

THE MIGHTY MACS

AN INSPIRING TRUE STORY



STUDY GUIDE



Crew Overview

Tim Chambers (Director; Writer: screenplay, story)

Anthony L. Gargano (Writer: story)

Cast Overview

Carla Gugino (Cathy Rush)

Marley Shelton (Sister Sunday)

Ellen Burstyn (Mother St. John)

David Boreanaz (Ed Rush)

Katie Hayek (Trish Sharkey)

Kim Blair (Lizanne Caufield)

Meghan Sabia (Jen Galentino)

Using This Discussion Guide

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for biblically-based discussion of various themes found in *The Mighty Macs*. The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that groups can choose to discuss the entire guide at once or can focus on one or two themes at a time.

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Film Overview/Note to Group

In the early 1970s – amidst the cultural landscape of Nixon’s presidency, the Vietnam War, and the women’s rights movement – a determined young coach named Cathy Rush led the unlikely Immaculata College “Macs” to unprecedented back-to-back-to-back national championships in women’s basketball. Based on these inspiring events, *The Mighty Macs* explores the historic journey to that first championship in 1972 (a first for

both the Macs and collegiate women’s basketball), and the belief, commitment, and perseverance necessary for such an endeavor.

As the film opens, Cathy (played by Carla Gugino) accepts the coaching job at Immaculata after interviewing with the tough-minded, pragmatic Mother St. John (Ellen Burstyn). Soon, Cathy faces a series of severe professional obstacles – e.g. no gym and no funding besides her small paycheck – that reflect the college’s own dire financial situation. And on a personal level, Cathy must navigate the societal expectations that would have her embrace the roles of wife and mother; it is on this point that her husband, Ed (David Boreanaz), agrees heartily with society.

But, Cathy is undeterred. With the help of Sister Sunday (Marley Shelton), a young nun entering her fifth year and in need of God’s direction, Cathy addresses the program’s basic needs – a functional court, a usable rimbaseketball, and uniforms. As for the team, Cathy eventually whittles it down to a dedicated few, among them Trish Sharkey (Katie Hayek), an overlooked athlete from a poor family; Lizanne Caufield (Kim Blair), a romantic with sights on the perfect wedding; and Jen Galentino (Meghan Sabia), a nurse-in-training whose family doesn’t know she plays basketball.

During the first part of the season, the team lacks cohesion and focus, suffering loss after loss. Cathy’s frustration culminates in a late-night, post-curfew basketball drill in which she forces her players to repeatedly practice defensive sweeps in a massive drainage pipe. The following morning, Mother St. John calls for Cathy’s resignation at the end of the season, but that disappointment is overshadowed by the sounds coming from the gym – players working together and working hard. Finally, Cathy’s appeals for teamwork and commitment have become reality.

After a victory at Penn State, the team gains momentum, racking up wins and infusing Immaculata with a sense of pride and unity – and even, perhaps, hope for the school’s financial woes. Soon, the Macs are awarded an at-large bid to the national championship tournament, where they beat several teams to reach the final game against Cathy’s former school, West Chester State College. With her husband in the stands, Cathy coaches her team to a breathtaking win, proving – as she narrates – “Anything is possible when we’re committed to our dreams.”

Theme One: Belief

Guiding Scripture: Hebrews 11:1 (NLT): “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”

Scriptures Referenced

- Mark 9:23 (NLT): “‘What do you mean, “If I can”?’ Jesus asked. ‘Anything is possible if a person believes.’”
- Mark 11:23 (NIV): “‘Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.’”
- John 1:12 (NLT): “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.”
- Romans 10:9-10 (NIV): “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (NIV): “Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight.”
- Philippians 4:13 (NLT): “For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”
- Hebrews 11:1 (NLT): “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”
- Hebrews 11:6 (NIV): “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

DVD Scenes to Review

- First Game (00:27:55 – 00:29:53, Chapter 6)
- Trish’s Conflict (00:32:02 – 00:33:22, Chapter 7)
- A Heated Discussion (00:43:51 – 00:45:24, Chapter 9)
- National Championship (01:26:01 – 01:32:41, Chapter 17)



Discussion Questions

As you begin this theme discussion, spend some time defining belief. How would you articulate or explain this concept to someone else? What does it mean to believe in someone or something?

