



Rowing // News

## Film Review: 'A Hero For Daisy' Uncovers Cold Truth of Title IX

*Olympic rower produces film on women in sports*

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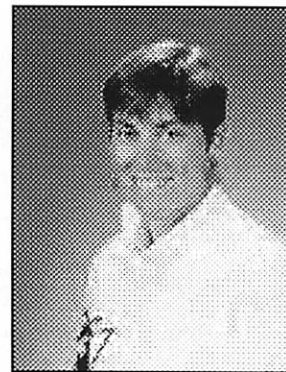
COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – (Jan. 30, 2001) - March 3, 1976 must have been a cold day in New Haven, Conn. But for 19 members of the Yale women's rowing crew, the only difference from that day to any other day was that their freezing bodies were actually dry this time. And they were painted. Blazing into the athletic director's office, the women stripped off their shirts to reveal "Title IX" printed in Yale blue across their bare chests, while the stunned director gawked and a New York Times photographer frantically snapped pictures.

Oars under fire...

Title IX, which was passed four years earlier, required athletic facilities in federally funded institutions to be equally accessible to men and women. For the Yale women, it was being grossly overlooked.

But the display wasn't over. From within the group a voice emerged. Sacrifice, sweat, hours upon hours were what these women had given, she said. Now, here are the bodies upon which only one thing had been bestowed by their school: exploitation. A voice cut through the silent stupor of the shocked onlookers to read the team's 300-word mission statement. The message, while in meaning owned by all the women, belonged to one. One heroic revolutionary, Chris Ernst.

Thanks to the fireworks sparked by Ernst that day, the sky is again lit up through producer Mary Mazzio's feature documentary 'A Hero For Daisy.' The film is a 40-minute tour de force that follows the life of and, perhaps more importantly, the far-reaching accomplishments of former Yale- and Olympic-rower Chris Ernst. Mazzio, herself encouraged by a friendship with Ernst, also participated in the Olympic Games as a member of the USA women's rowing team in 1992. The film, inspired by the birth of her daughter, Daisy, is Mazzio's effort to realize 'heroes' in the hard work of everyday people, and courage found in unlikely places. But back to the story...



Mary Mazzio is an Olympian from the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain.

The simple issue: showers.

The more complex version: The women's crew suffered through season after season of trudging 30-minutes off campus to a practice field where they gave every ounce of energy to their sport, only to return, filthy and freezing, to a cold bus and an agonizing wait until the men's team finished their showers in the boathouse's all-male facilities. Not to mention being a female athlete had consequences of its own. Jeered at by a school rooted in patriarchy, women's sports were hardly taken seriously, let alone given funds to operate at the same level as their male counterparts.

Not a threat, not a challenge, but a voice...

Despite the seemingly intuitive bitterness caused by such a situation, "A Hero For Daisy" elicits no such response. It is not the girl-power fluff we see saturating our culture whenever a new female icon enters the public eye. It is not a dig toward male-heavy collegiate sports programs. Its purpose is not to criticize, and in that effort, the film is a huge success.

The documentary gives credence to true gender equality in sports, and perhaps more importantly, in life. And its justification comes with a purpose; not just because equality should, idealistically, take place. It squares off with issues point blank, issues that are traditionally swept under the proverbial rug in the name of convenient ignorance.

"It's really not even a film about sports," Mazzio said. "It's a film about human courage, about having a voice to say what's right and what's wrong. There are two messages here. The first is to have a voice and not be afraid to use it. The second is when you fall flat on your face, you can't be afraid to get back up."

It is easy to look around and think the world is populated by the Cindy Crawford, Jennifer Aniston and Christina Aguilera that fill modern media and public communications outlets. 'Daisy' proves it's not only possible, but it's admirable to be a grunting, sweating athlete and a woman at the same time. The 1976 Yale women's crew sent a wake-up call to educational sports programs nationwide, reminding them of the whats and the whys of Title IX. 'Daisy' is today's periodic awakening we need to realize that ultimately, maybe men and women are equally credible, both on and off the playing field.

#### The big dogs, and the "bulldog"...

Of course, the appropriate authority graces the film through interviews with such big names as Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and legendary Yale football coach Carm Cozza but the truth is, they are not the essence of why this biography is so luring.

It is Chris Ernst herself. By friends, coworkers and admirers she is called fierce, intense, tough, a bulldog and at the same time sweet, big-hearted and an iconoclast. She is the role model girls (athletes or otherwise) need today in a world that bombards with Weight Watchers, Cover Girl, Sex in the City, and the like. She doesn't attempt to prove herself on gender alone because she doesn't have to. A breakthrough, highly successful career in itself says "Look men, here I am, not as a female athlete, but as an athlete. Watch me play, look what I've done and now see if you can top that!"

"When I met Chris, I was scared to death of her, just like everybody else," Mazzio said. "She was the toughest, most committed woman I had ever met. When I watched her lift weights, she would lift these huge barbells and I just thought 'This woman is awesome. She is unbelievable.'"

But really, we're not talking about the eye-popping, headline-grabbing bra burner you might expect from such a pioneer. Sure, Ernst went on to row in the 1976 and 1984 Olympic Games, but what is she doing now? A job she loves; she's a plumber. She jokes that after fighting so hard to get showers in the first place, she now fixes them.

"It's vintage Chris, to go to Yale and then say 'I'm going to become a blue-collar worker, a union plumber,'" Mazzio said. Chris has pushed the barriers wherever she's gone, and she hasn't done it in an ideological way, but in a very practical way. She is an incredible leader, someone who's not afraid to go after what's wrong and make it right. She is wonderfully courageous."

Edgy, bold and brutally truthful is the lean in "A Hero For Daisy". It speaks a contemporary language while at the same time proving a point through history. Just one year before Title IX was enacted, a Connecticut Judge said, "Athletic competition builds character in our

boys. We do not need that kind of character in our girls."

Well, your honor, take a look at the character of the Jackie Joyner-Kerseyes, the Marion Joneses, the Chris Ernsts of the sports world and then tell me that.

*(National Women and Girls in Sports Day is Feb. 7, 2001)*

**Film Information**

*A Hero For Daisy*

Written and directed by Mary Mazzio

Produced by Mary Mazzio, Theresa Mazzio and Eric Hamilton

Available for home, educational and institutional use by calling 1-877-98-DAISY  
Or visit [www.aherofordaisy.com](http://www.aherofordaisy.com)

*Editor's note:* [www.USOlympicTeam.com](http://www.USOlympicTeam.com) welcomes the opportunity to review films featuring or worked on by U.S. Olympians.

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