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Will Supreme Court Rulings Give 'The Front Runner' Film Momentum?

By MIKE FLEMING JR | Friday June 28, 2013 @ 8:25am PDT

Tags: [Frank Perry](#), [Patricia Nell Warren](#), [Paul Newman](#), [The Front Runner](#)

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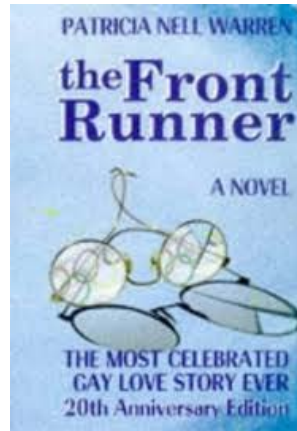
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EXCLUSIVE: Supreme Court decisions this week on same sex marriage has given gays, lesbians and transgenders the closest thing to equal rights they have ever seen

in the U.S. And the decision by basketball player Jason Collins to declare that he is gay has opened the door for other jocks to do the same. All of this has given [Patricia Nell Warren](#), author of the groundbreaking 1974 gay-themed novel *The Front Runner*, newfound resolve to try once more to get her book turned into a feature film. The subject matter — a handsome ex-Marine college track coach who has kept his sexuality secret until he becomes the coach of a world-class runner he falls in love with, until they declare their love right before he becomes a gold medalist, and deal with the tragic consequences of an intolerant society — has long tempted Hollywood but always fell short of the start line. The author feels it is because society wasn't willing to accept a movie depicting two people in love, who happened to both be men. Warren, who fought to gain back the rights several years ago after decades of futility, is looking for the right fit and hopes the moves toward tolerance will reverberate in Hollywood. The book was the first in a trilogy.



"For me, as the author, this was always about two characters who wanted to be married," she said. "In the early '70s, that wasn't possible. The closest they could get was a personal commitment ceremony, which was a big thing in the early '70s. If my characters were alive today, they would be tremendously excited by what the Supreme Court did this week."

The book, which became the first contemporary

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gay novel to reach the New York Times bestseller lists and has sold over 10 million copies around the world, has endured a long tortured development history. When first published, it became a sensation and it looked like it would be a sprint to movie theaters when **Paul Newman** optioned it and commissioned a script by Jeremy Lerner. Despite the clout that came with being one of the world's biggest movie stars, Newman couldn't get it financed, and dropped it. "Paul really stuck his neck publicly, but in those early years, it was a very difficult subject for the film industry to embrace," Warren told me.

Next to try was **Frank Perry**, the late helmer of such films as *Mommie Dearest* and *Compromising Positions*. "With Frank, it was quite clear that he couldn't get the financing," Warren said. "The story pushes a lot of buttons particularly with people who are far to the right. They are still a problem today on this issue, and yet there has been an ongoing interest in the book over the years. It always came down to the issue of money. This is a story framed around the Olympic Games, and that gives it a certain scope. I don't think this is a subject that can be made on a small budget. I'm hoping that within the context of what is happening now in the country and in the world, that we will now be able to find the people who are the right fit for this project. There is a story to be told that is still relevant, and a tremendous following out there waiting for the movie to happen. There are a number of films dealing with similar subject matter that are succeeding; the groundwork is there."



Perry finally gave up and the rights were sold to producer Howard Rosenman, who in turn sold them to producer Jerry Wheeler. Wheeler got closest, but he died in 1990. The property continued changing hands until Warren had her fill and started the process of getting back her groundbreaking book. Three years of litigation with Wheeler's life partner ended when the author reimbursed development costs. She then formed a partnership with business partner Tyler St. Mark, but creative differences resulted and that didn't end well. Finally, Warren has the rights necessary to get the movie made. She just needs for a financier to step up.



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