According to several online dictionaries, the consensus regarding belief yields two primary definitions: first, an acceptance of the truth or existence of something; second, a firm conviction.

For Cathy Rush, these definitions aptly describe her vision for the Immaculata basketball program. She holds the firm conviction that her squad can achieve greatness. And she isn’t willing to compromise that belief, even at the onset of the first game, when an ironic turn of events forces her to distribute “We will be #1” buttons in a dim, confined women’s restroom.

Scene to Review

First Game (00:27:55 – 00:29:53, Chapter 6)

- What are your first impressions of this scene? Feel free to discuss anything from the “welcome” the Macs receive to the tiny gym to the women’s restroom.
- How do the filmmakers’ choices contribute to the mood of the scene? What do you notice about lighting, camera angle, music, or other effects that make for a specific atmosphere?
- During her brief pep talk, Cathy quotes martial arts master, Bruce Lee: “As you think, so shall you be.” What does this reveal about Cathy’s respect for the power of belief?
- Based on this first game, does Cathy have any reason to believe that her team will win a single game this season? At the same time, why is belief now more important than ever?

Take a few moments to read Philippians 4:13 and Hebrews 11:1 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- When faced with overwhelming circumstances that test our ability to maintain belief, how does a verse such as Philippians 4:13 encourage us with a timeless reminder?
- How is Cathy’s belief in the Macs an earthly reflection of Hebrews 11:1? On a spiritual level, why is this verse of the utmost importance when it comes to faith in Jesus Christ?

For a while, Cathy is the sole torchbearer when it comes to believing in the Macs’ potential. The difficulty is that many of her players have been raised with cultural or familial expectations that limit their ability to believe in pursuing dreams – aside from customary women’s careers or marriage and children. As Cathy discovers, trying to instill belief can be a frustrating task.



Scenes to Review

Trish's Conflict (00:32:02 – 00:33:22, Chapter 7)

A Heated Discussion (00:43:51 – 00:45:24, Chapter 9)

- Cathy tells Trish that she must have the courage to follow her dreams – that would be Trish's gift to the world. How does courage play a part in the establishment of belief?
- How does Cathy know that Trish doesn't believe in herself? Why does she say that Trish must believe she has the gift to play basketball? How would that belief impact Trish?
- During the fight with Ed, why is Cathy frustrated? How is this scene a tangible representation of what happens when belief meets various roadblocks along the way?
- Can you relate to Trish's experience? Have you ever lacked belief in your abilities? What about Cathy? Can you relate to her experience of trying to help someone believe?

Read John 1:12 and Romans 10:9-10 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In what ways do these verses demonstrate the power of belief?
- What right is given to those who "believed him and accepted him" in John 1:12?
- How does Romans 10:9-10 present the salvation message? How is belief vital?

Throughout the course of the film, Cathy's belief in the Macs gradually spreads to her players, the nuns, and even long-standing critics such as Mother St. John and Ed. When the Macs receive one of four at-large bids to the national championships, belief – a notion that started as a small seed in one person – seems to have grown and taken root in others' hearts and minds as well.

Scene to Review

National Championship (01:26:01 – 01:32:41, Chapter 17)

- A week prior to this championship game, West Chester State College beat the Macs by more than forty points. How have the Macs changed since that devastating loss?
- How does this final scene highlight the concept of belief?
- Cathy suggests that the Macs' belief was encouraged by women's accomplishments. Does that idea have a spiritual parallel in terms of encouragement within a community?

- Take a few moments to discuss the concept of believing in yourself (or having confidence in yourself). What is the danger in trusting solely in our abilities?
- Conversely, how is God the frame of reference by which everything has meaning? How should He inform the way we believe in ourselves and find confidence in our abilities?

