

Athlete A

Athlete A is a 2020 American documentary film about the USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal. Directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk, the documentary follows a team of investigative journalists from *The Indianapolis Star* as they broke the story of doctor Larry Nassar sexually assaulting young female gymnasts and the subsequent allegations that engulfed USA Gymnastics (USAG) and its then-CEO Steve Penny. It was released on June 24, 2020, by Netflix.

The title refers to gymnast Maggie Nichols who was referred to as "Athlete A" to protect her identity while investigations into her sexual abuse by USAG doctor Larry Nassar were ongoing.


Summary

While researching a story on the failure of schools to report sexual abuse, a reporter at *The Indianapolis Star* has a source reach out to her to suggest she look into USAG. The reporters at *The Star* collaborate on a piece that reveals that Steve Penny, president of the organization, worked to cover for abusive coaches. When the piece is published in 2014, Rachael Denhollander, Jessica Howard, and Jamie Dantzscher independently reach out to the team at *The Star* to reveal that they were sexually abused by USAG doctor Larry Nassar. Only Denhollander is willing to immediately speak on the record; during her interview she reveals that she is finally ready to come forward and plans on speaking to the police about what happened to her.

In 2015, gymnast Maggie Nichols is sexually abused by Nassar at the Karolyi Ranch and reveals the abuse to her coach who informs her parents. Her parents are called by Penny, who informs them he has reached out to law enforcement to investigate the abuse.

In 2016, *The Star* publishes its investigation into Nassar and Denhollander goes to the police with her evidence against Nassar. Maggie Nichols's parents, frustrated with the lack of information about their daughter's case, reach out to a lawyer who is working with other victims and discover that USAG was told of abuse going back at least as far as 2012. The criminal prosecution of Nassar goes forward, and he reaches a plea deal in 2017. Nevertheless, *The Star* continues to investigate the abuses perpetrated by USAG.

Penny is eventually arrested in 2017 for his role in covering up Nassar's abuse.

<i>Athlete A</i>	
	
Promotional poster	
Directed by	<u>Bonni Cohen</u> <u>Jon Shenk</u>
Produced by	<u>Serin Marshall</u> <u>Jen Sey</u> <u>Julie Parker Benello</u>
Edited by	<u>Don Bernier</u>
Music by	<u>Jeff Beal</u>
Production company	<u>Actual Films</u>
Distributed by	<u>Netflix</u>
Release date	June 24, 2020
Running time	104 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English

Nichols leaves elite gymnastics after being left off the 2016 US gymnastics Olympics team, which the documentary implies was because of her role in coming forward against Nassar.^[a] She competes in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) gymnastics, which reinvigorates her love of the sport.

Release

Athlete A was scheduled to have its world premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival on April 17, 2020, but the festival was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.^{[2][3]} The film therefore premiered when it was released on Netflix on June 24, 2020.^[4]

Reception

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 100% of 60 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.4/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Athlete A* shines an unforgiving light on horrific abuses—as well as the culture that allowed them to continue unabated for years."^[5] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 85 out of 100, based on 12 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[6]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Critics' Choice Documentary Awards</u>	November 16, 2020	Best Sports Documentary	<i>Athlete A</i>	Won	^[7] ^[8]
		Best Documentary Feature		Nominated	
		Best Director	Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk	Nominated	
		Best Editing	Don Bernier	Nominated	
		Most Compelling Living Subjects of a Documentary	<u>Maggie Nichols</u> , <u>Rachael Denhollander</u> and <u>Jamie Dantzscher</u>	Won	
<u>Alliance of Women Film Journalists</u>	January 4, 2021	Best Documentary	<i>Athlete A</i>	Nominated	^[9]
<u>San Diego Film Critics Society</u>	January 11, 2021	Best Documentary		Nominated	^[10]
<u>Hollywood Music in Media Awards</u>	January 27, 2021	Best Original Score in a Documentary	<u>Jeff Beal</u>	Nominated	^[11]

- a. The opinion that Nichols' being left off the team was due to her reporting of Nassar is a controversial one, with many gymnastics outlets noting that Nichols suffered a knee injury a few months before the Olympics and was nowhere near her peak form at the Olympic Trials, despite having won multiple medals at the World Championships the previous year. That she was not named an alternate is more surprising, with Lauren Hopkins of The Gymternet speculating that the judges may have been asked by USA Gymnastics to score Nichols such that her rank would not warrant an alternate spot.

References

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3. Beresford, Tribly; Lewis, Hilary (March 12, 2020). "Tribeca Film Festival Postponed Amid Coronavirus Fears" (<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/tribeca-film-festival-postponed-due-coronavirus-1283051>). *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved June 14, 2020.
4. Adams, Dwight (June 4, 2020). "What to expect from 'Athlete A', the Netflix documentary about abusive doctor Larry Nassar" (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2020/06/04/larry-nassar-usa-gymnastics-what-expect-netflix-athlete-a-documentary/3145360001/>). *USA Today*. Retrieved June 14, 2020.
5. "Athlete A (2020)" (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/athlete_a). *Rotten Tomatoes*. Fandango. Retrieved February 27, 2023.
6. "Athlete A Reviews" (<https://www.metacritic.com/movie/athlete-a>). *Metacritic*. Retrieved July 30, 2020.
7. Moreau, Jordan (November 16, 2020). "'Dick Johnson Is Dead' Wins Best Feature at Critics Choice Documentary Awards" (<https://variety.com/2020/film/awards/critics-choice-documentary-awards-dick-johnson-is-dead-1234832932/>). *Variety*. Retrieved January 7, 2021.
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9. Davis, Clayton (January 4, 2021). "'Nomadland' Triumphs at Alliance of Women Film Journalists Awards (EXCLUSIVE)" (<https://variety.com/2021/film/awards/alliance-of-women-film-journalists-awards-nomadland-1234878313/>). *Variety*. Retrieved January 7, 2021.
10. "San Diego Film Critics Society 2020 Awards Nominations" (<http://www.sdfcs.org/2020-nominations/>). San Diego Film Critics Society. January 8, 2021. Retrieved January 14, 2021.
11. Grein, Paul (January 27, 2021). "Diane Warren & James Newton Howard Among Top Winners at 2021 Hollywood Music in Media Awards" (<https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/awards/9517388/diane-warren-james-newton-howard-winners-2021-hollywood-music-in-media-awards/>). *Billboard*. Retrieved January 28, 2021.

External links

- *Athlete A* (<https://www.netflix.com/title/81034185>) on Netflix
- *Athlete A* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11905462/>) at IMDb

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