

Game, she got

>> Doc filmmakers Bobbi Jo Krals and Abbey Neidik ace women's tennis

by CRAIG SEGAL



The creators of SHE GOT GAME: Coming of Age on the Women's Tennis Tour are betting big their feature-length film will be a blockbuster. They poured buckets of their own money into the expensive project, chasing the biggest names in women's tennis around the world for behind-the-scenes, full access coverage.

The film's success seems like a sure bet. Women's tennis is more popular than ever. The blonde,

ponytailed Anna Kournikova is one of the most recognized athletes in the world. But what does the 20-year-old diva think of using sex to sell the game? Does Canada's Sonya Jeyaseelan blame her father for stealing her childhood to turn her into a tennis star? Is tennis just a rich girls' game? How big a deal is it for a player to tell the world she's a lesbian? Who's the biggest catfighter? How do veterans like Switzerland's Martina Hingis—whose mom got her into tennis after Czech authorities imprisoned her dad for anti-Communist activities—handle upstarts like the Williams sisters? What do these athletic stars do off-court? And how the hell did these two Montreal filmmakers get such crazy access to what their promo material calls “the least accessible major sport in the world”?

“That’s why no one’s ever done this before,” says director/producer Bobbi Jo Krals, president of Esperanto Productions, in her home office on l’Esplanade. “They [the Women’s Tennis Association] trusted us. They trusted our intentions.”

Krals and her partner Abbey Neidick say it’s the hardest film they ever shot. They worked frantically. Players cancelled interviews, matches were rescheduled. “Every situation was a new scenario,” says Krals. “Each tournament had the right to refuse access. From one day to another things completely shift and you’re going somewhere else. Your stomach’s always in knots.”

“It took a while for all the funding to get into place,” says co-director/producer Neidik, co-owner of award-winning DLI Productions. “So everything had to go on our credit cards. One-half to three-quarters of the shoot came out of our own pockets. The documentary industry is not geared around reacting in this kind of way.”

“The sports stations say they don’t have the budget, and the documentary people poopoo sports,” adds Krals.

Krals says being a tennis diva is not all it’s cracked up to be. “One of the things that shocked me was how insular this world is,” she says. “Yeah, they travel the world, but how often do they get to see the country they’re actually in? They’re in their golden years, 15 to 30. They’ll meet a guy and then never see him again,” she says. “At the end of the day I don’t envy that life.” :