

Coverage of the Rogers AT&T Cup at York University

Tennis

One tough racket

Canadian taking her best shot

York University in the winter is no place for tennis. It looks more like the surface of the moon than the site of a professional sporting event. As Sonya Jeyaseelan picks her way across the treacherous, icy surface, she throws out an observation.

"I find I'm in another world," she says as she turns to the camera, "compared to the rest of the world."

Jeyaseelan is talking about the sphere she inhabits as a professional tennis player, not the desolation of the university campus. And it's the insular community of women's tennis that filmmakers Bobbi Jo Krals and Abbey Jack Neidik reveal in the documentary *She Got Game*.

Captured over three years at various events — including the Rogers AT&T Cup here in Toronto — the result is a behind-the-scenes look at the not-always glamorous WTA Tour.

"There is a certain melancholy," said Krals, in town for a gala screening of *She Got Game* tonight at the Bloor Cinema. "It's like going behind the curtain with the Wizard of Oz."

The world's most recognizable players — Jennifer Capriati, Serena Williams, Martina Hingis, Anna Kournikova and Barbara Schett — are all featured in the film, but much of the story is told through Toronto's Jeyaseelan.

She personifies several of the themes in *She Got Game*: Pushed into tennis as a child, Jeyaseelan has struggled with both injury and self-esteem. She is trying to rebuild a relationship with her father, the domineering parent who first put a racquet in her tiny fist — "Wayne Gretzky's father had a dream, too," he says — and is struggling to return to the top-50 form she once possessed.

The cameras follow Jeyaseelan from airport to hotel room (she lugs her own bags), where she unpacks as soon as she gets in. On the road for weeks at a time, she busies herself immediately in an attempt to make her temporary lodgings homier. It's poignant, and understandable.

The filmmakers, who were both college athletes themselves, went into the project celebrating sport, and to a certain extent, *She Got Game* does that. The skill of the athletes is undeniable, but the challenges they face and the sacrifices they make to get to their elite level is what gives the film its edge.

Jeyaseelan's struggle with her father is one example; Capriati's well-publicized teenaged challenges are another. Anna Kournikova may appear on magazine covers, but she's always accompanied by a phalanx of security

New documentary reveals 'dark side' of women's tennis
Top players pay high price for success, by Jennifer Quinn



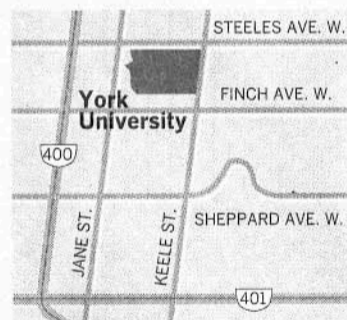
MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS

Jennifer Capriati's turbulent tennis career typifies the themes of documentary film *She Got Game*.

Tennis facts

Facts and figures on the Rogers AT&T Cup Tournament.

- **When:** Today to Aug. 17.
- **Where:** The National Tennis Centre, York University, 3111 Steeles Ave. W.



- **Schedule:** Singles qualifying starts at 10 a.m.
- **Tickets:** \$5.50-\$11.00. Visit www.rogersattcup.com or call 1-800-398-8761.

guards. And Hingis can't have a sip of champagne on her 21st birthday because she has a match the next day.

"I think the dark side (of the tour) was unexpected," Krals says. "There's a price to pay. And we realized this was the essential theme: What is the price of a dream?"

It's Schett, now ranked 54th in the world, who comes across as a voice of reason in the film. She provides perspective and a little world-weary humour as she observes the circus-like atmosphere that surrounds her and her colleagues.

"I don't want to be No. 1 in the world, because the price is too high," Schett says. "Anna or Martina could never go out and

get drunk without some photographer following them. I can do what I want because outside Austria, I still have my anonymity."

But *She Got Game* shows that the world of tennis can resurrect women, as well as knock them down. Capriati's stellar career looked to be over when she was arrested as a teenager. In *She Got Game*, Capriati comes across as an intelligent, well-spoken woman who knows herself and takes no guff.

One great exchange, filmed in Germany, has the press peppering her with questions about hometown players. In response to one particularly stupid query about whether or not two players who are getting married will be good parents, Capriati sighs and says, "Does anyone have any questions about me?"

It's a far cry from the footage of a younger Capriati at her comeback U.S. Open, head down on the table, crying and wondering why reporters just won't leave her alone.

