

## Press Kit

Champions on Wheels is a documentary feature.

If you are a festival programmer and would like to see this inspiring sports documentary in your theater, please send us an email and we'll send you a screener's copy immediately.

Our electronic press kit is available at Withoutabox, in paper form, and as a EPK.

### **Synopses of various lengths from 21 words to 500.**

Is there life after disability? Wheelchair tennis players squeeze joy from every moment as they go for gold in Athens. Champions on Wheels reveals their courage, determination, powerful athleticism, zest for life, and burning desire to be seen as normal.

### **Shooting Format/running Time**

The program was shot in mini DV and Beta SP. Its running time is 74:05. It was edited in Final Cut Pro. It will be screened in Beta SP or DigiBeta.

### **Production Stills**

High resolution 300 dip in color as well as black and white.

### **Cast**

Beth Arnoult, Sharon Clark, Daryl "Chill" Mitchell (narrator), Larry Quintero, Nick Taylor, Steve Welch

### **Principal Crew**

Grace Shafir director, producer, videographer, writer, lyricist, basic editor  
Orlando Luna editor  
Marian Wertalka webmaster

### **Contact information**

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## Synopses

21 words

Is there life after disability? Wheelchair tennis players squeeze joy from every moment as they go for the gold in Athens.

40 words

Is there life after disability? Wheelchair tennis players squeeze joy from every moment as they go for gold in Athens. *Champions on Wheels* reveals their courage, determination, powerful athleticism, zest for life, and burning desire to be seen as normal.

125 words

America has 54 million disabled people. Over two million Americans are in wheelchairs, usually from accidents. One moment they are walking; the next moment their lives are turned upside down. A handful not only grabs back their lives but insist on squeezing joy from every day. They are professional wheelchair tennis athletes.

*Champions on Wheels* tells the story of five people in an unblinkingly honest, upbeat portrayal of courage, determination, perseverance, faith, belief in self, athleticism, zest for life, and a great desire to be seen as a normal person. There is life after disability.

The athletes profiled in *Champions on Wheels* are a beacon of what is and what might be. This is a story of inspiration, motivation, admiration, changing stereotypes, but most of all, respect.

249 words

America has 54 million disabled people. Many never leave their rooms. Over two million Americans are in wheelchairs, usually as a result of accidents. This is truly the great minority that anyone can join instantly. One moment they are walking; the next moment their lives are turned upside down. A handful not only grab back their lives but insist on squeezing joy from every day. They are mothers, fathers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and friends. Most of all they are dedicated professional wheelchair tennis athletes.

*Champions on Wheels* tells the story of five extraordinary young people who suddenly find themselves in wheelchairs. It is an unblinkingly honest, upbeat portrayal of courage, determination, perseverance, faith, belief in self, powerful athleticism, zest for life, and a great desire to be seen as a normal person. Wheelchair tennis players have recaptured their lives and are living them to their utmost. There is life after disability.

*Champions on Wheels* is aimed at two audiences: those who are recently injured and need to see what a full life they can still lead and those who are presently ambulatory.

Watching these world class athletes overcome obstacles and insist on being independent compels us to admire their athletic prowess, dedication, zest for life and see them for what they are: real people who merely get around differently.

The athletes profiled in *Champions on Wheels* are a beacon of what is and what might be. This is a story of inspiration, motivation, admiration, changing stereotypes, but most of all, respect.

### **541 word synopsis**

Is there life after disability? Wheelchair tennis players squeeze joy from every moment as they go for the gold in Athens. *Champions on Wheels* tells world class athletes' story of courage, determination, powerful athleticism, zest for life, and burning desire to be seen as a regular person, just like any one else.

The story opens at the Sydney Paralympics and ends four years later at Athens. Five American athletes strive to try to make the American Paralympic team. Three are paraplegics; one is a quadriplegic, the fifth has a bone disease. Some will make Team USA. Some will not. However, the story is their trying to make the team, their dedication, and sacrifices that they make along the way. It answers the question: Is there life after disability?

