

TJ JACKSON

BLAINE RINCON

# Honeybun Runner

Old runner. New trick.



AN HBO PRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS THOMAS KENNEDY POPE AND PHOEBE JONES "HONEYBUN RUNNER" DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY STEVEN CEBALLOS MUSIC BY AUSTIN SPEAKMAN

STARRING TJ JACKSON BLAINE RINCON PHOEBE JONES ASHTON CARTER KENNETH TRUJILLO EDITOR DAPHNE MONKE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR NIKKO PALUCCI

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY THOMAS KENNEDY POPE

## Logline

In a reality where track athletes are treated like thoroughbred horses, a veteran track runner struggles with his self worth as his body begins to fail him days before a big race.

## Synopsis (Short)

**Honeybun** has been in the waning phases of his career as a track runner. When he's not spending his time alone in his stable, he's training under the strict watch of his **Owner**. A few days before his race against a much younger runner, **Next Day Air**, Honeybun struggles with a persistent knee injury, a dream that distracts him in between training sessions, and the looming threat of a new runner that has arrived at his training facility. In this warped interpretation of reality, a runner only has worth if he can win races. Honeybun must confront his lack of self worth when his owner pressures him into taking performance enhancing drugs to win what may be his final race.

Title	Honeybun Runner
Genre	Dark Comedy/Drama
Tagline	Old Runner. New Trick.
Production Year	2021-2022
Country of Origin	USA
Language	English
Run Time	20:53
Screen Ratio	2.35:1
Sound Format	Stereo

Thomas Kennedy Pope - Producer / Director

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## Bios

### Thomas Kennedy Pope

*Screenwriter, Producer, Director*



Thomas Kennedy Pope currently works in Atlanta, GA as a Senior Producer for Crisp. Since 2019 he's helped produce, direct, and edit more than 400 commercial projects for clients across the globe, and produced/directed 35 shorts for four multi-million dollar live events. When he's not on the grind at his day job, he's honing his craft as a screenwriter, director, and musician through his own personal projects—*Honeybun Runner* being the most recent. 14 years of filmmaking has taken him to the mountains of Eastern China, the streets of Cuba, and the foggy cliffs of the Faroe Islands. He's also infiltrated the Flat Earth Society, cheated death twice, and won a brand new Tesla in front of a crowd of 2,00 people—all three stories the byproduct of his writing and directing pursuits.

### Phoebe Jones

*Producer, Actor*



Phoebe Jones is a multifaceted artist from Muscle Shoals, Alabama. She has worked in front of the camera, behind camera, and on both sides of the stage as well. Most recently she made her acting debut as the female lead in *Rough Edges*, a feature length independent film that premiered at Cinequest in August 2022. Though primarily an actor, she has found a love of indie filmmaking through the development of *Honeybun Runner*. *Honeybun* captured her attention from the first read through of the script. She could not be prouder of the final product as her producing debut, or be more thankful to everyone who helped make the film a reality—especially Kennedy, whose writing and directing talent speaks for itself. For Phoebe, getting to work on thought-provoking projects with friends and like-minded creatives, is an honor and a dream come true.

### Steven Ceballos

*Director of Photography*



Steven Ceballos began his journey as a cinematographer at the Art Institute of Atlanta. He's been a full time cinematographer for north of a decade, serving as the DoP for the short films *Americana* and *Alone*. He also directed the award-winning 2019 documentary *Cang*. Steven fell in love with cinematography through his passion for telling stories through visual mediums—provoking emotions from audiences through color, movment, and lighting. Shortly after meeting Kennedy in the production department at Crisp, Steven signed on to be the director of photography for *Honeybun*. His extensive background and experience in documentary style filmmaking made him the perfect choice to capture the grounded look of *Honeybun Runner*.



## Bios

### TJ Jackson

*Actor - Honeybun Runner*



Professionally trained, TJ Jackson has played star and lead roles in feature films as well as in numerous recurring and guest star roles for daytime and primetime TV. Most recently, TJ played Josiah in the third season of Tyler Perry's series *Ruthless*. Before that, TJ was cast in Hulu and Disney's hit comedy film *Vacation Friends*, where he played alongside Emmy-nominated actress Yvonne Orji and *Get Out* breakout star, Rel Howery. Even with his most recent success, TJ understands that a great actor is a trained actor. He is currently sharpening his tools by studying with Austin-based coach Carol Hickey, who trained for decades under LA legend, Harry Mastrogeorge. TJ believes that "training doesn't end when the class is over...it is a lifelong lesson."

