

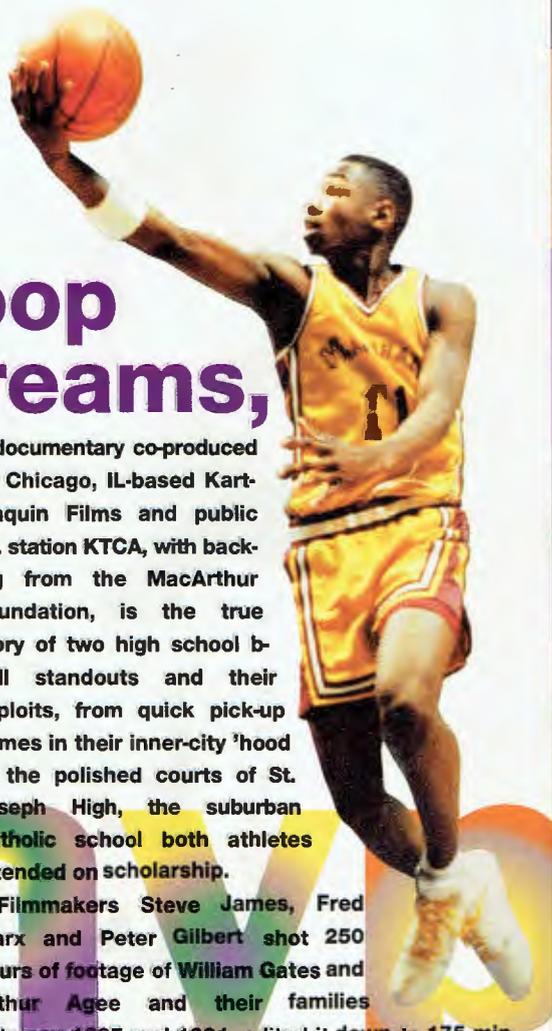
hoop dreams,

a documentary co-produced by Chicago, IL-based Kartemquin Films and public t.v. station KTCA, with backing from the MacArthur Foundation, is the true story of two high school basketball standouts and their exploits, from quick pick-up games in their inner-city 'hood to the polished courts of St. Joseph High, the suburban Catholic school both athletes attended on scholarship.

Filmmakers Steve James, Fred Marx and Peter Gilbert shot 250 hours of footage of William Gates and Arthur Agee and their families between 1987 and 1991, edited it down to 175 minutes, took it to the 1994 Sundance Film Festival and won the Audience Award for documentary.

On the surface, *Hoop Dreams* is just another basketball movie, but it becomes much more than that. It is a journey deep into the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all the young men who ever pick up a basketball and put on a high school uniform. Along the way, the three filmmakers teach viewers a lesson in the politics of high school and collegiate basketball. They give striking statistics—of the half-million high school athletes who play team basketball every year, only 2.8 percent play college ball and fewer than .005 percent of those ever make it to the NBA. They also ask tough questions—why suburban schools are allowed to practice a not-so-subtle form of racism by recruiting inner-city athletes to play on their teams. In the end, *Hoop Dreams* is more than just the title of the documentary.

— klee



ROLL 'EM

clockin' jobs

Call it fate, destiny, kismet, whatever, but **Mekhi Phifer** was definitely meant to get into the entertainment biz. The winds of fortune have blown success on the 19-year-old New York-born actor in his very first venture onto the big screen. Phifer beat out hundreds of actors (known and unknown) to land the role of Strike in the suspense movie *Clockers*, directed by **Spike Lee** and due out next spring.

"This movie is no joke. I think it's going to set the pace, because it's not depicting us as animals; it's not depicting senseless murders. It's saying, 'Yeah, we chose the wrong path,' but it lets you get into the characters," says Phifer.

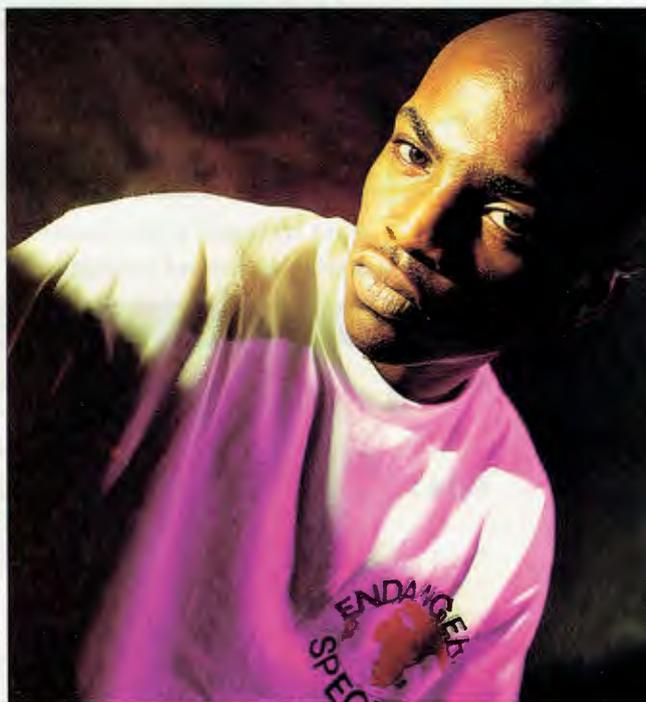
Clockers, adapted from a novel of the same name by Richard Price, presents a different look at the drug world, telling the tale of two brothers in a New Jersey housing project. **Harvey Keitel** (*The Piano*), **Delroy Lindo** (*Crooklyn*) and **Sticky Fingers** of **Onyx** are just a few of the people involved with the film.

"A friend told me about an open call for African American males between the ages of 17 and 25, but I was kind of skeptical because there were gonna be hundreds of African American males there, and they would all have pictures and I didn't have any pictures," Phifer recalls.

Want to hear how he solved the picture dilemma? He and

his cousin went to Woolworth's! They took pictures in a little booth for a couple of bucks and the rest, shall we say, is history, although Phifer doesn't brush his newfound dance with success off that easily.

"The audition was stressful. I had a lot of memorization. I met **Robi Reed**, the casting director, and she videotaped the audition. Four weeks later, I was called back to interview with **Spike Lee**. I saw the guy from *Straight Out of Brooklyn*, **Treach** from *Naughty*



phifer has made the most of a snapshot and his talent.

By Nature, **Nasty Nas** and a lot of other rappers auditioning," says Phifer.

A very down-to-earth brother, Phifer recently put college (where he plans to major in electrical engineering) on hold for a while, until he gets the acting bug out of his system. He cites his mom as his biggest inspiration and influence, saying she laid the foundation by teaching him to love and respect himself.

"I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur, I didn't like the idea of working for someone else. I like to control my own destiny," he says.

→ — sibylla nash

photograph by martin dixon