Read Mark 9:23 and 11:23 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In Mark 9:23, Jesus says, "Anything is possible if a person believes" – this is an enduring truth. Why, then, do we so often struggle with disbelief?
- How do these verses encourage us to greater belief?

In concluding this theme discussion, take some time to read 2 Corinthians 5:6-7; Hebrews 11:1 (the Guiding Scripture for this theme), and Hebrews 11:6 (see Scriptures Referenced). Spend some time evaluating what you believe. Does that belief begin with the Author and Perfecter of our faith? If not, would you consider entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ? In Him, you can be assured that your belief is treasured; with Him, "anything is possible" (Mark 9:23).



Theme Two: Cimmittment

Guiding Scripture: Colossians 3:23 (NLT): “Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.”

Scriptures Referenced

- 1 Kings 8:61 (NLT): “And may you be completely faithful to the Lord our God. May you always obey his decrees and commands, just as you are doing today.”
- Psalm 37:5 (NLT): “Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.”
- Proverbs 22:29 (NIV): “Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank.”
- Proverbs 28:20 (NLT): “The trustworthy person will get a rich reward, but a person who wants quick riches will get into trouble.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV): “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- Colossians 3:23 (NLT): “Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.”
- 2 Timothy 2:13 (NLT): “If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.”
- 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV): “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”
- Hebrews 13:8 (NIV): “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

DVD Scenes to Review

- Cleaning the Floor (00:24:06 – 00:25:17, Chapter 5)
- Late-Night Drill (00:39:32 – 00:43:50, Chapter 8)
- New Attitude (00:45:25 – 00:47:53, Chapter 10)
- A Plea for Regionals (01:02:17 – 01:04:33, Chapter 13)

Discussion Questions

The Guiding Scripture for this theme is an important call to commitment and to excellence within that commitment: “Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people” (Colossians 3:23). In the Macs’ program, commitment isn’t optional, and

Cathy’s pursuit of dedicated athletes initially prompts a decline in roster numbers.

During the “wooden pool” drill, a player leaves the team, citing that Cathy’s approach to fighting for the ball is “unladylike.” Fast-forward to a new drill – “cleaning the floor” – and Cathy sees her squad count drop even further. Yet, instead of worrying about having enough players to field a team, Cathy seems pleased to whittle down her numbers to a dedicated, committed few.

Scene to Review

Cleaning the Floor (00:24:06 – 00:25:17, Chapter 5)

- How does this defensive drill demonstrate a player’s commitment to the team? Why does Cathy take issue with imperfect (or higher) sweeps?
- Cathy tells the players that they will need to break up with their egos for the next six months. What does she mean? How does this statement relate to commitment?
- Cathy also says that representing the school is a privilege. When you view something as a privilege rather than a given, what tends to happen with your level of commitment?
- How does excellence play a role in shaping the players’ commitment to the team? Why do some players abandon the team during this drill? Why do others choose to stay?

Read Psalm 37:5 and Proverbs 28:20 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What does Psalm 37:5 say about commitment? How much of what we do should be committed to the Lord? What does He promise to do when we trust Him?
- Proverbs 28:20 is a fascinating take on commitment and excellence. How does this verse differentiate between a “trustworthy person” and a “person who wants quick riches”?

Admittedly, Cathy’s late-night drill (one in which she forces the players to execute their defensive slides in a drainage pipe) is exacting. On the other hand, the consequence is born of a lack of commitment, excellence, and discipline on the team’s part. Having tried the traditional route, Cathy decides to test the girls’ limits, hoping that it might result in deepened commitment.





Scenes to Review

- Late-Night Drill (00:39:32 – 00:43:50, Chapter 8)
- New Attitude (00:45:25 – 00:47:53, Chapter 10)

Compare and contrast the beginning of the first scene with the final moments of the second scene. Think about the team huddles, the overall mood, the game play, etc.

