

Documentary shows life behind game



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TENNIS

Being a tennis fan can be character building.

Unlike golf aficionados, who get everything on a platter — merely clicking the remote to watch Tiger and friends on TV every weekend — tennis lovers have learned to be a hardy lot.

For example, when one of the rare non-Grand Slam tournaments to get American network TV coverage, the NASDAQ-100 Open, was on CBS two weeks ago, viewers in Toronto did not see either Serena Williams or Andre Agassi win their respective finals because the Buffalo, N.Y., affiliate opted to show infomercials.

Tomorrow night on the LIFE Network, at 9 p.m. EDT, tennis followers are guaranteed a nice fix of their favourite game, albeit in the form of a 90-minute documentary entitled *She Got Game: Behind the Scenes on the Women's Tennis Tour*.

The film uses Canadian player Sonya Jeyaseelan as the central thread in the story but also mixes in many of the big names in tennis, among them Serena Williams, Jennifer Capriati, Martina Hingis and Martina Navratilova.

There are interviews with par-

ents such as Oracene Price (mother of Serena and Venus Williams), Denise Capriati and Reggie Jeyaseelan, who had a troubled and sometimes abusive relationship with his daughter.

She Got Game follows the likable and effervescent Jeyaseelan in 2001 (when her ranking plummeted from No. 49 to No. 333) and up until the summer of 2002. At that point, she was getting back onto the tour following a delicate operation in early December of 2001, to remove a walnut-sized cyst behind her left eye, which threatened her vision, and a smaller one behind her right eye.

A week later, dangerous hemorrhaging from the surgery necessitated a further, and very frightening, procedure.

Montreal-based directors Bobbi Jo Krals and Abbey Jack Neidik have put together a film that includes footage shot at events in California, South Carolina, Munich, Moscow, Toronto and Montreal as well as a varied cast of characters, including Billie Jean King, Mary Carillo, Bud Collins and lesser-light players such as Barbara Schett, Iroda Tulyaganova and Jana Kandaar.

Schett, currently No. 54, has ranked as high as No. 7 (1999) and played doubles with Anna Kournikova and other top stars.

In *She Got Game*, Schett, a 27-year-old Austrian, offered a unique viewpoint on the all-consuming quest to be No. 1.

"I always thought it would be nice to be around No. 10," Schett said.

"People know you, but not too



ANDRE KOSTERS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Wide-eyed wonder

Chilean Fernando Gonzalez returns the ball to his opponent, Agustin Calleri, of Argentina, during their Estoril Open match yesterday in Portugal. Calleri knocked off the fourth-seeded Gonzalez 7-5, 6-1 to advance to the semi-finals.

much.

"That would be just perfect," she added with a hearty laugh. "Maybe that's the wrong thing to think, but I think it's definitely healthier for your life."

Schett also provided a candid perspective on the predictable and sometimes monotonous yearly cycle of tournaments. About playing the Moscow event in the fall, she noted, "It's going to be cold, it's going to smell terrible at the airport and it's just not going to be

like Europe."

There is moving footage of Jennifer Capriati at a U.S. Open media conference where she makes a tearful plea to reporters to finally refrain from asking questions about her troubled past.

As well, Capriati and Serena Williams are caught being a little testy when it comes to media obligations.

A revealing vignette shows WTA Tour media staffer Raquel Martin pleading with a recalcitrant Wil-

liams to do a media appearance during the 2001 Tour Championships in Munich.

There are very few criticisms of *She Got Game* except for the fact it begins rather slowly and that Jeyaseelan's ordeal with the cysts is not mentioned.

The producers claim that is because they didn't have film footage to properly incorporate it, but that seems lame when an interview with Jeyaseelan could have detailed the circumstances sur-

rounding the most traumatic events in her life during the period of filming.

The best thing about the show is its scope and its willingness to stick its lens and microphone into crannies of the sport not usually seen.

Long-suffering fans should enjoy this rambling, informative and entertaining look at women's tennis.

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