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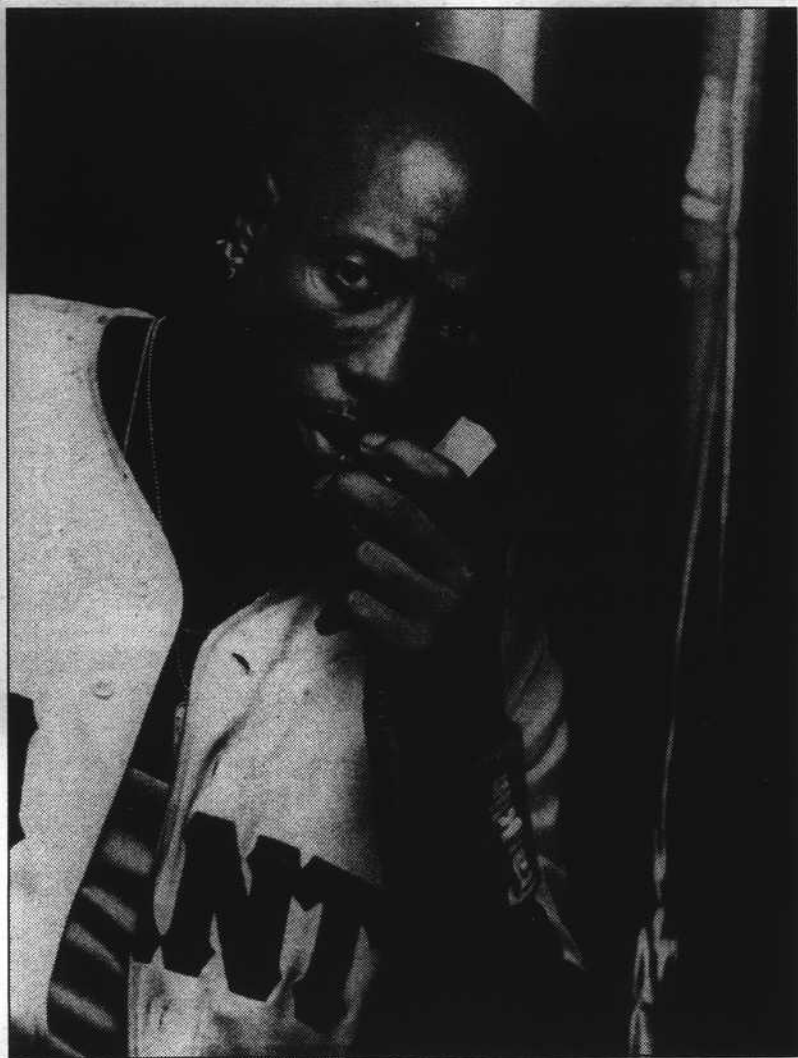
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Character depth places 'The Fan' above previous obsession movies



COURTESY OF TRISTAR PICTURES

BOBBY RAYBURN (Wesley Snipes) receives a strange phone call in his team's locker room from obsessed fan **Gil Renard** (Robert DeNiro) in "The Fan."

The Facts

Film: "The Fan"
Stars: Wesley Snipes, Robert DeNiro
Director: Tony Scott
Rating: R (language, nudity, violence)
Grade: B+
Five Words: Obsession film takes different turn

By GERRY BELTZ
 Film Critic

"The Fan" isn't the kind of movie it looks like.

Other obsession films have come out, but they just had psychos with penchants for certain people. No character, no past, no drama.

That's what puts "The Fan" above the rest.

On one side is Bobby Rayburn (Wesley Snipes), an incredible baseball player who has just secured a \$40 million contract with the New York Giants. However, he is a tad upset that he didn't get his lucky number 11, which has already been given to rising star Juan Primo (Benicio Del Toro, "The Usual Suspects").

On the other side of the fence, Gil Renard (Robert DeNiro) isn't just your ordinary baseball fan; he has one favorite player in particular.

Yep, it's Bobby.

Mind you, Gil's obsession with Bobby runs a close second to his obsession with baseball in general, dating back to his younger days when he "could've been in the majors."

By day, Gil is a knife salesman. He is a man living in an idealistic world where people are interested in quality, perfection and playing fair.

He's also a pathological liar (he thinks he knows Mick Jagger), divorced and isn't trusted whatsoever by his ex-wife. Whenever his world of perfection is threatened, he becomes verbally abusive and downright dangerous.

He just wants life to be fair.

Bobby's contract is under constant criticism from both the public and press, especially when his game starts to slip. In truth, Bobby was just thinking about the game too much and wasn't able to relax. Gil, however, is sure that it is because Bobby doesn't have his lucky number.

The obvious solution? Of course!

Gil's work doesn't stop there. When he personally finds out how Bobby feels about the game and the fans, he takes steps to bring Bobby to a new way of thinking.

The steps? Oh, kidnapping, mayhem, murder, blackmail. You know, the usual steps anyone would take.

DeNiro played a great psycho in "Cape Fear" and was wonderful as the overgrown bully in "This Boy's Life." For "The Fan," he takes the psycho character to a new level, adding the humanity and personal history sorely missed in similar films.

Snipes is very good, as well, showing the human being hidden inside the fragile idol loved by millions. His life is under the magnifying glass of the public, and when he makes a mistake, it is the public that turns on him at the drop of a hat.

Other stars appear in the film in supporting roles, but they do not do anything worthwhile. Ellen Barkin plays a tough-as-nails sports reporter/commentator, and John Leguizamo shows up as Bobby's agent. Both roles are about as useful as a candy machine at a Jenny Craig meeting.

The rest of the film outweighs this shortcoming, especially with the excellent performances from both Snipes and DeNiro.

"The Fan" may not be a grand slam, but it is definitely out of the park. Check it out.

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