

Jeyaseelan story a cautionary tale



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STANDING PAT

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prised a few years ago when she severed ties with her father-coach, Reggie, alleging physical and verbal abuse.

I remember when Reggie quit his job and moved to Florida to give Sonya a better chance to make it as a tennis player. I have to admit that Jeyaseelan turned out to be a better player than I thought she could be. She developed into a hard-hitting top-50 player despite the fact she's barely 5 feet tall. She has career wins over top-10 players like Conchita Martinez, Nathalie Tauziat and Venus Williams.

But as the documentary points out, Jeyaseelan is approaching the end of her career and has little to show for 11 years of pro tennis. She never finished high school and, while her career earnings are close to \$700,000 U.S., she earned less than \$13,000 last year. She missed nearly five months after an operation to remove non-malignant brain cysts and has had recurring knee problems.

Jim Fuhse, a WTA Tour flack, compares the tour with the circus and the comparison is apt, because in both forms of entertainment, the bright lights overshadow the reality. She Got Game strips away the glitter and the grease paint and offers a revealing look at the games behind the game.

Fleury decision overdue: Chicago Blackhawks star Theo Fleury was suspended for a minimum of six months for violating the terms of the NHL's substance-abuse program and, for Fleury's sake, everyone involved should make sure that he has exorcised whatever demons possess him before he's allowed to return to the ice.



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Sonya Jeyaseelan has had a few problems in her career.

This is the third time Fleury has run afoul of the substance-abuse regulations and the only surprise is the suspension took so long to happen. The Blackhawks should have taken some action this year when Fleury was involved in an incident at a strip club in Columbus.

Hall of Fame off base: Dale Petroskey, the president of the Baseball Hall of Fame, deserves an error for cancelling weekend celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of my favourite baseball movie, Bull Durham.

Petroskey cancelled the April 26-27 event because he was afraid that stars Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon would use the occasion to publicize their opposition to the war in Iraq. Petroskey, who used to work in the Reagan administration, said he was trying to keep politics out of the Hall, but he seemed to be making a political statement when he said recent comments by the actors could "ultimately put our troops in even more danger."

The cancellation was ironic, because some of those troops on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt recently told an interviewer that they took their minds off the war by watching comedies. One of their favourites is Bull Durham.

Petroskey's decision has prompted noted author Roger Kahn to cancel an August appearance at the Hall of Fame. He was scheduled to discuss his new book, October Men.

Sonya Jeyaseelan's nickname is "Sunny" but her cheery disposition masks the reality of a life marked by abuse, health problems and a tennis career that has been only modestly successful.

The 27-year-old B.C. native is the focal point of *She Got Game*, a documentary produced by Montrealers Abbey Niedik and Bobbi Jo Kral. They were given unprecedented access to the women's tennis tour and have produced an honest, behind-the-scenes look at the most popular women's professional sport.

The documentary, which will air on the Life Network tomorrow night at 9 p.m., is a must-see for parents who aspire to athletic greatness for their kids. The public perception of the WTA Tour is coloured by the success of the Williams sisters, Martina Hingis and Anna Kournikova. But, for every star, there are hundreds of youngsters who sacrifice education and a normal childhood for a dream that never comes true.

Jeyaseelan is luckier than most. I've been following her career since she was a 9-year-old in Vancouver and I wasn't sur-