



The Crash Reel Discussion Guide

Director: Lucy Walker

Year: 2013

Time: 108 min

You might know this director from:

Devil's Playground (2002)

Blindsight (2006)

Countdown to Zero (2010)

Waste Land (2010)

The Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom (2011)

FILM SUMMARY

THE CRASH REEL tracks the journey of U.S. champion snowboarder Kevin Pearce whose life-changing crash turns the main passion in his life into a threat to his very survival. Both visually sumptuous, dramatic and emotionally compelling, this film explores the irresistible but potentially fatal appeal of extreme sports, as well as the intimate dynamics of one Vermont family.

Oscar-nominated filmmaker Lucy Walker seamlessly combines twenty years of stunning action footage with newly-shot verité footage and interviews after Kevin's near fatal crash leaves him with a traumatic brain injury. Kevin's doctors caution him that even a small blow to the head could be enough to kill him. In order to continue pursuing his snowboarding passion, Kevin must defy his doctors and his family, who have selflessly nurtured him back to life through two long years of recovery. THE CRASH REEL is a film about passion, about the love of sport, and the money and media pressure that drives young people to take constant risks. It's about identity, family, and ultimately about accepting oneself no matter what our "disabilities" may be. It's about love.

FILM THEMES

Director Lucy Walker said her film is “simultaneously a snowboarding movie, an anti-snowboarding movie, and a movie that is not about snowboarding at all, but about passion and how to live and how to dig deep and accept disability and embrace change and be a family and be an athlete and be an inspiration.” Her quote highlights many of the major themes raised in her film.

EXTREME SPORTS

This film raises thought-provoking questions about passion and singularity of purpose even when the stakes can literally be a matter of life and death. Though most of us don't participate in extreme sports, we still enjoy watching them on television. Many young athletes are driven by the money and media pressure to keep going higher, further, stronger. Extreme sports, and other extreme behaviors such as hot dog eating contests, trigger an innate reaction that compels us to be voyeurs who participate vicariously by watching.

FAMILY DYNAMICS

In times of crisis, families are tested. They can either come together as the Pearce family does or they can let the tensions pull them apart. Without such a caring family, it is likely that Kevin would have gone right back to snowboarding instead of learning to accept his limitations, his new brain and new possibilities in life. The strength and love of the Pearce family also shines in David Pearce, Kevin's brother with Down Syndrome—or as he prefers to call it, “Up Syndrome,” because he is “an Up kind of guy.” The Pearce family enabled this uplifting perspective.

HOLDING ONTO HOPE

For much of the film, Kevin remains determined to go back to the life he lived before his accident. But over time, with the wise counsel and concern of his family, Kevin begins to embrace his limitations and start his life anew. Kevin's journey speaks to the universal experience of suffering defeat or profound loss yet embracing change and gradually moving on with one's life.

WHAT ARE “DISABILITIES?”

David Pearce, Kevin's brother with Down Syndrome, has a habit of saying what everyone else is thinking, which is a tremendous gift to his family. His mother Pia explains that David can be so tuned-in because he's focused on emotion rather than cognition. Father Simon Pearce says he wouldn't want David any other way, that David is absolutely perfect. This begs the question: what is a disability? Perhaps we are all disabled in some way, and conversely, we all have different yet vital gifts to offer.

“Healing never ends. I will win, not immediately, but definitely.”

Kevin Pearce

“[The film] is simultaneously a snowboarding movie, an anti-snowboarding movie, and a movie that is not about snowboarding at all, but about passion and how to live and how to dig deep and accept disability and embrace change and be a family and be an athlete and be an inspiration.”

Lucy Walker

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What were your initial reactions to the film? When the credits ended and you took a deep breath, what were your thoughts and feelings?
2. Did this film give you any insights into the drive and commitment it takes to be an athlete of Olympic caliber?
3. How do you define “disability” and what is your experience with this word? Did this film cause you to view disability in a different light?
4. THE CRASH REEL takes a non-judgmental look at the nature of risk in sport. What is the price of pursuing of our passions? How much risk is too much? Is there a level of danger or risk that is too great that the sport should be banned?
5. In the U.S., certain states have passed laws that require young athletes who have suffered a serious sports-related injury to get approval from their doctor before they can return to the game. What do you think of such laws?
6. Have you ever loved something or someone so passionately, that even though you knew this passion might be destructive, you just couldn't let it go?
7. Filmmaker Lucy Walkers raises the following question: “What sort of society of spectacles have we become that kids are competing gladiator-style, where the X Games resembles nothing so much as the Hunger Games?”
8. Extreme sports not only kill their stars, but they inspire a population of young people to engage in extremely risky behavior at home. After a screening at the X Games, an athlete got up and asked, “What is our responsibility to ourselves, to one another, and to the kids who look up to us?” How would you answer this question?
9. What was Kevin's responsibility to his family and their concerns versus his own desire to return to snowboarding and his willingness to accept the risk of death were he to have another brain injury?
10. Is it better to live life to its fullest, never shying away from danger or risks even if it means cutting your life short? Or is it better to accept natural limitations and learn to be content with life?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- THE CRASH REEL is made up of Lucy Walker's original footage, plus archival footage from 232 different sources.
- Every three minutes a young athlete from 7 to 19 years old is taken to an emergency room for a concussion, according to a recent analysis of pediatric injuries recorded by U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- According to the BBC, between 260,000 to 400,000 of America's veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI), the invisible wound of war.
- The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that every year, at least 1.7 million TBIs occur either as an isolated injury or along with other injuries.
- The BBC reports that during the last decade, emergency room visits for sport- and recreation-related TBIs among children and adolescents increased by almost 60%.
- After American football, girls' soccer is the fastest-rising category of teenage TBI.
- Researchers in Canada recently reported that an estimated one in five teens have suffered a TBI that either required admission to hospital or caused them to become unconscious for at least five minutes.
- TBI is a contributing factor to a third (30.5%) of all injury-related deaths in the United States.
- According to the Center for Disease Control, direct medical costs and indirect costs such as lost productivity of TBI totaled an estimated \$76.5 billion in the United States in 2000.
- Adults aged 75 years and older have the highest rates of TBI-related hospitalization and death.
- Almost half a million (473,947) emergency department visits for TBI are made annually by children aged 0 to 14 years.
- Brain injuries are called "invisible injuries" because it's difficult to tell whether symptoms such as moods or impulsivity are coming from the injury or the person. This was the case with Kevin. His brain was not telling him how injured he was. It was hard to tell where passion ended and impaired judgement began.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film with the people in your life, so that they can also be moved by the story. Also, continue to follow and support filmmaker Lucy Walker's work: www.LucyWalkerFilm.com
2. Learn More about Traumatic Brain Injury and how to protect yourself and those you love at the Love Your Brain Campaign: www.thecrashreel.com/LoveYourBrain
3. Contribute to the Kevin Pearce Fund: www.KevinPearce.com
4. Donate to the Athlete Recovery Fund which provides financial resources to professional athletes in BMX, FMX and Skateboarding after a severe injury for rehabilitation, equipment, long-term disability and educational scholarships. www.AthleteRecoveryFund.com
5. Join the Brain Injury Recovery Network: www.TBIRecoverly.org