

## **FILM REVIEW ICARUS: DOPING BETWEEN AN INDIVIDUAL CHOICE AND A GEOPOLITICAL ISSUE**

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**Abstract:** This is a review of an American film *Icarus* (2017) directed by Bryan Fogel. The documentary is essentially about doping, but what starts with an individual target becomes a geopolitical issue. The documentary won the U.S. Documentary Orwell Award from Sundance Film Festival in 2017. Understanding doping as more than a personal ethical problem, *Icarus* is a good chance to discuss about the sport system, not taking athletes as the only cheaters. The literature about drugs in sports is vast and is normally based on education, and prevention and policy. The documentary succeeds in condensing these three issues through traveling to different countries to interview members of international sports organizations.

**Keywords:** Doping; *Icarus*; Sports Organizations

### **Resenha do Filme *Icarus*: O doping entre uma escolha individual e uma temática geopolítica**

**Resumo:** Esta é uma resenha crítica do filme americano *Ícaro* (2017) dirigido por Bryan Fogel. O documentário é essencialmente sobre doping, mas o que começa com um alvo individual se torna uma questão geopolítica. O documentário ganhou o Prêmio Orwell documentário no Sundance Film Festival (EUA) em 2017. Assumindo o doping como sendo mais do que um problema ético pessoal, *Ícaro* é uma boa chance de discutir sobre o sistema esportivo, não tendo os atletas como os únicos trapaceiros. A literatura sobre drogas no esporte é vasta e normalmente é baseada na educação, prevenção e política. O documentário é bem sucedido ao condensar essas três questões quando viaja para diferentes países em busca de entrevistas com membros de organizações esportivas internacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Doping; *Icarus*; Organizações Esportivas

### **Reseña de la película *Icarus*: dopaje entre una elección individual y una cuestión geopolítica**

**Resumen:** Esta es una reseña de una película estadounidense *Icarus* (2017) dirigida por Bryan Fogel. El documental es esencialmente sobre el dopaje, pero lo que comienza con un objetivo individual se convierte en una cuestión geopolítica. El documental ganó el Premio Orwell Documental de Sundance Festival Film de los Estados Unidos en 2017. Asumiendo que el dopaje es más que un problema ético personal, *Icarus* es una buena oportunidad para discutir sobre el sistema deportivo, no tomando a los atletas como los únicos tramposos. La literatura sobre drogas en el deporte es vasta y normalmente se basa en la educación, y la prevención y la política. El documental tiene éxito en condensar estos tres problemas cuando se viaja a diferentes países en busca de entrevistas con miembros de organizaciones deportivas internacionales.

**Palabras-clave:** Dopaje; *Icarus*; Organizaciones Deportivas

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One of the most well-known characters in mythological history is Icarus. The man who flew like a bird until his humanly defaults tore him away from the gods. Icarus' father fashioned him wings from bees wax and feathers, which would release the two of them from the labyrinth in which they were imprisoned. The wings set them free from not only the limits of the walls, but mankind's confines to walking the earth. Not heeding the warning of his father, Icarus soared so close to sun, and the gods at that, that his wings tragically melted and he fell, crashing mortally back down to earth. There are many interpretations of the myth. In one we see Icarus' over-ambition and disregard for limits; and the other we see his father who hands him the means for his initial delimitation yet withholds the sufficient protection from perils. Thus, leading to his eventual downfall. The documentary bearing the same name explores who is to blame for a society sick with the obsession of exceeding the limits of sport.

Yet, athletes are often trapped between expectations of better performances and suspicious methods to attain them. Meanwhile, over time some testing technologies are still not qualified to put them out of the game or there is no institutional interest to do so. The bibliography about this topic is vast and generally agrees with Paul Dimeo's book (2007) that such things often lay in a grey zone and go "beyond Good and Evil".

The documentary is claimed to have been an accident. The work of a disgruntled amateur athlete and a disgraced Russian ex-doping agent. Bryan Fogal, the director, sets off on a mission to reveal the ease of cheating the doping tests by partaking in a difficult bike competition, during which he follows the doping instructions of Grigory Rodchenkov. Indeed, one can argue that Fogal had only embarked on a path of whistleblowing to enlighten the public of the misdemeanors of highly regarded athletes and powerful governments. Yet, as he points the finger at everyone else, he actually catches himself off guard. In the end, he inadvertently portrays himself as another rat in the rat race, consumed by sports falsities and his own unrealistic morality.

The documentary's opening is intriguing. Graphic images of Fogal injecting steroids into his body compel the audience to watch and discover who would buy in to such a traumatic ordeal. Having said this, the whole

world seems to be enchanted by international sporting competitions. We are drawn by our own patriotisms and competitiveness to follow these sports, as well as an innate intrigue to hear about the criminal world, which is why the proposal of the documentary is perfectly tailored to modern society. However, along the journey we can expect to take away far more than Fogal promises.

*Icarus* clearly exposes a complex labyrinth that bypasses the doping regulations. Initially we see first-hand the steps the athlete must take when using performance enhancing drugs, while the backwaters and trapped doors are simultaneously exposed. The tricks and deals that government agents transact to deceive doping tests. Shortly before the Rio Olympics of 2016 it was disclosed that most likely the whopping 69 medals the Russian athletes carried home from London 2012, had been implicated in the doping scandal. What followed was a dispute of what sort of severity should be applied to the Russian athletes. It was a dispute that left all those involved both to blame, yet equally blameless when examining the roots of the problem.

Clearly, the stagnation in great wars, independence and civil land disputes on a grand scale have diminished the brash and obviously violent ways to exert your power as a nation over another. Therefore, this new way to brandish your worldly power emerged. This power struggle between the "greatest" nations is regularly broadcast in all international sporting events, and exceptionally so in the Olympics. Although in the beginning, the documentary firmly depicts the goofy Russian doping agent, Grigory Rodchenkov, as the scapegoat, by the end the blame has shifted to Russia as a Nation and their leader Putin. Nevertheless, in this report we implore you to also consider other factors that were involved.

There is no doubt that Russia has been exposed. It is clearly part of an immense scandal, but that being said, what other countries can be implicated? Could the camera so easily have been turned on Trump's patriarchy, China's empire or Queen Elizabeth's corgi entourage?

Overall, *Icarus* could be considered an ideal depiction of the immense pressure that society has put on everyday people to appear, in a manner of speaking, as perfect sculpted gods. Nowadays, people aspire for the bodies of the Greek statues (myths and legends we must add) we awe at in the

museums, or even the photo-shopped images of celebrities and models adorned on magazines and our television screens. The need to improve yourself to reach what society deems perfection. Or else prove that you can reach the outer limits like Icarus to a point where you come crashing down, either unceremoniously exposed by doping scandals as Armstrong was, or by a formidable injury. Or even that your money cannot stretch to purchase the state-of-the-art equipment that gives you the leg up to the starter lane. The narrator does not see that he himself in his disgruntled attempt to blame Russia, embodied the misperception of society's limits. Do we have an unhealthy relationship with being healthy?

Therefore, all levels of sports need to be rethought and the enjoyment needs to be instilled in the younger generations before sport becomes an outright mockery and a dangerous one. There are two powers at play: the country leaders using their athletes as little pawn gods; and the obsession of society to push people into a false rat race with unrealistic, godly goals.

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