



Rattlesnake of hope: American director preparing documentary about blind soccer players

Documentary filmmaker Anne Galitsky landed in Santiago to capture the essence of the discipline, within the framework of the Parapan American Games. Here he tells us how he has immersed himself in the culture of this fascinating sport and in the community of visually impaired athletes.

Hands on the shoulder of the player in front. A companion behind, in the same position, with goggles covering his eyes. The audience, in silence, listens to the ambient sound of the stadium and captures conversations in Spanish, English and Portuguese. They hear the blind soccer players warming up, practicing with the balls, the bells of the ball being passed from player to player.

Thus, Anne Galitsky imagines the documentary that she is directing and that brought her to Santiago, regarding the Parapan American Games that are being held for the first time in the history of Chile.

"The Envisionaries" (which could be translated as "Los Contempladores" in Spanish) is the working title he has in mind. The director, who is the daughter of Ukrainian immigrants, has a master's degree in History and specialized in the social changes that occurred after World War II.

But his passion is in the documentary record, which is why he founded, together with director Rebecca Shine, the Graham Street production company, whose mission is to create socially relevant audiovisual pieces, books and exhibitions to educate and inspire the public.

His two previous films, "Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth" (2009) and "14: Dred Scott, Wong Kim Ark & Vanessa Lopez" (2014), address immigration in the United States, specifically the stories of undocumented youth. And it was in 2019 that she attended the Parapan American Games in Lima, because she had wanted to make a documentary about blind athletes for years.

"We attended Lima 2019, thinking that the film would focus on Para athletics, specifically on speed and long jump, but we were in soccer for the blind, at the Deportivo Villa María del Triunfo, far from the center," he says.

It was clear that the film would focus on blind footballers. Plus, macular degeneration runs in his family. Her grandmother couldn't see anything for the last 20 years of her life and her mother has lost most of her vision. Her aunts, uncles and cousins also face this reality.

"I have been afraid that it will happen to me, but part of filming this film consists of facing that fear with the best possible medicine: being surrounded by the happiest people I have ever met and who are also blind," she says.



From left to right: the director, Anne Galitsky; the associate producer, Dunetshka Otero-Serrano, and the photographer, Joseph Glode (Photos: provided).

Anne, in your films there is a search for social justice, how do you deal with that link between what athletes with disabilities do and sport in general?
I think of sport as a language. It allows us to communicate between different cultures, languages, genders and nationalities and understand each other better. The Paralympic movement, more than 60 years old, is one of the most hopeful social movements of the last century. And sporting events like the Parapan American Games celebrate both difference and commonality. I hope to attend this celebration of the human spirit every four years for the rest of my life.

Have you met some of the protagonists and what stories have you found?
I can tell you that the people we have spoken to are not only athletes, but also poets. We plan to visit the players in their home countries and interview them about their lives and the people who have believed in them along the way.

Are you going to the 2024 Paralympics? What is it about mega sporting events that inspire society in general on issues of inclusion?
Yes, we are planning to attend Paris 2024. I think many people around the world feel 'outside' within their own societies. Stories of inclusion uplift us all.

Why football for the blind?
Soccer is the most popular sport in the world, watched by billions of people, and until recently, most Americans weren't interested in it, and we have a long way to go. Blind football is an exciting sport, and in 2028 we will host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles, and we will have a newly formed team. We hope our film helps introduce this sport to the United States.

After Lima 2019, what changes did you perceive in how society views people with disabilities?
It is well documented that every city and country that hosts the Paralympic or Parapan American Games makes great strides in accessibility, both in architecture and attitudes. The speed of change depends on pressure from those living in host countries and the recognition that change that is good for the disabled is good for everyone.

By: Pablo Apablaza/Santiago 2023.
Main photo: Andres Piña/ Parapanamericanos Stgo 2023 via Photosport.

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