

Forget the Blue Devils and meet the Lady Chieftains of New Mexico

By Allison Ballard

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It's unlikely that this documentary was scheduled to coincide with the NCAA tournament, but it's an interesting contrast to the glitzy college men's basketball games taking place this weekend.

Rocks with Wings, from director Rick Derby, is about the Lady Chieftains, the girls basketball team at Shiprock High School in New Mexico, and their coach, Jerry Richardson.

The documentary will be screened at 7 tonight at City Stage as part of the 8th Annual Cucalorus Festival of Independent Film.

Mr. Richardson, needing a job after college in the 1980's, packs up his car and heads to a teaching job in the Southwest. Not too long after he's started, he agrees to coach a group of Navajo girls who want to play basketball.

Of course, the doc is about more than just basketball. The Navajo community is used to failure and repression. Mr. Richardson is an African-American from Texarkana who grew up during desegregation. And the interaction between the coach and his team is an interesting look at minority existence and the nature of overcoming obstacles.

Footage from the games is woven together with interviews with the players and coaches, photographs of Navajos and words of Native American philosophy.

Mr. Derby spent 10 years making this documentary, which is actually only the first episode of a five-part, 10 hour series about the Lady Chieftains.

This movie might have you caring more about a game that happened years ago than which teams are in the Final Four.