaries ENIGMA (2025) & THE STROLL (2023), and an Emmy-nominated producer for the docuseries THIS IS ME (2015). She produced the Golden Globe and Emmy Award-winning Amazon show TRANSPARENT (2014 - 2019) and the film BIOSPHERE (Duplass Brothers Productions / IFC, 2022). THE LADY AND THE DALE, her 4-part series and directorial debut for television, premiered on HBO in 2021; it was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award in 2022. THE STROLL won a Peabody Award in 2024 and a Special Jury Award: Clarity of Vision at Sundance 2023. Her standalone directorial feature QUEENMAKER: THE MAKING OF AN IT GIRL was released on Hulu in May 2023. ENIGMA debuted at Sundance 2025 and premiered worldwide on HBO in June 2025.

ALEX SCHMIDER | PRODUCER

Alex Schmider is an Emmy-nominated producer and Entertainment Executive at GLAAD, the world's leading LGBTQ media advocacy organization. An acclaimed independent producer, Schmider's credits include CHANGING THE GAME (Hulu), DISCLOSURE (Netflix), FRAMING AGNES (Kino Lorber), STAY ON BOARD: THE LEO BAKER STORY (Netflix), CHASING CHASING AMY, and upcoming KICK about Olympian Nikki Hiltz. His works have earned Emmy, Peabody and Critics' Choice nominations to wide critical acclaim, and have received support from Ford Foundation, among others. Named to the 2025 OUT100, Schmider has also been recognized as one of DOC NYC's 40 Under 40 and Forbes 30 Under 30 for Media.

MEGAN RAPINOE | EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

[Instagram](#) (1.9M)

TEGAN & SARA | EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Twin sisters born in Canada, Tegan and Sara have built a remarkable career that spans ten studio albums, and more than one million albums sold. Their creative accomplishments have been matched by a longstanding commitment to advocacy. Tegan and Sara are multiple JUNO and GLAAD Award winners and recipients of a Governor General's Performing Arts Award, Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from the University of Calgary, and the 2018 New York Civil Liberties Union Award, in addition to numerous GRAMMY and Polaris Prize nominations. They have performed on some of the world's biggest stages, from the 2015 Oscar Telecast to major festivals such as Coachella, Lollapalooza, and Glastonbury. In addition to music, they were executive producers of the TV series, High School, based on their New York Times–bestselling adult memoir of the same name. They are also the authors of the Junior High graphic novel series for young readers, which was illustrated by Eisner Award–winner Tillie Walden. In 2016, they created the Tegan and Sara Foundation, which fights for health, economic justice, and representation for 2SLGBTQ+ community.

[Instagram](#) (460K) | [TikTok](#) (323.5K)

PRODUCTION CREDITS

DIRECTED BY

Julia Schwalb

PRODUCED BY

Samantha Bloom

Grace Zahrah

Julia Schwalb

PRODUCED BY

Zackary Drucker
Alex Schmider

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY

Curren Sheldon

EDITED BY

Moira Hamilton

SUPERVISING EDITOR

Grace Zahrah

ORIGINAL SCORE BY

Para One

FEATURING

Nikki Hiltz & Emma Gee

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Hallee Adelman
Roger & Carin Ehrenberg
Eileen A. Ryan

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Matthew Singer
Juliette Morris

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Tegan & Sara
Imara Jones
Tiler Wilson

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Megan Rapinoe
Camille Bernier-Green

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Adrian Salpeter
Chris Mosier