- For the sake of discussion, talk about whether you agree or disagree with Cathy's late-night consequence. How did the slide drills ultimately impact the players' commitment?
- While the players are in the drainage pipe, Cathy yells, "Our results will not change until our habits change!" How does this statement relate to commitment and excellence?
- The following morning, how does Sister Sunday show her dedication to Cathy and the basketball program? What does her selflessness reveal about her commitment?
- Do you have an interest in sports? Do you play? Are you a spectator? Based on your own experiences (with sports or other applicable areas), why is teamwork vital to success?

Take a moment to read Proverbs 22:29 and Colossians 3:23 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In Proverbs 22:29, what does it mean that "someone skilled in their work...will serve before kings" and not officials of low rank? How might this motivate us to excellence?
- How does Colossians 3:23 encourage us toward excellence? Could any of your habits (to use Cathy's word) benefit from a change in work ethic or attitude? If so, how?

When the Macs receive an invitation to regionals in Baltimore, Cathy and Sister Sunday intrude on a board meeting to ask for financial help with transportation. In what becomes an impassioned plea, Cathy asks Mother St. John to consider and honor the players' commitment, mentioning the personal and team sacrifices that their dedication has required throughout the season.

Scene to Review

A Plea for Regionals (01:02:17 – 01:04:33, Chapter 13)

- How does Cathy's speech demonstrate the way that commitment breeds commitment?
- Describe Cathy's demeanor and attitude. How do they enhance her

message? How do Mother St. John's responses and reactions change through the course of this scene?

- In the grander picture, how does this trip to regionals represent a chance for the school to show its commitment to the Macs? In turn, how could this opportunity better the school?
- Can you relate to Cathy's experience in trying to convince people (Mother St. John in particular) to share in her vision and enthusiasm? If so, what happened?
- What are some ways that we can show support for and commitment to other people's work, projects, or visions? What might that support mean to someone you know?

Read 1 Kings 8:61 and 2 Timothy 2:13 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- In 1 Kings 8:61, Solomon is speaking to the Israelites at the temple dedication. Yet, how are these ancient words relevant and necessary in our modern-day society?
- What does 2 Timothy 2:13 say about God's character? About his faithfulness? What are some ways that we can pursue the character of God and know Him more intimately?

As you conclude this theme discussion, read 2 Timothy 2:15 and Hebrews 13:18 (see Scriptures Referenced). For the Hebrews verse, spend some time contemplating what it means that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." What does that say about commitment? About dedication? About excellence? Consider, too, your own commitments. How might the truth of Jesus Christ's steadfastness and the character of God encourage you today?



Theme Three: Perseverance

Guiding Scripture: Galatians 6:9 (NIV): “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Scriptures Referenced

- 1 Chronicles 16:11 (NLT): “Search for the Lord and for his strength; continually seek him.”
- 2 Chronicles 15:7 (NIV): “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.”
- Proverbs 24:16 (NLT): “The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again. But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked.”
- Romans 5:3-4 (NLT): “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.”
- 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV): “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.”
- Galatians 6:9 (NIV): “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”
- 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (NLT): “As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.”
- Hebrews 12:1 (NLT): “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”
- James 1:12 (NIV): “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

DVD Scenes to Review

- The Interview (00:03:00 – 00:05:33, Chapter 1)
- Financial Trouble (00:08:58 – 00:12:02, Chapter 2)
- At-Large Bid (01:05:50 – 01:10:45, Chapter 14)

Discussion Questions

In many ways, the Guiding Scripture for this theme accurately describes Cathy Rush’s journey and experiences at Immaculata. The verse reads, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). Because Cathy walks her course with perseverance and steadfastness – not catering to weariness or obstacles – she and the Macs (and many others) reap a significant harvest: fellowship, trust, and victory.

During her interview with Mother St. John, Cathy learns of several challenges facing the basketball program – the gym burned down months ago, the title of “basketball coach” is more akin to “babysitter,” and the remaining basketball is a beaten, tired mess of its former self. At any point, Cathy could have fled. Instead, she accepts the flaws and views them as opportunities.