"There are mixed feelings," Krals said of the end product. "I'm so thrilled to see that women can make a living playing sports. But the reality is that the life is gruelling."

She Got Game is both entertaining and good journalism. It leaves you torn: You admire the skill and dedication of the athletes, yet wonder why they would want to put themselves through that particular hell.

She Got Game has its theatrical premiere tonight at 9:15 p.m. at the Bloor Cinema (506 Bloor St. W.) and will be shown on the Life Network tomorrow at 9 p.m.

Clijsters moves on to semifinals

CARSON, CALIF.—The talented Russian teenagers keep coming, and Kim Clijsters sends them away with punishing groundstrokes and post-victory kisses on each cheek.

Clijsters, who will be in Toronto next week for the Rogers AT&T Cup, defeated Svetlana Kuznetsova 6-3, 6-1 in the quarter-finals of the JPMorgan Chase Open yesterday, putting the Belgian two victories away from overtaking injured Serena Williams as the world's top-ranked woman.

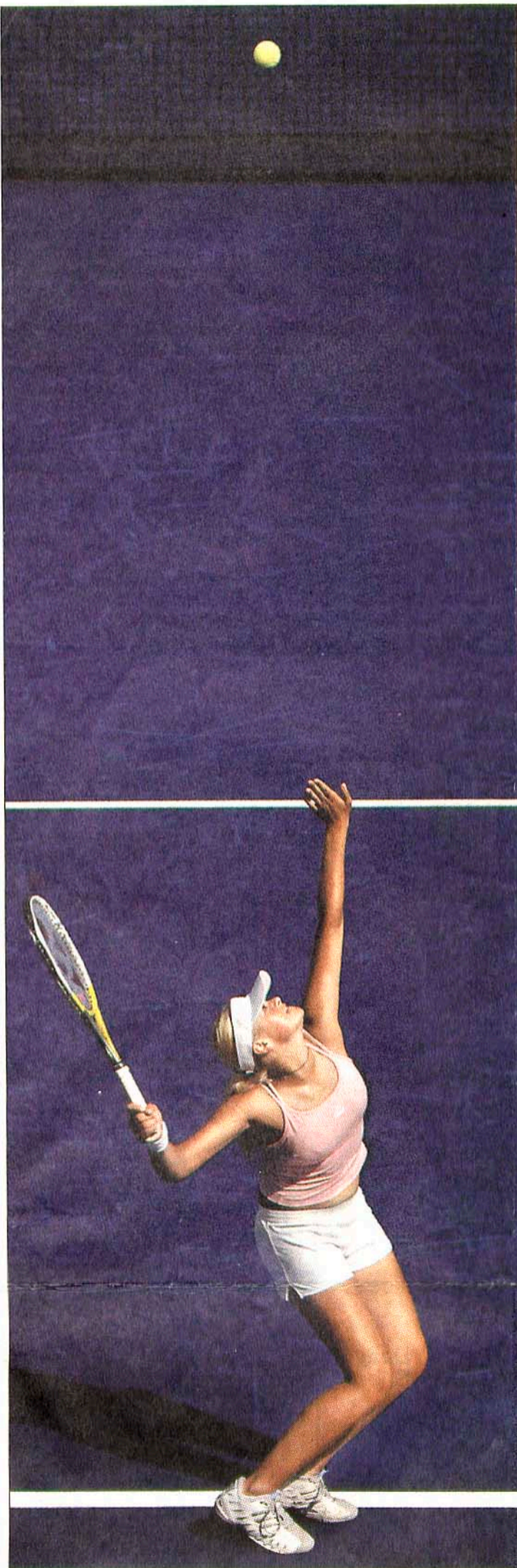
Clijsters outlasted Maria Sharapova 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 Thursday, then pronounced the 16-year-old Russian "an incredible player. She can go all the way. It's just a matter of being consistent."

That wasn't a problem for Clijsters, who won nine straight games over the first and second sets to put away Kuznetsova, an 18-year-old best known as Martina Navratilova's doubles partner.

"Kim plays so consistently, which makes it so hard to play her," Kuznetsova said. "She's one of the best players because of that. Other players aren't as consistent."

The top-seeded Clijsters advanced to today's semifinals against No. 16 Francesca Schiavone of Italy, who beat qualifier Nicole Pratt 6-2, 6-3.

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STEVE RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR

Up, up and away Alexandra Wozniak practises serve for Rogers AT&T Cup at York University. Wozniak is on court today at 10 a.m. trying to qualify for the main event, which starts Monday.