



Kellie Mitchell speaks with Kaye Garms during a referee clinic that Garms runs in Colorado. Garms, 76, schedules Division 1 officials for the Western Athletic Conference.

PHOTOS COURTESY KELLIE MITCHELL

FLYING QUEENS DOCUMENTARY CAPTURES BASKETBALL, A DIFFERENT ERA

BY SKIP LEON
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In her upcoming independent documentary "Flying Queens: A Basketball Dynasty," Kellie Mitchell has tried to capture what it was like for the Wayland Baptist University women's basketball team that won 131 consecutive games and four Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) national championships from 1954-58.

Mitchell, who works at Denver-based Aperture Art Productions, Inc., is the producer, director and writer of the feature-length documentary. She interviewed a number of the players from those teams as well as some well-known basketball coaches, including the coach of those Flying Queens teams, Harley Redin.

The documentary is about basketball, but its scope is much larger. It's about a different era in the United States, a time when educational opportunities for women were limited, a time when most women were encouraged to get married and raise families, a time when job opportunities for women were limited.

What the Flying Queens and Wayland Baptist University were doing was revolutionary at the time.

"The 1950s, for women, was a time of oppression and repression," Mitchell said. "These women were playing basketball on a scholarship, which was unheard of in the 1950s. There were so few places



Kellie Mitchell, writer/director of "Flying Queens: A Basketball Dynasty," is shown filming Rita Alexander Cohlman.

for women to go to college, let alone play basketball. Wayland was offering scholarships to women so they could get a higher education and play basketball at the same time."

The story grabbed Mitchell's attention.

"I was like, 'Whoa, this is unusual,'" she said. "And they flew around in little planes to boot. They had the Hutcherson Air Service. Claude (Hutcherson) and Harley were pilots and flew these women to away games in these little bonanza airplanes."

Claude Hutcherson became the team's benefactor and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the team, providing team uniforms as well as dress clothes for away trips. He also funded many scholarships.

Mitchell said it's been about three years since the inception of the project and she has worked on it over the past two years. The

documentary came about following a chance meeting with two of the players on those Wayland Baptist teams.

"This film chose me," Mitchell said of the Flying Queens documentary. "I was at a fundraiser at a house in Denver and this friend of mine came up to me and grabbed me by the shirt and said, 'you have to meet these women.' She said it's a really interesting story about this winning basketball team in the 1950s."

That didn't peak Mitchell's interest. She gets such requests all the time.

"People come up to me all the time and say we should make a film together," Mitchell said. "But they have no idea, no money, but they want to make a film."

But Mitchell crossed the room and spoke with the two former Flying Queens, Alice "Cookie" Barron and Kaye Garms. And as

the three talked with each other, the seeds of the documentary were planted.

"I walked over and chatted with them a little bit and became intrigued with their story," Mitchell said. "I took their phone numbers and met with them. Cookie and Kaye gave me the names of other Flying Queens. I did phone interviews with a number of Queens that were part

of the 131-game winning streak. I learned more about their story and I was intrigued. And then I was hooked."

Over the past two years Mitchell has filmed in many locations for the documentary.

"We filmed in seven states," Mitchell said. "I've been to Plainview several times. We did some filming around the college. We filmed some interviews in the library there. We filmed Harley here in Denver during the Final Four."

Mitchell said part of the story is about how the women who played on those Wayland Baptist University teams went on to make a difference in the world after college.

"Part of the story is how these women went on to do great things," Mitchell said. "Cookie helped with Title IV here in Colorado in Jefferson County. Now, we have 11 sports for girls here in Jefferson County. There's a woman who's a former Congresswoman. They all went on to do great and wonderful things."

Title IX was enacted as part of the United States Education Amendments of 1972 and basically says that women should not be discriminated against in the educational system. For athletics, that means that an equal number of sports must be available for women as there are for men.

Mitchell said the story is an inspirational and positive one.

"This is a feel-good story," Mitchell said. "They kept winning. They played hard. Wayland could actually recruit the best women in the nation because they were offering something nobody else had. In the dusty, hot Panhandle of Texas, here was this little Baptist college and they had it all for a lot of these women. And this was at a time when a lot of sports weren't even played in high school for women. A lot of states didn't allow that."

Wayland Baptist University provided the young women with the chance to get an education and play basketball.

"Without that, these women wouldn't have gotten those educations and wouldn't have been able to play basketball anymore," Mitchell said. "They might not have gone on to influence so many other women and girls. These women laid the foundation for women's basketball for all of us. For all women playing professional basketball today, if not for them we wouldn't be where we are today. They deserve our support and recognition."

Mitchell also noted that Redin was instrumental in a number of rules changes in women's basketball, including the 30-second shot clock and the switch to a full-court game instead of the 3-on-3 version of the game where three players played offense on one-half of the court and then three different players played defense on the other half of the court.

Mitchell noted the help of former Flying Queen Faye Wilson-Gould in bringing the documentary to fruition.

Mitchell said she hopes to have the documentary finished in March and start initial screenings in May.

"We'll probably finish in March, but we won't do any showings until May because we couldn't find a venue to do a first private screening," Mitchell said. "Then we'll get a distributor and get it out there. We'll probably do something in Plainview. But there are no promises. We might have a private screening in Plainview or nearby. I want Harley Redin and Wilda Hutcherson-Redin (his wife) to see it."

Mitchell said she also is working on a soundtrack for the documentary and is in discussions with a top female basketball player to be the on-camera voice between interviews and carry the story.

For a five-minute glimpse of what the documentary will hold, go to the website www.flyingqueens.com and view the video. Also, click on the Facebook link and like the documentary. You can also follow updates on the documentary on Twitter.

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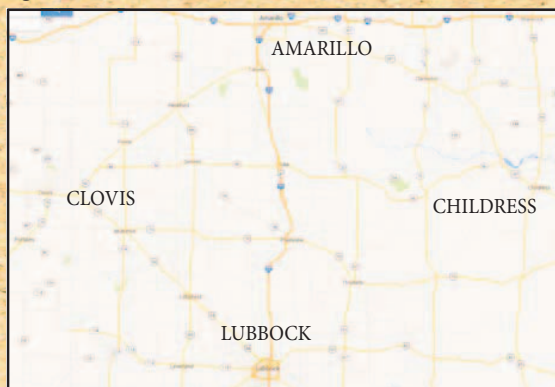
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