

# Stand and Deliver delivers its message painlessly, enjoyably

By Kathy Amen

*Stand and Deliver*. Directed by Ramon Menendez; written by Ramon Menendez and Tom Musca; produced by Tom Musca for Warner Bros. Starring Edward James Olmos and Lou Diamond Phillips. Rated PG (a little mildly vulgar language).

You all know the story. The team from the high school on the wrong side of the tracks is always the underdog. Then, a new teacher/coach arrives, inspires the kids to beat the odds. Through hard work, determination and desire, they win the big game.

*Stand and Deliver* plays this familiar scenario yet another time, but with a new twist. This time it's not football, but math, at which the kids learn to excel. Their final victory comes not against the team from across the town, but as a statement to the educational establishment that can't believe they could do it.

Jaime Escalante (Olmos) is a real math teacher in Los Angeles, and the true basis of the story makes it all the more exciting. He really has taught kids that have barely made it

to high school how to do complex math.

Olmos' performance is remarkable and it makes the movie work. Escalante is idealistic and determined to make a difference, but he looks like a typical middle-aged computer nerd and has definitely unconventional teaching methods. At the center of almost every scene, Olmos keeps our attention and our sympathy.

The rest of the cast is equally impressive. Phillips' character, a gang member who decides to stay with the class when his buddies desert, is a striking presence. The other kids look, act and sound more like normal kids. Andy Garcia, who was quietly impressive in *The Untouchables*, is good again here as a testing service representative.

*Stand and Deliver* is as inspiring as *Rocky*, and in an arena much more closely related to real life. It's so entertaining that it can deliver its message -- that desire and hard work can overcome any disadvantages -- painlessly and enjoyably.



Edward James Olmos -- as Jaime Escalante, an unconventional high school teacher with a radical approach to student apathy -- takes on one such disinterested student (Daniel Villarreal) in *Stand and Deliver*, a movie drawn from a real-life incident (Courtesy photo)