- Beth Arnoult's seven-year-old son, Jacques, has grown up on the tour. She lives in Maui for the independence it affords. Her ATV 4 x 4 flipped on sand dunes in Las Vegas as her boyfriend-future husband watched. She fought going into a wheelchair for three years, then decided to get on with life and have a baby.
- Sharon Clark is the No. 1 American woman. She was instantly paralyzed when the car she was riding in skidded on black ice. She mentors newly injured teens and lures them to tennis. Sharon is juggling her Paralympic training with planning her wedding. We meet one of her mentees at a Saturday morning practice.
- Larry Quintero was on a baseball recruiting trip when he was shot by party crashers. Larry is a stay at home dad who heads for the gym every day at five. Although he is training hard for the Paralympics, Larry doesn't enjoy traveling and being away from his wife and daughter.
- Nick Taylor was born with his feet locked behind his ears. Many surgeries followed. Three weeks before World Team Cup, Nick was hit by a car. Before lapsing into unconsciousness, he bade his father tell the coaches he would be in Poland. He was, played with a broken arm, and helped the US win gold.
- Steve Welch has a bone disease but won two wheelchair basketball NCAA titles, two MVP awards, and five NWBA championships. Steve has legendary mobility. His difficulty is choosing between tennis and basketball. That is why he is No. 1 only in the US. He has two silver Olympic medals which he hopes to replace with gold.

Tension is high since 2004 brings the Paralympics in Athens. Everyone wants to qualify and to be able to compete for their country and a medal. Not only is there the thrill of competing, but the massive crowds and applause far surpass the usual experience at a wheelchair tennis tournament. 100,000 fans turned out for the opening ceremonies in Sydney. Sharon Clark remembers, "It was so exciting being there. You came out through a tunnel and all these people were screaming. It was so nice being appreciated, like all the hard work was worthwhile."

America will take 4 men, 4 women, and 3 quads to Athens to compete in the Paralympics. Of our five, all will not make it to Athens. Is the struggle worthwhile? Is it the prize or the journey that counts?

### Champions on Wheels **treatment**

The underlying story is that people in wheelchairs are often invisible. "Normal" (meaning able bodied) people tend to look through them or look away. They cannot seem to acknowledge their existence. If there is an emotion, it is pity.

These athletes are the antithesis of pitiful. To them it is all about quality of life. They are in tennis for one of two reasons: they love sports and competition or they want to be seen as people, not as chairs. Sports is their connection back to the able bodied community. However, instead of being one-dimensional, they have full, happy lives. Indeed, they insist on squeezing joy from every day.

This is not a rah rah story. In addition to coping with the trauma of paralysis, it is a story of broken dreams, broken marriages, single parenthood, incredible perseverance in the face of impossibility, grit, determination, and the overriding belief: I am entitled to have a life. It shows unblinkingly how they live their lives.

It is no picnic being in a wheelchair. At best it is a nuisance that requires extra planning. At worst it means having to cope with steps, narrow doorways, no access to bathrooms on airplanes, and dealing with people who see through them--a dehumanizing situation. Despite the challenges, these incredibly upbeat athletes are focused on the goal and refuse to allow anything to stop them. Wheelchair Champions is not only a salute to their athletic prowess, but it is a story of courage, passion, motivation, inspiration, and respect. It is a step toward changing stereotypes.

### **access**

I have spent 30 months with them, attending their tournaments, camps, and living with them. I have shot over 130 hours of footage from action to intimate. I have followed them to ten wheelchair tennis tournaments, plus Wimbledon, the US Open, the Australian Open, Nasdaq, and a US Training Camp. I also lived in their homes. They have not only welcomed me but have given me their home movies, pictures, and access to their friends and family.

Typically I am the only videographer at wheelchair tournaments except for the odd news camera. I am also the only national journalist. Not surprisingly, most people do realize wheelchair tennis or the Paralympics exist or how people in wheelchairs could possibly play tennis. The Paralympics are usually mistaken for Special Olympics. Losing their legs did not mean losing their brains. What they want more than anything else is to be seen as world class athletes and people, not as chairs.