### Blaine Rincon

*Actor - The Owner*



Blaine Rincon was born in Ozark, Alabama. He grew up in the small southern town of Boston, Georgia until he was 17 and then entered the U.S. Air Force at 19 as a maintenance technician. After his military service he remained in Florida where he studied at University of West Florida in Pensacola, earning a BFA in Visual Arts, with concentration in drawing and painting in 2005. During his time in Florida, Blaine put his artistic skill to good use working as a graphic designer. Blaine moved back to Georgia in 2013 to build his acting career in Atlanta.

### Kenneth Trujillo

*Actor - Sweetheart*



Kenneth Trujillo is an award winning actor, director, and producer. The chameleon artist has made his mark in feature films and television shows alongside some of the industry's biggest names. One word describes every one of his performances: grounded. From his charming presence in *The Girl from Plainville* opposite Kelly AuCoin to his menacing face-offs with John Travolta and Kevin Hart in *Die Hart*, he keeps your attention through every frame. He can be seen in Hulu's upcoming highly debated biographical miniseries *Mike* opposite Trevante Rhodes.



## Q&A with Writer/Director Thomas Kennedy Pope

### How did you come up with the idea for *Honeybun*?

I joked with our producer Phoebe Jones that I must have been in a bit of an anthropomorphic phase of writing because I came up with the idea while I was writing a short story about some violent sentient farm animals. The seed of the idea was simply “what if athletes were treated like horses?” Then as I thought about it a little bit more I realized that in a way they are. When I was in high school, I played soccer in one of the most competitive leagues in the country, and at times I felt like my worth was just contingent on how good I was on the field. It’s a lot of pressure to put on a child. Then I thought about college athletes who must feel that at least tenfold; the coaches and programs that profit off of them; and finally thought about anyone that feels like they’re part of a system where their worth is conditional. I thought that was a story worth telling for the message. I wrote the first draft in a day.

### How did you go about producing the film?

Initially I got the opportunity to present the project at *FilmPitch ATL*, and the consensus I received was that the film was so bleak by the time it ended. I adamantly stood by the ending though, so Phoebe and I mulled it over and decided that crowdfunding would be the way to go. We aimed to secure a \$5,000.00 budget for talent, crew, locations, and wardrobe. I had access to camera gear and lighting from my job, and we planned around what we had. I spent a few days writing personal messages to all 1,000 people on my friends list for their help. Fortunately I had quite a few people that were really excited to help out. We hit our goal in about 45 days. Phoebe and I put up our own money for anything extra we needed; and we’re incredibly proud with what we were able to produce on such a small budget.

### What was the biggest challenge you faced in the making of *Honeybun*?

Time was a huge challenge. We obviously didn’t have any deadlines in the pre-production and post-production stages, so we made sure we got the right people to tell the story we wanted to tell; but because our budget was so small and we were working around multiple schedules, we projected that we were going to have to find a way to shoot everything in two days over a single weekend. It’s a 20 minute short, which is a lot of ground to cover in just two days. Our strategy was to try and find ways to shoot the short in the most efficient way possible. One huge time saver was the idea of using long unbroken takes of Honeybun in the medical evaluation room. We trusted that whenever TJ didn’t have lines in those two scenes that his reactions to everything the owner is telling him would be compelling enough for an audience to watch. He did such a fantastic job in that respect, and I honestly think those simple shots that saved us so much time on our schedule were my favorite moments of the short.



## Q&A with Writer/Director Thomas Kennedy Pope

Who are some of your influences?

I'm really inspired by directors that have managed to put together a body of work that feels explicitly unique to them. Hirokazu Kore-eda, Leos Carax, Paul King, David Lynch, Luc Besson to name a few active directors. I also get really inspired by people who can make incredible stories with little resources. That's every director's story at some point. I love seeing debut features of great directors and following the trajectory of their careers from that point. I'm excited by the thought that the next big name could come from anywhere potentially.

You've referred to this as a dark comedy. What makes you classify it as such?

I had that thought in my head when I initially wrote it because some of the action and the plot points are just absurdism by definition. I think a grown man feeding another grown man carrots is kind of funny. In the same breath, I think a fan who roots for the star player of a team or a sport one day then abhors him the next day is funny. Did I choose to play the script out as a comedy? Absolutely not. Reason being is that I wanted it to feel like this reality was 100% truth for the characters and that there were real stakes involved. Is it comedic? Absolutely I think so, in a very dark way. I test screened it with quite a few people who I relied on for honest feedback, and all of them said something along the lines of "I wanted to laugh at some things but I felt really wrong doing so." Great! I love that response! I think it's indicative of some sort of a reaction churning in the audience; and that's all I can hope for. I'd be far more concerned if I received no reaction at all.

