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All Grown Up

At 32, the USA Film Festival proves it can still play ball

BY ROBERT WILONSKY

Among this year's highlights are the documentaries: *American Mullet*, *Rocks with Wings*, *Missing Allen*, *Adrift* and the locally made *Hell House*, among others; each serves to remind there's nothing so interesting as what happens when we turn the cameras on ourselves.

Rocks with Wings

April 27 at 4:40 p.m.

Due to air on PBS this year, director Rick Derby's moving and gripping documentary is one of those too-good-to-be-true tales: A black basketball coach from Texas named Jerry Richardson winds up in Hellhole, New Mexico (Shiprock, actually, though its mostly Navaho residents consider it a purgatory), ends up coaching the high school's girls basketball team (the Lady Chieftains), offends them as women and as Native Americans and winds up befriendng them all on the way to... Actually, to give away more--whether the team takes the district title from its nearby rivals, for instance--would spoil the ending; this is the real-life *Hoosiers* commingled with *Remember the Titans*. It's an astonishing sports story but quite a bit more--a film about the clashing of cultures, spirituality, pride, anger, despair, retribution and, most of all, the desire to make something of one's self in a desolate wasteland where the only constant is a low-grade suffering that sweeps through the town like dust. "I just want to get away," says one of the ballplayers, though *all* want out; the only thing Shiprock has going for it is the promise of divorce and poverty. "People," says another, "are used to failure." Which makes the Lady Chieftains that much more important to the town, and Derby makes astonishing use toward film's end of two nearly complete games (with play-by-play, no less) from 1987 and 1988, when the the Lady Chieftains clashed with the girls from Kirtland and played them to a tie quarter after quarter, overtime after overtime. *Rick Derby is scheduled to attend. --R.W.*

The Dallas Morning News - Friday April 26, 2002

Beyond Hollywood

By Al Brumley

Rocks with Wings: In the mid- 80's, Jerry Richardson, an African-American Coach, finds himself in the tiny town of Shiprock, N.M., in charge of a Navajo Girls' high-school basketball team. Director Rick Derby documents the culture clash that ensues, as well as the magic as Mr. Richardson and his charges learn to communicate with one another. This is truly a special film, with thrilling game footage and current interviews with the players.