

# Film Review: Foxcatcher

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**Foxcatcher** is not an easy movie to sit through. In fact it's quite unpleasant, oppressively intense from the start of the movie, and by the time the movie is over, you'll feel as if all your joy and life has been sucked from you. You'll also be hankering to see it again as *Foxcatcher* is also one of the finest films of the year.

When we arrive at the beginning of our tale, Mark Schultz (**Channing Tatum**) has been stuck in a malaise. A former Olympic gold medalist, he's now spending time doing visits to schools, eating ramen with hot sauce in a sparse apartment and training with his brother Dave Schultz (**Mark Ruffalo**). His life gets a bit of an injection when he is courted by millionaire John du Pont (**Steve Carell**) to come train at his home and help build an Olympic team. What seems like an ideal set up (unlimited resources, his own house, helping craft a team) slowly erodes into a tense mixture of shattered dreams, psychological issues and despair.

I don't know how to properly talk about this film as my soul has yet to recover from the movie. Watching *Foxcatcher* is like having your heart put into a vice grip for two hours and fifteen minutes. **Bennett Miller** paints such a bleak and unrelenting picture of psychosis, machismo and darkness that in the happy moments you'll be gasping for air. This isn't to say the movie is too dark to enjoy as I found myself captivated by every character beat the movie hit and the journey the film took me on, just that Miller wants you to feel the weight of the proceedings. You feel as tired as Dave or Mark Shultz after a training match or as put upon as John du Pont by the time the movie is over. Miller, who dazzled with *Capote* and *Moneyball*, takes yet another step in his career at crafting incredibly thorough character study. I remarked after the film that the film feels so claustrophobic without being forcefully so. There are so many scenes that standout in this regard, and Miller is a director unafraid to let the moment be. Take for instance the introduction to the brothers via a brutally almost silent sparring match or a shot near the end of the film with du Pont jogging around the *Foxcatcher* gym, Miller, along with his DP **Greg Fraiser** and composer **Rob Simonsen**, are just masterful. There's never a point during this film where you don't feel like you're in the hands of a sterling creative team and the daunting tale still has a visual might.

Of course it's easy to craft engaging scenes when you are working with an airtight script. **E. Max Frye** and **Dan Futterman** have set up an incredibly fascinating chamber piece and character study with *Foxcatcher*. The movie has a lot to accomplish both thematically and plot wise, and these two writers manage to find a really great

balance between two. This movie has so much to say and does so without stopping for speeches or twisting the narrative to those whims. There's so much to dive into with this film regarding the athlete's psyche, the drive for excellence, and the blurred lines between brotherhood/mentorship with regards to Mark/Dave/John and the movie finds interesting ways to do this. Foxcatcher is really a feat considering that its a bleak movie where the characters don't achieve their goals and yet you never get depressed. Most surprising to me is how effortlessly the script moves through time (the movie covers about 10 years) without any issue.

While everything in the film works, Foxcatcher wouldn't have reached the incredible heights it does without a phenomenal trio of performances at its center. To be asked to pick out a best in show is impossible given what each man has to offer. As the brother, Mark Ruffalo continues to find new ways to explore natural humanity. His role is much less showy than the other two and yet you never lose him on screen and he makes the brotherly bond feel real from the first moment on screen. Speaking of things working from the first moment, Steve Carell, my word, what a performance. Every time he's on screen there's a sense of palpable dread and unease, which is amazing given his character's pitifulness and lack of physical imposing-ness. Much will be made of the prosthetic nose he has to wear but Carell's chilling performance is so much more than a physical trait, he gets into this character's head. What he found there is hard for me to say, you never truly find out du Pont's motivations, but Carell isn't here to make his character easily explainable. The final piece of the puzzle is Channing Tatum, an actor who finally seems to be realizing his potential. Mark is a character someone like Channing should be playing at this stage in his career and he does the most with the part. He uses every ounce of his physicality with this role as a wrestler but it's the psychology of this character that he lets pour through the screen, channeling the character's inner turmoil and fraying mental state as well as the physical.

Foxcatcher is a movie that shows the worst of us while being one of the best films of the year. You owe it to yourself to run to check it out.