



## 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 exhilarating and inspiring journey of U.S. champion snowboarder Kevin Pearce, whose fast-hurling career is halted by a near fatal crash that leaves him with a traumatic brain injury. With the help of loving family and friends, he slowly recovers, determined to return to competitive snowboarding. However, Kevin's doctors warn him that even a small blow to the head could kill him. His family tries to convince him that the danger is too great, but for Kevin Pearce, snowboarding is more than just a passion and profession—it's his identity.

Oscar-nominated filmmaker Lucy Walker seamlessly weaves together newly-shot footage of candid interviews and intimate verité scenes with archival footage from over 230 sources. Spanning 20 years, the film includes breathtaking action shots and personal videos from family and friends. The result is a powerful story that explores obsessive passion, the bonds of family, friendship and rivalry among athletes, and a culture of extreme sports that pushes its stars to take dangerous risks.

THE CRASH REEL follows Kevin as he goes beyond physical recovery to true healing. After accepting his situation, he uses his experiences to help and inspire others. What emerges is a portrait of an unforgettable family and the powerful love that binds them together as Kevin gains the strength to set a new course for himself, one that continues to unfold long after the film ends.

## FILM THEMES

Director Lucy Walker describes her film as “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.”

### EXTREME SPORTS

Extreme sports celebrate escalating risk and danger because the feats are spectacular whether or not the athlete succeeds. “Crash reels” are clips of crashes that are strung together by the media, glorifying the fearless and seemingly invincible. Spectators share in the complicity by watching athletes attempt dangerous acts. Rabid fandom and lucrative sponsorship also encourage athletes to go further and higher, in turn, inspiring reckless imitation among kids who film themselves performing tricks at home.

### FAMILY DYNAMICS

The love shared within a family can be complicated by obligation. Kevin calls snowboarding “the love of his life,” but his desire to return to competition is repeatedly opposed by his family. The risk is too great, and Kevin’s brother David says simply, “I don’t want you to die.” In other scenes, Kevin’s family asks what would happen if he became injured and dependent on his family for the rest of his life. This film captures the transformative power of familial love, while also conveying how limiting and even stifling those bonds can feel at times. Kevin’s single-minded passion may seem selfish to some, while others may recognize how family duty can sometimes hold us back.

### WHAT ARE “DISABILITIES”?

Special Olympian medalist David Pearce was born with Down Syndrome, which some call “Up Syndrome,” he says, because he’s “an ‘up’ kind of guy.” David admits, however, that he hates his disability and wishes it would go away. He says sometimes he goes up to his room and cries, then comes back down and moves on to “a different day.” David doesn’t let his disability define him, but he doesn’t deny its existence either. Through his limitations, David reveals powerful abilities, such as self-acceptance, honesty, perseverance, and wisdom.

### IDENTITY

For much of the film, Kevin tries to return to who he was before the accident. He gradually accepts that his brain injury is permanent and a part of his new identity. He then uses his experience to help and inspire others. On his official website, the former professional snowboarder presents himself as an “inspirational survivor, sports commentator, motivational speaker and advocate for brain injury and Down syndrome.” Like Kevin, many of us have experienced traumas and collected scars that may never completely heal, but we must accept ourselves, recalibrate the course of our lives and try to use what we have.

**“What seems like a big amount of money when you’re 17 doesn’t really mean a lot if you wind up paralysed, dead or with a traumatic brain injury... Even at the Olympics, there is no real conversation about safety that is keeping pace with how fast the sports are developing.”**

Lucy Walker

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

Kevin Pearce



## FILM FACTS:

- 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 may have been the case for Kevin.
- 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.
- 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.
- Almost half a million (473,947) emergency department visits for TBI are made annually by children aged 0 to 14 years.
- 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.
- TBI is a contributing factor to a third (30.5%) of all injury-related deaths in the United States.
- Researchers in Canada recently reported that an estimated one in five teens have suffered a TBI that either required hospital admission or led them to be unconscious for at least 5 minutes.
- Adults aged 75 years and older have the highest rates of TBI-related hospitalization and death.
- 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.
- 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 slopestyle event debuted at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Many competitors deemed the course too dangerous. While practicing on it, Norway’s Torstein Horgmo broke his collarbone, and Finland’s Marika Enne suffered a concussion. Double Olympic champion Shaun White described the course as “intimidating” and withdrew from the event to focus on the halfpipe.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film with the people in your life. Give them the chance to be moved by the story.
2. Contribute to the [Kevin Pearce Fund](#).
3. 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.
4. Learn more about traumatic brain injury and how to protect yourself and those you love at the [Love Your Brain Campaign](#).
5. Join the [Brain Injury Recovery Network](#).

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They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**