The film seems to be rooted in classic feel-good sports underdog tropes; but it becomes so bleak by the end. What made you decide to push the story in that direction?

We had a pretty clear understanding that we didn't want a "happily-ever-after" conclusion to this story because it wouldn't portray the intended message we had for it. I look at the short's message inversely. Honeybun's character arc doesn't interest me as much as what he's up against. The biggest challenge he faces is the perception of others. I wanted *Honeybun* to be an allegory of the reality that falls upon every star athlete or top performer at some point. I've seen in film what happens when the underdog rallies to win it all. I'm interested in the phase that comes after. How and when the world decides to turn on the hero. How often does the hero deserve that, if at all?

Why the finger guns?

You know, I have two reasons, but I think I'll leave that one up for an audience to decide for themselves. I'd be interested in seeing what people would think about that decision! To me it was the most absurd choice of the movie.





## Q&A with Writer/Director Thomas Kennedy Pope

### What is your approach as a director on set?

When I'm in the process of writing the script, I'm doing so with the understanding that although I have a clear vision of what it all looks like, I'm going to give a lot of liberty to the actors that I trust to play the characters. TJ, Blaine, Ashton, and Kenneth all brought something personal to the characters that they portrayed, and I encourage that. I knew I made the right casting choices because by the time we got on location to shoot, I didn't have to course correct any of the talent that much. I loved their approaches to their respective characters. That's a best-case scenario for me because if I trust the talent to take care of my characters—and even surprise me with new ideas—then I can just focus on how we decide to move our camera, which was especially important considering the small budget and time constraints we were under.

### What was your experience working with your cast and crew?

It's always a great project if we can all have fun with what we're doing. I think cast and crew alike just had a great time with this project. Pretending to be somewhat of a horse isn't really something you do every day. TJ especially brought this sort of naivete and optimism to the character of Honeybun that was just electric to watch in both the happy and the bleak moments. Whenever we were doing a take, I'd always linger several seconds before calling cut to take notice of how everyone behind camera was reacting in the moment. I'm looking for those "smile" moments. If I'm smiling behind camera, and I look over to see Steven and Nikki (my DoP and 1st AD) crack a smile as well, then we hit the sweet spot. I've worked on hundreds of projects in my career so far, and I think you can tell when something just feels right. Even with the challenges we had during production, with the right team at your side they don't feel like problems to fret over. They just feel like obstacles to overcome.

### What's next? Are you working on any future projects?

I'm just coming off of a huge event that I had the honor of producing and directing several shorts for. My team and I wrote and produced about a feature length film's worth of content. Seeing it premiere at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in front of 5,000 people really fueled my drive to pursue directing my first feature film. I've written several and intend to write two more. Then I'll decide which one I'd like to pursue funding for. In the meantime, I'm honing my craft with smaller projects until that time comes. I have a gameplan to make it all happen and I'll be executing it very soon.

## Credits

Honeybun Runner	TJ Jackson
The Owner	Blaine Rincon
The Doctor	Phoebe Jones
Next Day Air	Ashton Carter
Sweetheart	Kenneth Trujillo
The Starter	Simon Boughey
The Commentator	Tripp Karrh
The Stable Boy	Cody Hopper
Honeybun's Jockey	Anna Williford
Next Day Air's Jockey	Lily Nguyen
The Bookie	Curt Simmons
Tomahawk Tickler	Matthew Suwalski
Writer, Director, Producer	Thomas Kennedy Pope
Producer	Phoebe Jones
Director of Photography	Steven Ceballos
Assistant Director	Nikki Palucci
1st Assistant Camera	Alex Cha
2nd Assistant Camera	Zachary Swiatocha
B Cam Operator	Gabe Anchondo
Sound Mixer	Scott Lancaster
Boom Operator	Zain Jiwani
Lighting	Jason Reinhardt
Grips	Joey Okoyomo
Drone Operator	Dave Remley
Script Supervisor	Alex Majher
Production Assistant	Anna Brown
	Aidan Guthrie
Editor	Daphne Monke
Music/OST	Austin Speakman
VFX Artist	James Pechman
Colorist	Marieta Farfarova
Sound Designer	Cody Duckworth