Scene to Review

The Interview (00:03:00 – 00:05:33, Chapter 1)

- Did you notice the way that Cathy walks and how she carries herself? What does her general confidence and attitude suggest about her approach to any problems that arise?
- As discussed with Mother St. John during the interview, what are some of the new rules for women’s basketball? How does this present a welcome challenge for Cathy?
- How might the worn basketball symbolize the current state of basketball at Immaculata?
- At this point in the film, do you view Mother St. John as an obstacle to Cathy’s vision? Based on her behavior, what does Mother St. John think of basketball? Of Cathy?
- How do you respond to adversity? Are you like Cathy? When you encounter challenges, do you readily accept them? Or do you wrestle with adversity, struggling to persevere?

Read 1 Chronicles 16:11 and Proverbs 24:16 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What does 1 Chronicles 16:11 tell us about perseverance? If we’re struggling with various challenges and obstacles, what should we do, according to this verse?
- Take a moment to describe the message of Proverbs 24:16 in your own words. How does the comparison between the godly and the wicked encourage you to persevere?

One of the biggest obstacles for Immaculata – and, by default, for Cathy – is the school’s financial crisis. In the following Scene to Review, the film transitions back and forth seamlessly between an important financial meeting and Cathy’s exploration of the old activities center. This transitioning is no coincidence, as Cathy may just be the answer to Mother St. John’s prayers.

Scene to Review

Financial Trouble (00:08:58 – 00:12:02, Chapter 2)

- When Cathy and Mother St. John share scenes, is there a sense of conflict between modern and traditional? Why must they work together to persevere?

Since dialogue and narration are absent from the gym scenes, discuss what Cathy may be thinking as she explores boxes of hand lotion and studies the rim-forsaken backboard.

- Throughout the film, how do the school’s financial problems affect Cathy? What obstacles does she face? How does the lack of money force her to get creative?
- Can you relate to either Cathy’s or Mother St. John’s (or both) experience? Have you ever had to be resourceful or manage financial troubles? Did perseverance play a role?

Read Romans 5:3-4 and James 1:12 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- Romans 5:3-4 is a verse closely associated with the theme of perseverance. Why should we rejoice when confronted with problems and trials? What would we otherwise miss?
- James 1:12 reminds us that one who perseveres under trial is blessed. Have you been wrestling with trials lately? How might this verse offer comfort and guidance?

In an intense, heartbreaking game, the Macs lose in the Regional Final to Cathy’s former school, West Chester State College. Following the game and

during the ride home, the Macs are speechless, each person nursing her own wounds after such an emotional, startling end to the season. But, Mother St. John is waiting back at the college with news – big news, in fact.

Scene to Review

At-Large Bid (01:05:50 – 01:10:45, Chapter 14)

- How is this loss different than the losses back at the beginning of the season? Why isn't Cathy angry? Why aren't teammates blaming each other? What's changed?
- Describe the range of emotion throughout the scene. What happens during the game? How does the sobering loss impact the mood? What happens at the college?
- What does this scene say about perseverance? About one's ability to persevere? Is it a learned behavior? Can a person become better at facing adversity? Why or why not?
- Can you think of practical ways to incorporate the discipline of perseverance into your life? How has Jesus Christ set an example for us in this discipline?

Take a moment to read 2 Chronicles 15:7 and 1 Corinthians 9:24 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- The message of 2 Chronicles 15:7 was initially given to King Asa in the Old Testament, but how does this lasting word of God embolden modern believers to persevere?
- 1 Corinthians 9:24 says, "Run in such a way as to get the prize." What does this phrase say about the theme of perseverance? Are you prepared to run in such a way?

As you finish this discussion, read 2 Thessalonians 3:13 and Hebrews 12:1 (see Scriptures Referenced), and think about any additional Scripture that address perseverance. Along those same lines, can you recall people from the Bible whose stories are a testament to the discipline of overcoming adversity? Or how about you? Has your faith been molded through perseverance?

