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'Foxcatcher' a twisted American dream

There's a nearly wordless scene early on in the disturbing tragedy "Foxcatcher," now playing at Liberty Hall, that beautifully sets up the relationship between brothers and wrestlers Mark Schultz (Channing Tatum) and Dave Schultz (Mark Ruffalo).

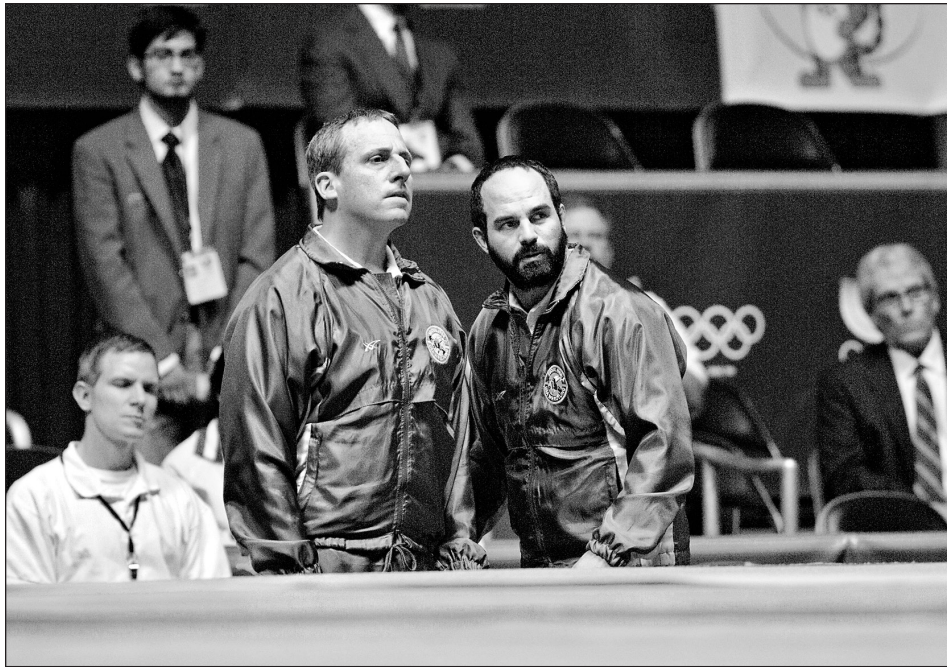
They grapple with one another during a training exercise at their blue-collar gym, and for younger brother Mark, there is clearly something to prove. It's jarring to see such intense physicality between men, while also understanding that this is a commonplace routine for the two gold medalists.

When older brother Dave gets the upper hand, Mark lashes out and accidentally draws blood. When Dave brushes it off casually, it only makes Mark seem more desperate.

Bennett Miller, recently nominated for a best director Oscar, exerts exquisite control over "Foxcatcher," which is based on a true story, but is so atmospheric that it plays like a horror film. It's a tough watch to be sure, and it's also rewarding — not from a satisfying plot standpoint but in that the spell it so completely casts.

The image of millionaire John du Pont (Steve Carell) wandering alone in the morning mist on his enormous Pennsylvania estate, his face cocked slightly up in a frozen expression of entitlement, is one I still can't shake. John is the wannabe father figure to Mark, who comes to live on Foxcatcher Farm and train for the 1988 Olympics in the best facility money can buy.

The bulk of "Foxcatcher" is made up of subtle trade-offs between these two men. Tatum fills Mark with all kinds of pent-up rage that he's only able to express on the mat, while Carell's du Pont is about as creepy



Steve Carell, left, and Mark Ruffalo in "Foxcatcher."

SCENE STEALERS



ERIC MELIN

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as it gets. His conversation is stilted and unsure, but somehow also filled with arrogance and power.

Mark goes along with John's increasingly strange behavior — which includes the patrician competing in a local wrestling tournament created for the sole unspoken purpose of letting him win — because of his access to the gym and equipment.

There's no backstory to explain any of the bizarre behavior in the movie, although one definite piece of age-old motivation is introduced. Mark lives in his brother's shadow — it's Dave who has all the

social skills and a well-adjusted family — while du Pont is haunted by his mother (Vanessa Redgrave), who cares more for her horses than her wrestling-obsessed son.

Like his previous films "Moneyball" and "Capote," Miller has a keen eye for examining the intersection of class, money and ambition. The screenplay, from Dan Futterman and E. Max Frye, compresses the timeline of the story, moves key scenes around, and favors character over action, but it absolutely stays focused on these difficult larger themes.

John du Pont calls himself the "Golden Eagle" and prattles on unconvincingly about why the team needs to win for America, but "Foxcatcher" reveals American ideals twisted beyond belief.

Free State Film Festival Winterfest

The ever-growing Free State Festival isn't until June, but the Lawrence Arts Center will be hosting a two-day mini-fest Jan. 30 and 31 featuring two movies hot off the festival circuit that have local ties, which should ramp up excitement a

her creative partner Brandon Walter. They shot it in Los Angeles, where they live, and Brown is excited to bring the film to Lawrence, where she still has many friends.

"This level of success makes us feel like we are on the right path in our lives. It's funny, because when you first submit to festivals and initially you get those first rejections, the fear sets in and you start to wonder if you might have made a colossal mistake," she says. "Maybe your movie is actually a disaster and you wasted all of your sweat, blood and tears on a film no one else can appreciate. After the first acceptance, I was able to breathe again."

