

## 'A Hero for Daisy' celebrates the spirit of Title IX

Don't be fooled by the title.

*A Hero for Daisy* is not your garden-variety, smarmy, after-school special. *Mary Mazzio and the Last Crusade* would be an apt subtitle for a film whose point of departure is Title IX and women's athletics.

Daisy is a fast-paced and fast cut film without the crutch of official narration, but with a bulging vein of humor.

"We wanted it to be as fast as MTV, but also what you might see in a feature film," said writer and director Mary Mazzio.

Mazdio, an Olympian and former attorney, tells the story of two-time Olympian and World Champion in Lightweight double sculls, Chris Ernst. Ernst attended Yale University starting in 1972, the year Title IX legislation requiring equal athletic facilities between genders was enacted, and just a year after the 200-year Yale tradition of male education had been snapped by co-education.

Ernst had earned a spot on a Yale crew team, whose roster included men and women.

But it was a team that did not behave as one. Hierarchy among Yale rowers had a tradition almost as long as male education, and it was even less likely to reform. The boathouse along the Charles River in Boston lay a half-hour from the Yale campus, and Yale crew commanded just one packed bus to transport rowers to and from campus.

Since rowers begin practicing as soon as the ice peels off the rivers in late-winter — and since they are drenched from the outside in from the icy stream and from the inside out by sweat — it was crucial to the athletes' health that hot showers awaited them in the boathouse.

But as the rowers showered, the bus sat outside indefinitely. Since no heat filled that bus — and since sitting and shivering soaked from the inside out and from the outside in is the fast track to pneumonia — something had to be done.



### Around the Horn

by Joe Snapper

For the boathouse had no showers for the women's team.

On March 3, 1976, Yale senior Chris Ernst, along with her women teammates, carried out their plot to shock Yale Athletics into reality. Before a *New York Times* stringer and camera flash, Ernst and her female teammates crowded into the office of the Director of Women's Athletics at Yale, a woman, and stripped. Ernst then read a statement to the director, detailing the process by which the skin and bodies before her were abused by Yale each day of the wintry rowing season.

Within days of the *Times* article, major media from around the world had snatched up the story. The Yale switchboard was ablaze with alumni attention, enough of it in the form of donation and demands, that two weeks later things had changed for Ernst and her rowers.

The Ernst incident and Yale's rapid reform sent a concentric ripple through the nation's schools.

"The film has brought people together from all different sides of the issue," said Mazdio, whose film has been featured on ESPN, on the pages of *Sports Illustrated*, and on the airwaves of NPR's *The Connection*.

"Title IX is really only part of the issue. We have feminists in academia getting together with football coaches. We wanted to have a really stimulating, exciting discussion instead of [angering] people with an agenda. All the inflammatory comments we left on the cutting-room floor. We really pursued it in way to present the story in a historical context.

"The goal is how to get people interested in a documentary," continued Mazdio, whose 3-year-old daughter, Daisy, has the film for her namesake. "You've got to hook them and make them think about things. Impacting people — that's what it's all about.

"We've had responses to the film ranging from CEO's of dot-coms wanting me to attend his 9-year-old daughter's birthday party, to teenage girls grateful because they didn't feel bad about being tall," recounted Mazdio, who remains four credits short of her Film Studies degree at Boston University. "We thought this was going to appeal to small segment of women, and we've just been blown away by the wide response. We've had entire communities rent out a theatre to show the film."

And that is just what awaits Grand Rapids. This Monday (Feb. 26), Mazdio travels to Grand Rapids, along with *A Hero for Daisy*, as part of her nationwide tour to celebrate the spirit of Title IX.

"We made it on the front page of the *New York Times* sports

section — a half-page with a photo," said Mazdio of the film's instant renown. "We were above the crease. And when do you ever see women on the front of the *Times*' sports section?"

Under the crush of demand and the chance to make more films, Mazdio recently retired as a partner in Brown, Rudnick, Freed, and Gesmer in Boston, where she worked since graduating from Georgetown Law School in 1987.

"The film started at as a thesis project for my film studies degree at Boston University," said Mazdio, who also has a 4-year-old son, Jamie. "When I was ready to start shooting, I looked at the story and I looked at my access, and my husband said, 'Don't let a bunch of students shoot this. You've got to go get pros.'

"So I went to friend of mine, who put it into Arnold Productions — the firm that does ads for Volkswagon. I had an absolute goose egg of an idea. But we got the support and spent a lot of money on the film.

"The editing finished literally the same day it was scheduled to debut at the 1999 Boston Film Festival. We took the film dripping off the reel to the West Newton Cinema. It viewed before a reporter from *The Boston Globe*. All of a sudden we had a full page in *The Boston Globe*. By the end, I had managed over 50 people -- and they all worked for free. So now I'm delighted to be writing checks," remarked the 1992 Olympian in heavyweight double sculls, whose schedule for speaking engagements is booked through next fall.

"I have the attention span of a puppy, I'm in my late-30s, and I'm try to appeal to 17- and 18-year olds and younger — all people who've been spoon-fed MTV.

"I don't like voluntary events because you never know about the turnout. But early on I did one at Phillips Andover, and the kids were hanging from the rafters. Boys were there, nudging girls, and laughing. And the fact that boys were there is something I really appreciate. Because I started out making the film for my daughter, but I ended up making it for my son, too.

"How many times do you hear about a little boy who has a woman for a hero? That's what it's all about: creating a heroic image for girls as well as boys."

This Monday at 7 p.m., at Studio 28, the dynamic, rollicking public speaking of Mazdio accompanies a public showing of *Daisy*. Costs are \$3 for students and \$5 for adults.

The 40-minute film will also be shown Monday at 9 a.m. at Grand Valley State University (call 895-3233 for details), and at 4 p.m. at Calvin College (459-8281, ext. 3112).