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# Sweetwater (2023 film)

***Sweetwater*** is a 2023 American biographical sports film about Nat Clifton, the first African-American to sign a contract with the National Basketball Association (NBA). Written and directed by Martin Guigui, it stars Everett Osborne as Clifton, with Cary Elwes, Jeremy Piven, Richard Dreyfuss, and Kevin Pollak in supporting roles.

The film was released on April 14, 2023, by Briarcliff Entertainment. At the 55th NAACP Image Awards the film was nominated for Outstanding Independent Motion Picture.

## Premise

Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton is the main attraction of the Harlem Globetrotters team, under the guidance of their owner and coach, Abe Saperstein. As Ned Irish, a New York Knicks executive, and their coach, Joe Lapchick, take the initiative to integrate the team

*Sweetwater*



Theatrical release poster

<b>Directed by</b>	<span><span>Martin Guigui</span></span>
<b>Written by</b>	<span><span>Martin Guigui</span></span>
<b>Produced by</b>	<div><span><span><span>Josi W. Konski</span></span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span>Tim Moore</span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span>Dahlia Waingort</span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span>Guigui</span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span>Darren Moorman</span></span><div><span></span></div></div>
<b>Starring</b>	<div><span><span>Everett Osborne</span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span><span>Cary Elwes</span></span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span><span>Jeremy Piven</span></span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span><span>Richard Dreyfuss</span></span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span><span>Kevin Pollak</span></span></span><div><span></span></div></div>
<b>Cinematography</b>	<span><span>Massimo Zeri</span></span>
<b>Edited by</b>	<span><span>Eric Potter</span></span>
<b>Music by</b>	<div><span><span><span>Jeff Cardoni</span></span></span><div><span></span></div><span><span>Martin Guigui</span></span><div><span></span></div></div>

with support of NBA President, [Maurice Podoloff](#). They soon join hands with the other owners of the league and create a historic moment.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Cast

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- [Everett Osborne](#) as [Sweetwater](#)
- [Cary Elwes](#) as [Ned Irish](#)
- [Jeremy Piven](#) as [Joe Lapchick](#)
- [Kevin Pollak](#) as [Abe Saperstein](#)
- [Richard Dreyfuss](#) as [Maurice Podoloff](#)
- [Jim Caviezel](#) as a sports writer<sup>[6]</sup>
- [Emmaline](#) as [Jeanne Staples](#)<sup>[6]</sup>
- [Eric Roberts](#) as [Judd](#)<sup>[7]</sup>
- [Ernest Harden Jr.](#) as [Will Robinson](#)
- [Robert Ri'chard](#) as [Pop](#)
- [Kevin Daley](#) as [Goose](#)
- [Liam Risinger](#) as [Richard](#)<sup>[6]</sup>
- [Gary Clark Jr.](#) as [T-Bone](#)
- [Mike Starr](#) as [Eddie Gottlieb](#)<sup>[6]</sup>
- [Jim Meskimen](#) as a desk clerk
- [Ian Fisher](#) as [Mo](#)
- [Bobby Portis](#) as [Earl Lloyd](#)<sup>[6]</sup>

<b>Production companies</b>	<a href="#">Sunset Pictures</a> <a href="#">Reserve Entertainment</a>
<b>Distributed by</b>	<a href="#">Briarcliff Entertainment</a>
<b>Release date</b>	April 14, 2023
<b>Running time</b>	119 minutes <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Budget</b>	\$8 million <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Box office</b>	\$541,633 <sup>[3][4]</sup>

## Production

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In December 2006, it was reported that [Martin Guigui](#) had been working on a [biopic](#) project about the career of [Nat Clifton](#) for the last ten years.<sup>[8]</sup> The project by [Sunset Pictures](#) was reported by [Variety](#) to begin production in April 2007 with [Guigui](#) directing from a screenplay he wrote.<sup>[9]</sup> [Henry Simmons](#) was attached to play [Nat Clifton](#) and [Richard Dreyfuss](#) to portray [Abe Saperstein](#), the owner and founder of the [Harlem Globetrotters](#). [Romeo Miller](#) had also signed on to play a younger [Clifton](#). Principal photography was set take place in the [San Francisco Bay area](#) and [New York City](#) that summer.<sup>[9]</sup> The [Great Recession](#) caused a delay production and by April 2009 filming was expected to start in [Winnipeg](#).<sup>[10]</sup> [Two Lagoons](#) and [Astra Blue Media](#) were then attached to co-produce, along with additional cast members of [Mira Sorvino](#), [Kevin Pollak](#), [James Caan](#) and [Smokey Robinson](#).<sup>[10]</sup>

By July 2014, some cast members had been replaced.<sup>[11]</sup> [Wood Harris](#) replaced [Simmons](#) as [Nat Clifton](#), [Nathan Lane](#) would play [Saperstein](#) and [James Caan](#) as [Ned Irish](#).<sup>[12]</sup> [Brian Dennehy](#), [Patrick Warburton](#) and [Ludacris](#) were all attached to star in undisclosed roles. The production budget was reported to be \$10 million and filming was expected to begin in [New York](#) in late 2014.<sup>[11]</sup>

Production was subsequently completed by October 2022, with Pollak as Saperstein, Dreyfuss as Maurice Podoloff, Cary Elwes as Irish, Jeremy Piven as Joe Lapchick. Gary Clark Jr and Bobby Portis make cameos.<sup>[5]</sup> Guigui and Jeff Cardoni composed the film's score.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Release

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*Sweetwater* was released by Briarcliff Entertainment on April 14, 2023.<sup>[5]</sup> The soundtrack album was released by Candid Records on the film's opening day.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Reception

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### Box office

Released alongside *Renfield*, *Mafia Mamma*, *The Pope's Exorcist* and *Suzume*, the film earned \$125,000 in its first day and went to debut on \$351,010 from 1,204 theatres, finishing 13th at the box office.<sup>[15]</sup>

### Critical reception

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 26% of 19 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 4.8/10.<sup>[16]</sup> Audiences polled by PostTrak gave the film a 62% positive score, with 46% saying that they would recommend it.<sup>[17]</sup>

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## External links

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- [Official website \(https://www.sweetwatermov.com/home/\)](https://www.sweetwatermov.com/home/) 
  - *Sweetwater* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2365971/>) at [IMDb](#)
  - *Sweetwater* (<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt2365971/>) at [Box Office Mojo](#)
  - *Sweetwater* (<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/sweetwater>) at [Rotten Tomatoes](#)
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