Thanks to the film's festival visibility, "Gone Doggy Gone" now has domestic distribution with Indican Pictures and foreign distribution with Showcase Entertainment. It turns out that audiences all over the world can relate to the movie, not just Americans who live in big cities.

"One person told us he brought his wife to the film because she was just like Kasi's character who treats their dog like an actual baby," Walter says. "He refused to tell her what the movie was about, and as it played, she saw

herself in Abby. He told us she really liked it and that it made her look at her own behavior. We do wonder, though, if they're still married."

The Sublime and Beautiful (Official Trailer) by Candy Factory Films

Also playing at Winterfest is the locally shot "The Sublime and Beautiful," which has also screened and collected awards internationally. This family drama from writer/director/star Blake Robbins was co-produced by and co-stars Lawrencean Laura Kirk. For more information on the Free State Film Festival Winterfest, go to lawrenceartscenter.org/winterfest.

— Eric Melin is the editor-in-chief of Scene-Stealers. He's a member of the Broadcast Film Critics Association and vice president of the Kansas City Film Critics Circle.

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COMPLETE LIST OF OSCAR NOMINEES

Complete list of 87th annual Academy Award nominations:

Best picture: "American Sniper"; "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; "Boyhood"; "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "The Imitation Game"; "Selma"; "The Theory of Everything"; "Whiplash."

Actor: Steve Carell, "Foxcatcher"; Bradley Cooper, "American Sniper"; Benedict Cumberbatch, "The Imitation Game"; Michael Keaton, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; Eddie Redmayne, "The Theory of Everything."

Actress: Marion Cotillard, "Two Days, One Night"; Felicity Jones, "The Theory of Everything"; Julianne Moore, "Still Alice"; Rosamund Pike, "Gone Girl"; Reese Witherspoon, "Wild."

Supporting actor: Robert Duval, "The Judge"; Ethan Hawke, "Boyhood"; Edward Norton, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; Mark Ruffalo, "Foxcatcher"; J.K. Simmons, "Whiplash."

Supporting actress: Patricia Arquette, "Boyhood"; Laura Dern, "Wild"; Keira Knightley, "The Imitation Game"; Emma Stone, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; Meryl Streep, "Into the Woods."

Directing: Alejandro G. Inarritu, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; Richard Linklater, "Boyhood"; Bennett Miller, "Foxcatcher"; Wes Anderson, "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; Morten Tyldum, "The Imitation Game."

Foreign language film: "Ida"; "Leviathan"; "Tan-

gerines"; "Timbuktu"; "Wild Tales."

Adapted screenplay: Jason Hall, "American Sniper"; Graham Moore, "The Imitation Game"; Paul Thomas Anderson, "Inherent Vice"; Anthony McCarten, "The Theory of Everything"; Damien Chazelle, "Whiplash."

Original screenplay: Alejandro G. Inarritu, Nicolas Giacobone, Alexander Dinelaris Jr. and Armando Bo, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; Richard Linklater, "Boyhood"; E. Max Frye and Dan Futterman, "Foxcatcher"; Wes Anderson (screenplay) and story by Wes Anderson and Hugo Guinness, "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; Dan Gilroy, "Nightcrawler."

Animated feature film: "Big Hero 6"; "The Boxtrolls"; "How to Train Your Dragon 2"; "Song of the Sea"; "The Tale of the Princess Kaguya."

Production design: "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "The Imitation Game"; "Interstellar"; "Into the Woods"; "Mr. Turner."

Cinematography: "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "Ida"; "Mr. Turner"; "Unbroken."

Sound mixing: "American Sniper"; "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; "Interstellar"; "Unbroken"; "Whiplash."

Sound editing: "American Sniper"; "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)"; "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies"; "Interstellar"; "Unbroken."

Original score: "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "The

Imitation Game"; "Interstellar"; "Mr. Turner"; "The Theory of Everything."

Original song: "Everything Is Awesome" from "The Lego Movie"; "Glory" from "Selma"; "Grateful" from "Beyond the Lights"; "I'm Not Gonna Miss You" from "Glen Campbell ... I'll Be Me"; "Lost Stars" from "Begin Again."

Costume design: "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "Inherent Vice"; "Into the Woods"; "Maleficent"; "Mr. Turner."

Documentary feature: "CitizenFour"; "Finding Vivian Maier"; "Last Days in Vietnam"; "The Salt of the Earth"; "Virunga."

Documentary (short subject): "Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1"; "Joanna"; "Our Curse"; "The Reaper (La Parka)"; "White Earth."

Film editing: "American Sniper"; "Boyhood"; "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "The Imitation Game"; "Whiplash."

Makeup and hairstyling: "Foxcatcher"; "The Grand Budapest Hotel"; "Guardians of the Galaxy."

Animated short film: "The Bigger Picture"; "The Dam Keeper"; "Feast"; "Me and My Moulton"; "A Single Life."

Live action short film: "Aya"; "Boogaloo and Graham"; "Butter Lamp (La Lampe Au Beurre De Yak)"; "Parvaneh"; "The Phone Call."

Visual effects: "Captain America: The Winter Soldier"; "Dawn of the Planet of the Apes"; "Guardians of the Galaxy"; "Interstellar"; "X-Men: Days of Future Past."

— The Associated Press