



Ghett'A Life

By Ben Nicholson • April 22nd, 2012



GHETT'A LIFE (MOVIE)
Jam rock Films

Release date: December 2nd, 2011
Certificate (UK): 15
Running time: 104 minutes

Country of origin: Jamaica
Original language: English with subtitles

Writer and director: Chris Browne

Cast: Kevoy Burton, Winston Bell, Chris McFarlane, Kadeem Wilson

I enjoy football – a lot – and over the years, on hundreds of occasions, I've been consoled by non-football fans after a heavy or bitter defeat with "never mind, it's only a game".

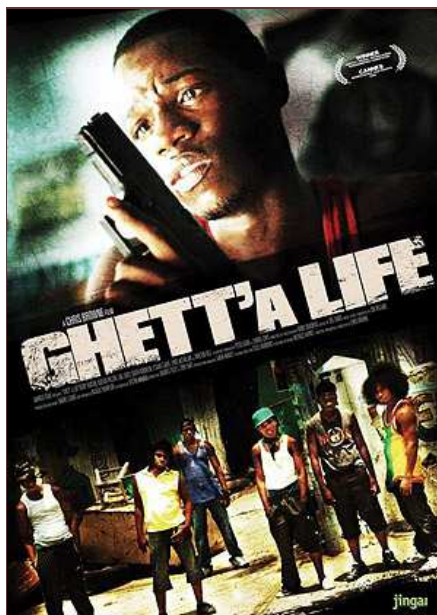
Former Liverpool manager Bill Shankly once said "some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that." I agree with him.

Having said that, I understand why people say it's just a game and doesn't matter, but sport can be important.

Last year we saw two documentaries that focused on famous sporting champions. Both showed how their success went on to help others. In Stevan Riley's cricket documentary **Fire in Babylon**, the West Indian cricket team gave the Caribbean islands a reason to join together. In Asif Kapadia's **Senna**, we saw how the Formula 1 driver's success lifted Brazil's spirit.

In another film released last year, this time a fictional story called **Ghett'a Life**, director Chris Browne also tried to show how sport can unite people. It also uses the tropes of a sports movie to show what life is like in a "garrison community" in Kingston, Jamaica – a community where gangster-like "Dons" keep people in check and supporting the chosen political party.

In such a community, Derrick (Kevoy Burton) and his best friend Big Toe (O'Daine Clarke) live. They're on one side of the political divide and are constantly butting heads with opposing youths like Gully Rat (Kadeem Wilson). Meanwhile, Derrick's father, Lenford (Carl Davis), is the latest nominee for a local council seat with his party, backed by the dangerous gangster Sin (Chris McFarlane) and his posse.



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Unbeknownst to Lenford, Sin rules with a brutal regime in which people disappear if they've betrayed the party or the community.

In amongst all of this, Derrick has a dream of becoming a boxer and when his friends' football flies over the wall into a boxing gym inhabited by youths from the opposition, he gets into a fight with Gully Rat but impresses the coach (Winston Bell) with the speed of his

punches. Although the gym won't accept him due to his political ties, he goes back and asks to box and the coach agrees to take him on, despite where he lives.

We see Derrick begin a rise to prominence as an up-and-coming local boxer, whilst lying to his parents about where he's going to avoid appearing to betray his community. As he begins a friendship with Gully Rat though, things become more complicated and Sin becomes a considerably more threatening presence in his life.

Derrick starts to despise his father and the parties for separating people into two warring tribes rather than uniting them all as Jamaicans. He aims to rise above their differences by boxing for his country – rather than for his party.

The film feels like a cross between **Rocky** (1976) and **City of God** (2002) as we see gang culture juxtaposed with boxing. However, it's filled with the clichés of a sports movie and some of the dialogue is more than slightly on-the-nose, especially when Derrick arrives at his epiphany.



Having said that, the story works, even if it is a little contrived, and the performances are all okay – Kevoy Burton portrays Derrick's earnestness with aplomb. As events spiral in the lead-up to the big fight against the Cuban, it doesn't pack the emotional wallop it's clearly aiming for – but the overall message is pretty clear and the final scene is a very nice touch.

Ultimately, what **Ghett'a Life** seems to be attempting is to highlight the garrison community culture in Jamaica whilst also showing how sport can help people rise above differences, whether or not this a realistic portrayal of either.

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Ben Nicholson

Ben has had a keen love of moving images since his childhood but after leaving school he fell truly in love with films. His passion manifests itself in his consumption of movies (watching films from all around the globe and from any period of the medium's history with equal gusto), the enjoyment he derives from reading, talking and writing about cinema and being behind the camera himself having completed his first co-directed short film in mid-2011.

His favourite films include things as diverse as *The Third Man*, *In The Mood For Love*, *Badlands*, *3 Iron*, *Casablanca*, *Ran* and *Grizzly Man* to name but a few.

Ben has his own film site, **ACHILLES AND THE TORTOISE**, and you can follow him on Twitter @BRNicholson.



—
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JESSE'S LOST JOURNAL

by Mark Patton

Jesse's Lost Journal was conceived as my subtext writings while making *Nightmare on Elm Street 2*. I stay true to the film until late in the game and then bear off in a new direction, bringing Jesse up to date and letting you see he is quite alive and doing just fine...

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