### **purpose**

My purpose is to accord these athletes the respect they deserve, to shine a light on wheelchair tennis, and to change stereotypes. It is impossible to watch these athletes without gaining a better understanding and without being inspired by them. If they can surmount their challenges, what is wrong with the rest of us?

## **Cast**

### **Primary Characters**

Beth Arnoult

No. 5 American woman

Sharon Clark	No. 1 American woman and No. 10 in world
Larry Quintero	No. 4 American man
Nick Taylor	No. 3 Quad in world
Steve Welch	No. 1 American man and No. 4 in world
Daryl "Chill" Mitchell	narrator

#### Tennis Celebrities

Andre Agassi	Tennis Great, Gold Medal Atlanta
Mike and Bob Bryan	Tennis Great, No. 1 Doubles Team, Athens Olympians
Jennifer Capriati	Tennis Great, Gold Medal Barcelona
David Dinkins	former Mayor New York City
Andy Roddick	Tennis Great, 2003 US Open Champion
Chanda Rubin	Tennis Great, Athens Olympian
Serena Williams	Tennis Great, Athens Olympian, Gold Medal Sydney doubles
Venus Williams	Tennis Great, Athens Olympian, Gold Medals Sydney

#### Secondary Wheelchair Characters

Donnie Arnoult	former husband of Beth Arnoult (able bodied)
Jacques Arnoult	son of Beth Arnoult (able bodied)
Jackie Cimino	former high school rodeo star
John Cimino	father of Jackie Cimino (able bodied)
Dani Di Toro	No. 2 woman in world
Tiffany Geller	teaches Kids' Clinic
Donna Gomes	friend of Beth Arnoult (able bodied)
David Hall	No. 1 man in world
Bill Jacobson	coach of Sharon Clark (able bodied)
Dan James	US Paralympic Head Coach (able bodied)
Patrick Kelleher	fiancé of Sharon Clark (able bodied)
Hope Lewellen	No. 6 American and former Paralympian
Kelly Quintero	wife of Larry Quintero (able bodied)
Bill Taylor	Nick Taylor's father (able bodied)
Esther Vergeer	No. 1 woman in world
David Wagner	No. 2 quad in world

## Principal Crew

Grace Shafir, director, writer, producer, videographer, editor

Orlando Luna, editor and motion graphics

Marian Wertalka webmaster

Fred Flaxman music supervisor

David Lyman was videographer for Birmingham tournament interviews. He also shot Daryl "Chill" Mitchell in Atlanta.

Sports 'n Spokes magazine contributed wheelchair sports photographs and Sydney stills.

Rien Hokken contributed the still from Athens.

Ryan McCall composed Wheels of a Dream around Grace Shafir's lyrics. Jereann Shafir performs it.

## **Shooting Format**

Champions on Wheels is a documentary feature.  
The program was shot in mini DV plus Beta SP.  
Its running time is 74:05.  
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It will be screened in Beta SP or DigiBeta.

Production stills are high resolution 300 dpi and are in color and black and white.

The tennis action was shot on location at the US Open, Australian Open, Nasdaq-100, Bausch & Lomb, Family Circle, Rock 'n Racquets, Andy Roddick Charity Exhibition, Woodfield Country Club Wheelchair Tennis exhibitions, Key Biscayne High Performance Training Camp, and ten wheelchair tournaments in Boca Raton, Birmingham, Hilton Head, Atlanta, San Diego.

The players were shot on location in Maui, San Antonio, San Jose, Wichita, Boca Raton in their homes, gyms, practice courts, and doing fun things like snorkeling. Daryl "Chill" Mitchell was shot in New York City and in Atlanta.

The NWBA contributed the 2003 Final Four basketball footage.  
Home videos from Beth Arnoult and Steve Welch were also used for their history.  
The documentary was culled from over 130 hours of material.

## **Contact Information**

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