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***STRONG!, A PROFILE OF FORMER OLYMPIC WEIGHTLIFTER  
CHERYL HAWORTH, PREMIERES THURSDAY, JULY 26 AT 9 PM  
ON INDEPENDENT LENS***

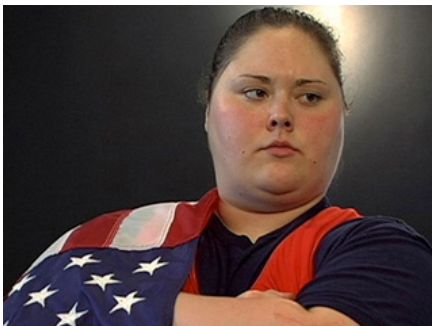
*“Being big – it definitely has its advantages. But there’s no such thing in this culture as being big and strong and completely and totally accepted as a woman.”*

— Cheryl Haworth

(San Francisco, CA) — By 15 she was an American national champion. By 17 she was competing in the Olympics. A formidable figure at five feet, eight inches tall and weighing over 300 pounds, Cheryl Haworth made history in Sydney, Australia in 2000 when she became the youngest athlete to win an Olympic weightlifting medal. *Strong!*, directed by Julie Wyman, follows Haworth as she struggles to defend her champion status even as her career inches toward its inevitable end. From the highs of her spectacular rise to the lows of battling injuries, *Strong!* explores the challenges this unusual elite athlete faces: coming to terms with a body that is celebrated within her sport but shunned by mainstream culture. *Strong!* premieres on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Mary-Louise Parker, on Thursday, July 26, 2012 at 9 PM (check local listings).

In presenting Haworth’s story, *Strong!* follows the path of a gender pioneer in an unconventional sport, and makes us question stereotypical notions of health, size, and fitness. Even from a young age Haworth was aware of her unique body and relished its strength, and when introduced to weightlifting as a teenager, she excelled. “It’s so rare I think to really find that thing that you’re supposed to do,” she says. “Weightlifting was that thing that I found.”

Following her win in Sydney, Haworth’s career gathered momentum. But while competing in Mexico and attempting an American record of 286 pounds, she tore two ligaments in her left



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arm. With an uncertain future in a sport that demands complete confidence, Haworth fought back, eventually breaking both the Pan American and U.S. records when she successfully lifted 354 pounds at the 2005 Pan American Games.

*Strong!* takes viewers inside the rarefied world of elite athletes to follow Haworth through several competitions and eventually on to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China. We meet Haworth's family, coaches, and other team members, who form a network of support. Yet the toll weightlifting takes on Haworth — both physical and psychological — is enormous. With honesty and candor she reveals her conflicting feelings about the weight she has to lift and the weight her body carries, and what kind of future she will face when she steps off the stage.

To learn more about the film, visit the *Strong!* interactive companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strong/>), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

### **About Cheryl Haworth**

Cheryl Haworth became the youngest athlete ever to win an Olympic weightlifting medal when she won the bronze medal in the +75 kilograms division in 2000 in Sydney, Australia. While Haworth instantly became one of the sport's top young stars, her ascent began in 1999 when she won the Pan American Games and placed fourth at the Senior World Championships.

Introduced to weightlifting while strength training as a softball player in 1996, within two years she had won her first two Junior National titles and placed fourth at the Junior Worlds as a 15-year-old. In 1998 Haworth set her first American records and went on to claim all of the American School-Age, Junior, and Senior records in the +75 kilograms division as well as all of the Pan American records at +75 kilograms. During her career, which began at the age of 14, Haworth remained undefeated in U.S. competition, where she won 12 consecutive Senior National titles, beginning with her first in 1999.

After winning two Junior World titles in 2001 and 2002, Haworth was well on her way to earning a third at the 2003 event when she tore two ligaments in her left elbow during an attempt at a new American record in the snatch and was forced to withdraw from the competition. Haworth came back from the injury in 2004. Though she sustained what some feared would be a career-ending injury, less than a year after reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation, Haworth not only won the 2004 Senior Nationals, but qualified for the Athens Olympic Games, where she placed sixth.

In 2005, Haworth returned to setting American records en route to winning a bronze medal at the Senior Worlds in Doha, Qatar. Haworth remained undefeated in the United States through 2008 when she qualified for her third consecutive Olympic team. Competing in Beijing, Haworth battled injuries to place sixth overall.

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In 2010 Haworth retired from the sport of weightlifting. She currently works as a recruiter for the Savannah College of Art and Design, her alma mater. She continues to work out when at home in Savannah, taking CrossFit classes with her former coach Don McCauley.

### **About the Filmmaker**

**Julie Wyman (Producer)** is also the producer of *A Boy Named Sue* (2000), which aired on Showtime and Logo television channels after screening at festivals on five continents, winning the 2001 Sappho Award for Best Documentary, and receiving a nomination for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's (GLAAD) Media Award for Best Documentary. Her 2004 experimental short *Buoyant* screened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City; the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's (MCASD) La Jolla, California site; and at festivals internationally. Wyman's experimental documentaries investigate the body, seeking to explore our notions of power, physicality, and gender categories. Wyman holds an MFA degree from UC San Diego's Visual Arts program. In addition to her work in independent film, she is currently an Assistant Professor of Cinema and Technocultural Studies at UC Davis.

### **ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS**

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities, and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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