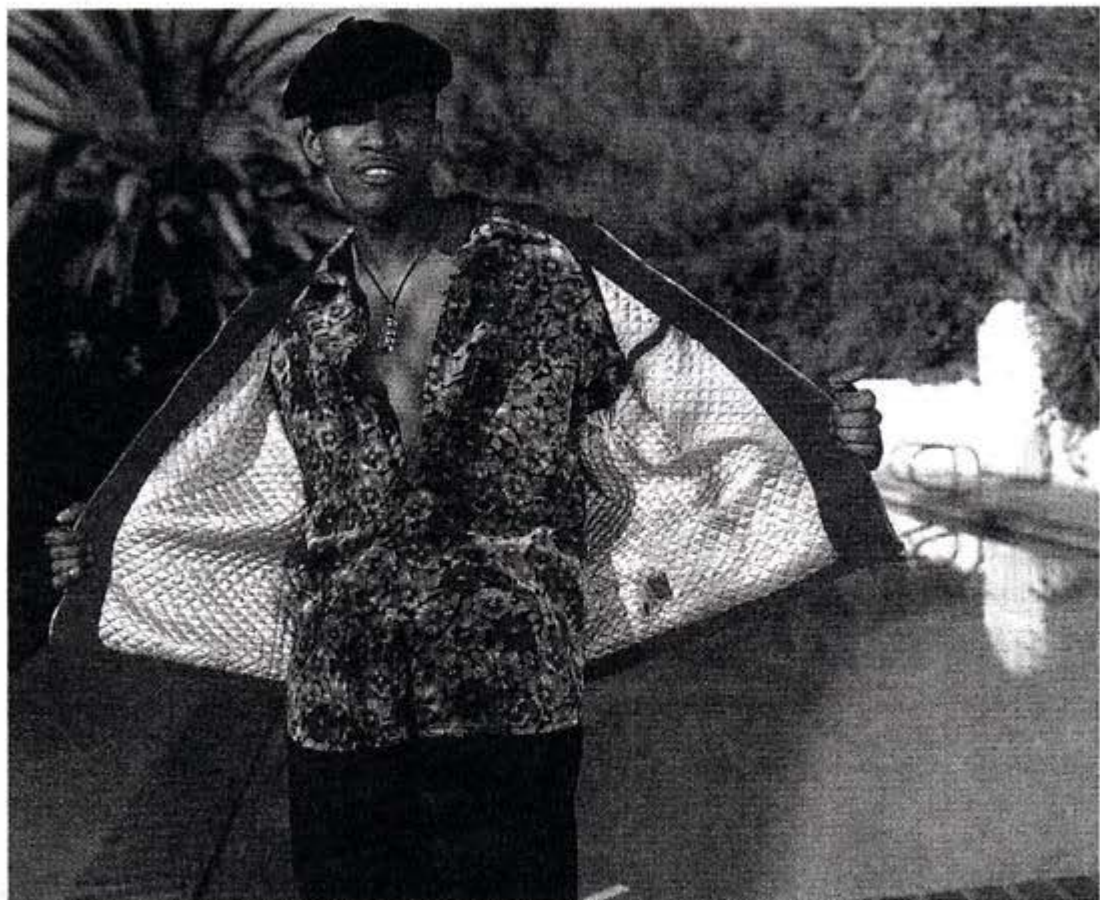


● REALLY BIG SHOW

ESPY AWARDS

Jamie Foxx shows what he's got



Actor and comedian Jamie Foxx, a local sports star in his own right, says high-school stand-out LeBron James is the real deal.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

DON'T think Jamie Foxx is hosting this week's 11th Annual ESPN Sports Awards (the ESPYS) just because he played a football star in Oliver Stone's "Any Given Sunday."

The star of the hit WB sitcom "The Jamie Foxx Show" grew up with a Dallas Cowboys poster in the room where he slept, and his family gathered every Sunday to watch their favorite team. Foxx was a star high-school quarterback but it was track that gave him his own, personal highlight reel.

"My greatest moment was [at] a regional track meet," says the 35-year-old actor, who just wound up principal photography on the Ray Charles bio-pic "Unchain My Heart."

"I'm a high jumper. I missed at six feet, twice. I'm waiting on my father to show up. He's late. He's never late. Then he pulls up in a Thunderbird — remember the old Thunderbird? Parks next to the fence and says, 'Come on.' I make six feet, six-two, six-four; make six six — and I go to the state track meet!"

That jump is still on the record books. "I'm second at six-six in the high jump," says Foxx. "The highest is seven feet. My daughter now has a record. She's nine years old. She's ranked sixth in the state

of California for high jump — at three eight. Something else, right?"

Foxx is looking forward to sharing the stage with Julius Irving, Tiger Woods, Serena Williams, Barry Bonds, Lance Armstrong and many others. And he can assure you that young phenom LeBron James — up for Best Breakthrough Athlete — has his head on straight.

"LeBron James to me is like one of the most well-adjusted cats," Foxx says. "He seems like he's having fun with it."

"And I know personally he doesn't have the 'I'm the spoiled athlete [attitude]. He really wants to try hard.'"

Foxx emphasizes how hard it can be for athletes not to go crazy when they're suddenly flooded with millions of dollars and the chance to do everything they've ever imagined. Especially African American athletes, he says.

"Why do I single out the African American male? The reason is because we come, a lot of times, from first-generation money. You're looking at years and years of poverty. So once they do get it, it's a struggle to maintain that."

"And bad things for us really count more — because it's a tastier thing when the media gets it and it's the young kid who has on the diamonds and is so flamboyant."

Foxx himself had a rare moment of negative press when he was involved in an incident at a casino in New Orleans that resulted in misdemeanor charges. (Foxx pleaded innocent; the trial is set to begin in September.) He speaks undefensively about what happened, describing it as an unfortunate event precipitated by a security guard and exacerbated by the arrival of the New Orleans police, who, Foxx says, have "a reputation for solving it with force."

Foxx speaks smartly about why athletes are turning pro at a younger age, and about them getting endorsement contracts while still in high school. He holds up as a role model people like Emmitt Smith (who maintained a spotless reputation despite playing for the "colorful" Dallas Cowboys).

Foxx continues to relish the chances he has to attend every sporting event imaginable.

"I'm going to go to the Olympics in Greece," he says. "I'm going to live on a boat. It's right there on the water."

"Everybody rides bicycles over there. So I figure I get a boat, rent it, take it out, take my daughter — and we'll just hop on our bikes and go to the Olympics."

The ESPY Awards
Wednesday, 9 p.m., ESPN