

Reel CRITIQUE

He Got Game

Starring Denzel Washington and Ray Allen

Directed by Spike Lee

Playing at Hollywood 16

Rated R

Critique: A



TRAVIS IRBY
staff writer

Spike Lee's new film *He Got Game* is not as much about basketball as family and responsibility. It is a touching tale of a father trying to reach a son he never knew, played against the modern morality tale of college athletics.

Jesus Shuttlesworth (Ray Allen) is the top high-school basketball player in the country. All agree he has the skills to be the next Jordan, Bird or Johnson. The path to millions is his to choose. Everyone wants a piece of Jesus and the riches he will reap. Though Jesus would be loathe to admit it, the reason he is so good can be traced to the dogged teaching of his jailed father, Jake Shuttlesworth (Denzel Washington).

Jake is in jail because he killed Jesus' mother and accordingly, Jesus hates Jake for the act. Jake is looking at a long jail term when opportunity passes the ball on a fast break.

The governor offers Jake a shorter sentence if he can convince Jesus to play for the governor's alma mater. Jake not only has to convince his son to forgive him, but free him.

He Got Game is one of the better movies of 1998. It delivers drama so deftly

that even those who hate basketball will enjoy the film. While there is a fair amount of basketball, there is no big game, no grand finale.

Most of the hoops action is a metaphor for the relationship between Jesus and Jake. The dynamic between father and son is what drives the film.

Denzel Washington is excellent as the troubled Jake. The absentee father is not a particularly new role, but Washington raises it and the entire film a notch or two. His scenes of the abusive training of his young son and his subsequent regret over those actions are superior stuff.

Ray Allen is pretty decent as the round-ball prodigy Jesus. A NBA player with no previous acting experience, Allen gives his character credibility.

Rosario Dawson and Milla Jovovich are solid in supporting roles as the women in Jesus and Jake's lives. Lee regulars Bill Nunn, John Turturro and Lonette McKee play people in the player's life.

Lee does a great job infusing the film with emotion and realism. Lee, who wrote the screenplay, brings a lively, original film to the big screen, at a time when such is a rarity.

There are a few flaws. The movie runs a little long and the depiction of women as a bunch of money hungry, sex-starved groupies seems a bit clichéd.

PLEASE SEE **GAME** ON PAGE 4.

Reel CRITIQUE

Les Misérables

Starring: Liam Neeson and Geoffrey Rush

Directed by Bille August

Playing at Hollywood 16

Rating PG-13

Critique: B



RACHEL DAWLEY
staff writer

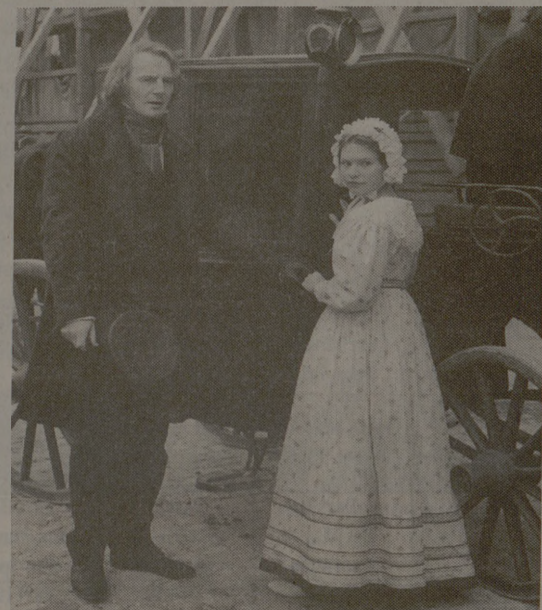
No novel has been filmed as many times as *Les Misérables*. The first feature films made in America and France were adaptations of Victor Hugo's tome. The latest film version of the 1,200-page classic novel is simply another competently told rendition of the familiar saga.

Director Bille August (*Pelle the Conqueror*) presents the movie adaptation with a star-heavy cast of Liam Neeson, Geoffrey Rush, Uma Thurman and Claire Danes.

The film treatment, with a screenplay by Rafael Yglesias, compresses and streamlines Hugo's vast cavalcade of human miseries and victories without diluting the author's passion and anger. It is fueled by Hugo's acute outrage at the inequities of the judicial systems, at the harshness of social castes and at the lack of human mercy.

The movie does an adequate job of presenting the well-known plot of *Les Misérables*. Set in early 19th-century France, it recounts 40 years in the life of Jean Valjean (Neeson), his rise from misery to nobility and his efforts to find serenity through atonement.

The movie begins with Valjean just out



Liam Neeson (Valjean) and Claire Danes (Cosette) prepare to leave the convent where they have taken refuge for the past eight years.

of prison, where he spent 19 years of hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread. Now a bitter man battling for survival, he is redeemed by a priest's act of kindness, and his entire life is reformed.

PLEASE SEE **MISÉRABLES** ON PAGE 4.

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