

Ward Serrill
Director's Comments
The Heart of the Game

The Buddha said that Life is suffering. Bill Resler says that "Life should be fun and if your life isn't fun you should change it." This simple philosophy got me through a lot of dark days during The Heart of the Game. Though Darnellia Russell put it best when she described Resler as "loose in the head," he changed my life for the better. I don't know what the Buddha would say about that, but the Buddha never played basketball.

-Ward Serrill
Director, The Heart of the Game

Well, it's been a cross between a magic carpet ride and an arduous mountain climb up an 18,000-foot volcano. Seven years ago when I wandered into the Roosevelt High School gym with my little camcorder (for technical junkies, at first a Canon XL-1, then a Sony pd-150) I never dreamed that one day my first movie would have a Miramax logo on the front and it would be giving me a ride to theaters all over the country.

The first time I walked into the Roosevelt High School gym I knew I had a story on my hands. I saw girls crashing and bashing into each other, knocking each other to the floor *and laughing* about it—lots of laughter. I had also stumbled into a world-class character, a true court jester and genius at basketball, coach Bill Resler. A college tax professor by day, Resler had a distinct talent at getting girls to work their asses off and have fun doing it. Resler and the Roughrider's took me on a 7-year odyssey.

I met Resler at a friend's house, Steve Rice, who used to be an accounting professor of mine in college—yeah its true, I used to be an accountant. Resler and I hit it off right away

and he captivated me with his long detailed stories of a girls' basketball team he had taken over. Resler's memory is frightening. He can recall exact details of a game that happened five years ago. His stories took me into the locker room, what individual girls were saying, what plays were being made on the court and what the stats were. Frightening. Resler is a champion storyteller. And after 45 minutes of this, I decided to follow him into the gym to see what he was talking about.

The first game I went to I sat behind the Roughriders bench. I literally saw sparks coming off these girls. They were over the top enthusiastic, crazily passionate. I got shivers up my spine just seeing it. I had long been a basketball fan. Steve Rice for years had taken me to his 12th row mid court season ticket seats at Sonics game. But that was before the Sonics got boring (I'll always miss George Karl and Gary Payton) and I found myself sitting further and further back in the seat looking at the spectacle of it all. The \$110 seats, the people not even watching the game, talking on cell phones, drinking \$7 beers. Sitting behind the Roughriders bench I saw something we had lost sight of in our culture, in our mania to win and be number one at all costs.

I saw girls working their guts out, giving it all simply for the joy of competition. No money, no contracts, no glory or fame. Just for the game of it. And I was fascinated how the girls naturally played together as a team. Here it is I thought, it is girls bringing the heart back to the game. So I naively jumped in to make a movie about it.

I had set out to make a movie about one season in the life of this strange and wonderful team. But since I had missed the first part of season one I was there during tryouts for season two in order to get a bit of pick-up footage when Darnellia Russell walked into the gym. I remember saying to myself, "I've been waiting for you." Her street-toughened confidence and quiet defiance captivated me. When I saw

her God-given basketball skills, I knew my second main character had arrived. On one side, this tough inner city-kid who was hell-bent on quitting the mostly white school she had been sent to and on the other side, this portly unorthodox coach (Santa Claus in Birkenstocks) whose main interest was helping Darnellia and the other girls have fun and make their lives better.

At its deepest **The Heart of the Game** is about TEAM and about how girls pull together as one to help each other out. It is about never giving up and taking that next step forward however difficult or frightening. And how each step might just culminate in some triumphant moment that we couldn't see if we had not persevered on that path.

I could go on and on about how this story unfolded and I might someday. Check back here from time to time and I might have some tales to tell.