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BIG SCREEN

If a fledgling film festival is known by the caliber of new films it premieres, then the Native Cinema Showcase is about to sprout wings. The festival of films by and about Native Americans plays in Santa Fe Aug. 12- 18.

Rocks with Wings

Rocks with Wings, a documentary from Rick Derby about the Shiprock High School girl's basketball team, is less likely to receive the notoriety of Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing* (when do documentaries ever draw a wide audience?) which is unfortunate. This stunning and lyrical film is almost poetic in nature. Without the use of a narrator, Derby weaves together an intricate tale using only interviews and footage shot over the span of a decade.

The girl's varsity team was energized in the mid- 80's when a young African American, Jerry Richardson, took the coaching job on the Four Corners reservation. He led the team to a handful of state championships, which included unseating Shiprock's rivals, the largely white, Mormon high school in neighboring Kirtland. *Rocks with Wings* is extraordinarily compelling in countless ways, but one of the most uplifting themes is the sense of possibility Richardson instills in his players. The Navajo people, we're told throughout the film, are not used to winning. "*They didn't know how good they were,*" coach Richardson says of his team more than once.

Intercut between the interview sequences and basketball footage are shots of old black and white photographs of traditional Navajo people. And the subjects interviewed in the film talk on a range of issues, many of which go far beyond basketball. In one particularly beautiful segment, the use of a "spirit line" in Navajo weaving is explained. When weaving a rug, we're told, the artist pulls a single thread out of the design, weaving it as a renegade line to the rug's edge. Looking like a flaw, it is actually a quite intentional way to break the rug's overall pattern. The line gives the spirit an out and reminds the people that the spirit cannot be boxed in. The spirit line is interpreted a variety of ways, as a reminder that creativity needs an outlet; that no one is perfect. Time and again Derby weaves the spirit line idea through the film, drawing together innumerable concepts that apply to everything from basketball to cultural genocide, to pervasive Navajo belief systems.

- Sharon Kayne