



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

2009 RHODE ISLAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

MEDIA RELEASE

For Details, Photographs or Videos about RIIFF News Releases,
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SPORTS LEGEND "WAT" MISAKA TO RECEIVE Roger Williams Independent Voice Award

SPECIAL SCREENING AND AWARD SALUTES LEGENDARY NBA PLAYER

PROVIDENCE, RI (July 28, 2009) - **Wataru "Wat" Misaka** is the first person of color, as well as the first person of Asian descent, drafted into what is now the **National Basketball Association (NBA)**. More than half a century before the Dallas Mavericks drafted China's Wang Zhizhi in 1999, the New York Knicks drafted Misaka in the first round. In honor of his accomplishments as a pioneer in the world of sports, the **Rhode Island International Film Festival (RIIFF)** will present Wat with the **Roger Williams Independent Voice Award** at this year's Festival.

A Nissei-American who was born, raised, and is still living in Utah, Wat was the very first draft pick of the **New York Knicks**, in 1947. Overcoming the national political climate during World War II, Wat was a star player for the University of Utah 1944 and 1947 championship teams, taking 2 years off in between to serve in the U.S. Army. His perseverance and loyalty to his teammates, other Nissei friends (including those interned at the Topaz camp) and his family are a testament to the unflappable Japanese American spirit.

Wat, a 5-foot 7-inch guard, appeared in three games and scored seven points for the 1947-48 Knicks before he was cut for reasons never made clear to him. But he recalls his brief stint in the NBA as a pleasant one. He turned down an offer to play for the Harlem Globetrotters so that he could return to school to earn a degree in engineering.

This is the inaugural year for RIIFF's **Roger Williams Independent Voice Award**, which recognizes an individual whose work reflects the values – freedom, equality, and tolerance – associated with Rhode Island founder, Roger Williams.

The award will be presented on **Saturday, August 8th at 5:00 p.m.** at the Columbus Theatre Arts Center, 270 Broadway, Providence, RI. at the festival screening of the acclaimed documentary film **"TRANSCENDING The Wat Misaka Story,"** directed by Christine Toy Johnson and Bruce Alan Johnson. Both directors, and members of Wat's Family will be in attendance.

Tickets for this special event are \$10.00.

For more information, call 401.861.4445 or visit www.film-festival.org.

DETAILS

WHAT: Special screening of **"TRANSCENDING The Wat Misaka Story,"** and **Roger Williams Independent Voice Award** presentation.

WHEN: Saturday, August 8th 2009, 5:00 p.m.

WHERE: Columbus Theatre Arts Center, 270 Broadway, Providence, RI.

WHO: The **Rhode Island International Film Festival** and **Sport in Society**

COST: \$10 general admission; call 401.861.4445 for additional tickets.

ABOUT THE RHODE ISLAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The mission of the **Rhode Island International Film Festival** is to discover and empower filmmakers. Held in Providence, and at locations throughout the state, RIIF is one of only 63 film festivals worldwide that is a qualifying event for the Oscars. It is also New England's largest film festival. Its innovative programming, cultivated industry ties, and loyal audiences have made the Festival a strategic and desirable platform for film premieres, drawing hundreds of independent filmmakers from around the globe. For more information about the festival, please visit www.rifilmfest.org.

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