# Gay wrestler Anthony Bowens takes over from Joaquin Phoenix in Todd Haynes' gay romance



Gay pro wrestler Anthony Bowens is stepping in following the sudden withdrawal of Phoenix from an NC-17 rated gay romance film. The project, which Phoenix had originally championed, is helmed by acclaimed director Todd Haynes. The unexpected departure of Phoenix has thrown the film’s future into question, with insiders citing that the "Joker" star perhaps experienced last-minute reservations about the explicit content.

Filmmaker Kit Williamson sparked a conversation by addressing the situation via social media. In his post, Williamson expressed criticism towards Hollywood’s apparent reluctance to feature gay actors in leading roles for high-budget LGBTQ+ movies, even within a project led by a prestigious director like Haynes. "What this really proves is that studios are ONLY comfortable making high budget ‘gay movies’ if there’s a straight lead," Williamson asserted in a tweet.

Adding his voice to the discussion, Bowens declared his commitment to changing this landscape. "I can and will change this one day," he responded confidently.

Despite currently focusing on his career with AEW and his passion for baseball in the San Fernando Valley Baseball League's Valley Boys, Bowens has kept Hollywood on his radar. Known for making history in 2022 as AEW’s first openly gay male champion, Bowens has leveraged his platform to amplify visibility for LGBTQ+ individuals in sports.

Bowens' journey has been marked by numerous milestones and celebrated performances. His victory in 2022 made him the second openly gay man to clinch a championship in major televised American wrestling—a landmark that follows Fred Rosser's (formerly WWE’s Darren Young) achievement in 2015.

Bowens, engaged to YouTuber Michael Pavano, integrates his identity seamlessly into his wrestling persona. This authenticity resonates with his fans, highlighted by the exuberant celebration of his championship win amidst a shower of pink and white confetti. Bowens' heartfelt speech to the crowd encapsulated his transformative journey: “I never thought that I would be able to live my dream because there was a time when I was very confused. And I didn’t know how to accept myself,” he admitted. “But I fought through all that and now I’m a champion.”

A defining moment of recognition came last June during a live event when the crowd collectively chanted “He’s gay!”—a sign of appreciation and support for Bowens' openness about his sexuality. His candidness continues to endear him to fans and cements his place as a trailblazer in professional wrestling.

The crossover from wrestling to cinema isn’t unprecedented, with WWE icons like John Cena, Dwayne Johnson, and Dave Bautista successfully making the transition to Hollywood. Bowens, with his dynamic TV presence and ability to handle high-pressure environments, could potentially follow suit. His declaration to step into leading roles in LGBTQ+ films echoes a broader call for diversity and representation in cinema.

As discussions around Phoenix’s departure and the casting of gay actors in Hollywood movies persist, Bowens' ambition to break into the movie industry adds a promising dimension. His resolve, alongside his visibility, suggests that Hollywood might indeed not be out of reach for this wrestling star aiming to change the narrative.