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Rocks With Wings

RELEASED: 2003

In the mid-'80s, Jerry Richardson, an African American man, accepted a position with Shiprock High School in a New Mexico Navajo community where he soon found himself coaching the girls' basketball team. This inspiring documentary follows Richardson's remarkable transformation of the Lady Chieftains into hoops heroines, but more importantly captures the emotional highs and lows that accompany the experience. Blending interviews with game footage and Navajo philosophy, director Rick Derby examines the culture clashes that occurred between Richardson and the girls in a manner that beautifully enhances their triumphant story. Richardson, an unapologetic taskmaster who ruled his team with a combination of skill and fear, certainly got results, but he also hurt feelings along the way. In a critical hotel room showdown before the Lady Chieftains' first state championship game, Richardson and the girls (including team leader Cheryl Lee, whose grit reminds one of Gophers boards star Janel McCarville) had to confront not only their expectations of one another, but the negative stereotypes that society had placed on each of them as people of color. Richardson's eventual ability to open his heart--and the girls' growing belief in themselves--led to success on the basketball court, but also in life. Derby's film has the stand-on-your-seat-and-cheer appeal of fictional sports films such as *Bend It Like Beckham*, but the story is real, which makes for a ride that's all the more satisfying. (Caroline Palmer)

City Pages Movie Clock

Rocks With Wings is currently not playing in area theaters.