

MIAMI INT'L FILM FESTIVAL MARCH 5, 2016 1:06 PM

The Miami Heat Wheels wheelchair basketball team takes the court in 'The Rebound'

HIGHLIGHTS

The movie makes its world premiere at the Miami International Film Festival at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday March 5.



BY RENE RODRIGUEZ
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The Rebound is nominally a documentary about the non-profit Miami Heat Wheels wheelchair basketball team and their attempt to win the league's national championship in 2013. But the real theme of this lively, emotionally engrossing movie is how we react after we suffer a crushing, life-altering blow. Some

of us never recover. Others, like the extraordinary athletes you get to know in this documentary, figure out a way to find meaning out of tragedy: They are down, but they refuse to be counted out.

The film was born out of a casual friendship between director Shaina Allen and the Heat Wheels coach Parnes Cartwright, who told her he was struggling to keep the team competitive (financial support from Miami-Dade County had gone down from \$30,000 in 2010 to \$2,500 three years later). Allen originally agreed to shoot a short promotional video that would be used to help raise funds. The players' wheelchairs were in dire need of repairs. The costs of traveling to other cities for championship matches needed to be covered.

But after spending some time with the players at their training facility in Gwen Cherry Park, Allen – a recent film school grad – realized she had material for a feature-length movie that went beyond the fascinating mechanics of wheelchair basketball (a sport that is as furious and exciting as its NBA counterpart).

Wheelchair Basketball Documentary: The Rebound (OFFICIAL TRAILER #1)



Like 2005's Oscar-nominated *Murderball*, *The Rebound* offers a fascinating look inside the world of paraplegic sports. The Heat Wheels train inside a parking garage in downtown Miami, using its steep ramps to strengthen their arms and increase their speed and flexibility on their modified wheelchairs. They lift weights and do pull-ups and stick to strict diets, just like any other athlete, except they're working on an infinitely greater level of difficulty.

In one of the film's many striking shots, Allen shows one of the players working out on the beach on the right side of the screen, while families enjoy the surf and sand on the left. Here is a rare breed of documentary that often uses images instead of words to tell its story. Despite its modest budget, *The Rebound* looks fantastic, making great use of Miami's natural light and giant skies. Allen often shoots scenes at the eye-level of her subjects, allowing us to subconsciously experience the world from their perspective.

But even though the movie is shaped like a traditional sports drama, culminating with the requisite, nail-biting championship game, the secret weapon of *The Rebound* – the reason why this movie affects you so deeply, even if you don't care about sports – lies within the personal stories of the players. We get to know a little about most of the team's members, such as Willy Rodriguez, who broke his back in a car accident and says he instantly knew he was paralyzed (he wouldn't know for sure until he woke up a month later inside an intensive care unit). "This team is everything I've got right now," he says into the camera, and the movie makes you understand why it's so important to him.

Gradually, the film focuses on three of the players, each with a radical different tale to tell. Mario Moran, a former gang member from New Jersey who moved to Miami after being shot during a street altercation, feels guilty about having left his sister behind without ever saying goodbye and is having trouble getting along with his father. Jeremie "Phenom" Thomas, who suffers from spina bifida and cerebral palsy after being born prematurely (he weighed two pounds, eight ounces), is an aspiring musician who writes catchy, witty rap songs and performs at a local nightclub.

And Orlando Carrillo, a charismatic young man who moved to Miami for medical treatment after suffering a severe injury in his native Venezuela, has applied for a scholarship to attend the University of Texas at Arlington. You root for him to get accepted as strongly as you root for the Miami Heat Wheels to win the title, because *The Rebound* is as much about the players as it is about the sport. Calling a movie "inspirational" can make it sound like medicine. But it's impossible to watch *The Rebound* and not draw strength from these remarkable guys, who happen to be stranded in wheelchairs but refuse to let that define them.

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MOVIE INFO

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

With: Mario Moran, Jeremie "Phenom" Thomas, Orlando Carrillo, Parnes Cartwright, Edwardo Thompson.

Director: Shaina Allen.

Writer: Marshall Davis Jones.

Producer: Michael Esposito.

Running time: 71 minutes. Brief vulgar language. Shaina Allen and the members of the Miami Heat Wheels will attend. Plays at 5:30 p.m. Saturday March 5 at the Olympia Theater.

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