

## First place for first people

### >> Montreal's aboriginal film festival is another slam-dunk by JOANNE LATIMER

<http://www.montrealmirror.com/ARCHIVES/2002/060602/film2.html>

It's another slam-dunk for The First Peoples' Festival. On the heels of its success last year, this 10-day event delivers a sensational roundup of films from across North America. It helps tremendously that Montrealers haven't yet felt the first pangs of festival fatigue—timing is everything in fête season, especially in film.

With relatively fresh eyes and good vibes from last year, audiences will learn, humbly, from a wellspring of Canadian films like Honour of the Crown, by Tom Radford; three new episodes from the NFB series Finding Our Talk; Jeff Dorn's Behind the Wheel; The Frozen Infection, by Joel Montanez; Red Run, by Murray Jurak and Kem Murch's Our Healing Journey.

#### **She got game**

For a basketball film that rivals, if not surpasses, the intensity of Hoop Dreams, see Rocks With Wings. It's a sensational documentary about a Navajo reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico in the '80s. While the film focuses on the impact of a young black coach on the girls' high school basketball team, and their rivalry with the neighbouring white team from Kirtland, director Rick Derby casually explains a lot about Navajo culture. Intermixed with the gripping basketball drama is an explanation of the curious "spirit line" in Navajo blankets and discussions about the girls' apparent lack of competitive drive.

Coach Jerry Richardson couldn't understand why the girls playing for the Lady Chieftans were okay with failure. As a Type-A achiever, Richardson set about boosting the school team over the course of four years, taking them to state championships. We see the power struggles Richardson had with the older coaches, we see his hardline method of pushing the girls in practice and, surprisingly, we see how his arrogant nature nearly crushed the team at a state tournament. He could be a prick, driving the girls into the sympathetic arms of the assistant coaches, and he wasn't one for encouraging comments.

Nevertheless, the girls didn't crumple when faced with Richardson's brand of tough love and the Lady Chieftans experienced astonishing growth. The entire town rallied behind their ball players, raising spirits and pride above previous levels. Basketball footage from state games is gripping, as is the racial aspect between the town and the coach, while the archival footage of Navajo artisans helps root the film in the area's rich history.