Final Thoughts

- What are some additional themes in the film? Can you point to specific scenes or moments of dialogue that pertain to the themes you see?
- What do you think of Sister Sunday? How is her role in the film important to Cathy Rush as both a friend and colleague? How does Cathy ultimately help Sister Sunday?
- The film is set in the early 1970s. What did you think of the costumes? How did other aspects of the movie – sets, locations, lighting, script – contribute to the time period?
- How does the soundtrack contribute to the overall atmosphere of the film? During the basketball sequences, how does the music add to the tension of the game?
- Do you have any final thoughts on Cathy Rush and the Immaculata Macs? What do you think of their legendary back-to-back-to-back national championships?



"AN INSPIRING FILM THAT YOUNG WOMEN EVERYWHERE MUST SEE!"

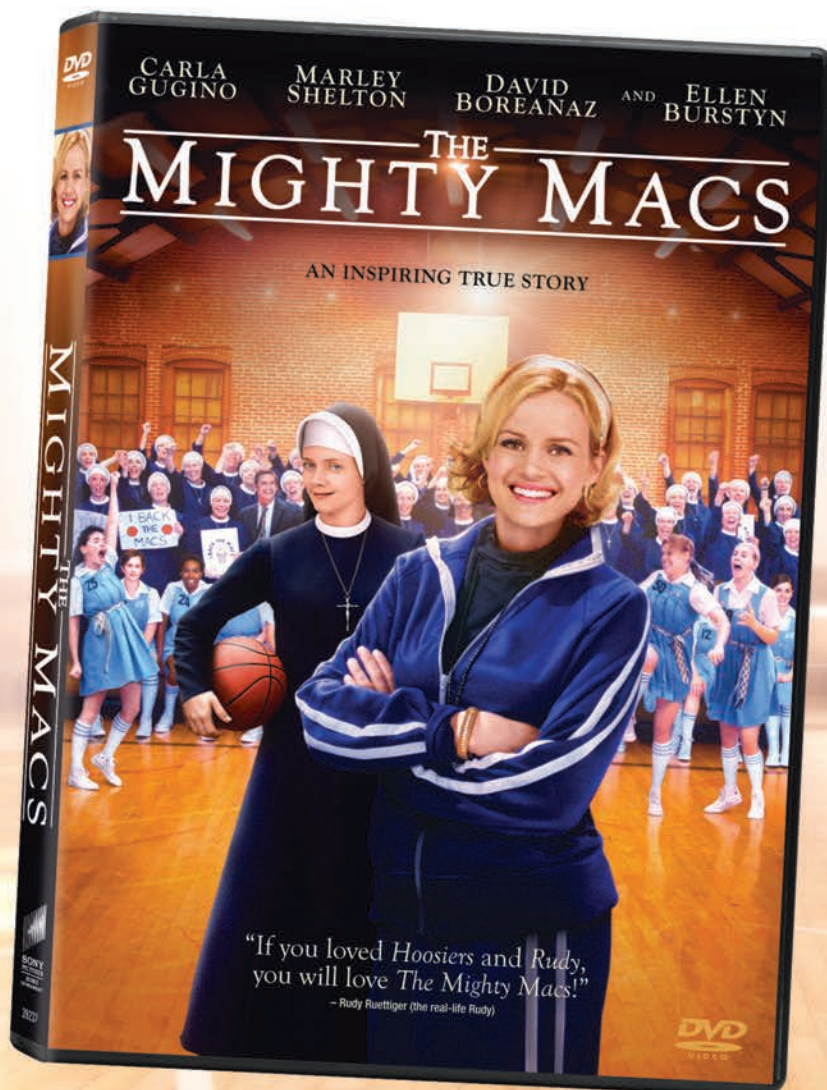
— Lindsey Vande Hoef, Women's Basketball Coach, Lakeland College

"IT'S A STORY OF
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