



The Dirtiest Race in History: Ben Johnson, Carl Lewis and the Olympic 100m Final

Richard Moore

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The 1988 Seoul Olympics hosted what has been described as both "the dirtiest race of all time" and "the greatest track event in history." The unforgettable men's 100 meter race has become infamous for the elation of breaking a seemingly impossible world record for human speed and for the doping scandal that followed. This book is a groundbreaking investigative account into the story of Ben Johnson and Carl Lewis, and how one of the oldest of Olympic sports became a complex high-stakes game of cheating, cover-up, and fallen heroes.

The book follows the remarkable buildup to the showdown of the two rival track superstars and chronicles Johnson's gold medal win, a title he retained only briefly before he tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs and Lewis was awarded the gold. In 1999, however, after being named Sportsman of the Century by the IOC, Lewis his credibility damaged by revelations that he, too, used performance-enhancing drugs and tested positive prior to the Seoul Olympics.

Containing stunning new revelations, this book features candid witness interviews, including with Johnson and Lewis, to reconstruct the race, the hype, the drugs, and the deception, and it examines how the fallout continues to impact sports today, as every new record is met with widespread skepticism.

The Dirtiest Race in History: Ben Johnson, Carl Lewis and the Olympic 100m Final Details

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From Reader Review The Dirtiest Race in History: Ben Johnson, Carl Lewis and the Olympic 100m Final for online ebook

David says

This is THE book to read about the scandalous 1988 100m Olympic final in Seoul. It's a riveting read that goes back and forth between Carl Lewis, Ben Johnson, their coaches, managers, hangers-on, reporters, and fellow competitors.

You get the back stories of the 2 main guys, their confrontations with each other on the track before 1988, and everything that led up to their final meeting in Seoul at the Olympics. Plus, there is some post Olympics updates on the main players involved. 6 of the 8 competitors in that final were implicated in some sort of drug controversy at some point in their career! Including Carl Lewis.

The author interviews almost everyone that is humanely possible for the book, so it feels very complete and thorough. The only interviews he couldn't seem to get are with people who were already deceased and, of course, Carl Lewis. Though in the end, he does get some quotes from him. Charlie Francis (Ben Johnson's coach) had already died by the time of the writing of the book, which is disappointing. But, since Francis had already written a book and testified at the Dubin inquiry, his opinions and quotes are stated which helps to round out his position.

If you have any interest in this race and the circumstances surrounding it, then it's a great read for you.

Peter Boyle says

I clearly remember, as a 7-year-old living in two-channel rural Ireland, hearing the phrase "anabolic steroids" for the first time in the aftermath of this momentous race. That's how big this story was - it shook the world of sport to its very foundations.

As a previous reviewer has remarked, there are two stories in this book - the simmering rivalry between the aloof Carl Lewis and mellow Ben Johnson and the drug culture that overwhelmed the world of athletics in the 80s. I found the former by far the more interesting, the hatred and jealousy between two sprinters at the pinnacles of their career propelled the 100 metres into the blue riband event it is today. The doping scandal however is mired in politics and technicalities and didn't grab me as much as the duel on the track.

Still there is much here to intrigue and beguile - Johnson in particular is good value for a worthy sound-bite. Recommended for any sports fan who wants to learn more about the most famous race of the twentieth century.

James Morcan says

Forget Usain Bolt...Forget Carl Lewis...Ben Johnson #1 sprinter of all time in my books.

I was just a kid when watching the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. Was a fan of Carl Lewis before that, but then Ben Johnson came along and completely blitzed everyone else - and made it look easy!

At the time I thought he was a "cheat" after the news came out next day.

HOWEVER, in hindsight, now that it's obvious virtually all elite athletes are on some sort of drugs, and that everyone else in that 100M final (including Carl Lewis) has also been shown with subsequent testing to have also used steroids, I now think Ben Johnson is the greatest 100M runner ever.

9.79 in 1988 is better (counting "inflation") than Usain Bolt's recent times these decades later.

Also think Johnson could have achieved a lot more if he had been able to continue in his career.

Matt says

This is the second of Richard Moore's inquiries into the murky world of doping in sprinting and probably it is even better than "The Bolt Supremacy". He's aided for the most part by the presence of a smoking gun in the form of Ben Johnson's positive drugs test following his astonishing 9.79 in the 1988 Olympic 100m final.

Johnson's positive drugs test was perhaps the biggest story in modern Olympic history. Previously, the drugs cheats had been minor figures or Bulgarian weightlifters while, in general, sporting heavyweight figures avoided the disastrous consequences of a positive test. The question, then, becomes only whether the more established stars - where the money is - are better protected or not. Moore's answer is yes, and it's hard to disagree. Whether it's an entire safe containing the key to numerous positive drug tests at the 1984 Olympics going missing, or the testimony at the inquiry into Johnson's positive test revealing that multiple US competing athletes had been doped prior to competition, or the positive test of Johnson's arch rival Carl Lewis being hushed up based upon his testimony to having drunk some herbal tea before the test, drug cheats are everywhere in the narrative.

This casts Johnson as a tragic character, a man more sinned against than sinning. There is even a strong story in support of Johnson actually being doped by an associate of Carl Lewis before he took his test. Certainly it is fact that Andre Jackson, long time friend to the Lewis camp, was inexplicably photographed in the testing area handing Ben Johnson beers - eight of them, according to the man himself. As for Jackson, Moore tracked him down and Jackson refused him a denial, whatever the reason.

Not that Johnson was innocent - he's an admitted drugs cheat. His coach, however, insists that he tested positive for the wrong drugs...

In the end, what strikes most about this era is the lack of professionalism. Coaches were doping athletes experimentally, seeing what worked and what didn't based upon a sort of folksy pre-internet rumour mill. Johnson may have panicked at shaky form going into the tournament and doped during a visit to St. Kitts. There's no way to know, in the end.

But the exploration of possibilities and most of all the bitter rivalry between Lewis and Johnson is explored deftly here. I enjoyed every minute of this book, and the "boring bits" about the rules governing drug use just deepen the narrative in this case.

A sobering thought is that of the eight men who ran the most dramatic 100m race in history, six were labelled drug cheats, and that the cheats have become much better at what they do.

Shawna says

Good if you love sports anecdotes.

Ralph Smith says

I remember where I was in 1988 when Ben Johnson won the 100m and the same for when the news on doping came out. Moore's book not only reminds us of the era but gives us a lot of behind-the-scenes insight. Very much worth a read.

Dave says

Not the normal type of thing I read but a study of drug use in cycling somehow led me to discovering this book. I do remember the race and watching it at the time and this book describes the story in refreshing detail. I think we all knew at the time that Johnson wasn't the only doper and squeaky clean Lewis looked suspect as did Christie. The novel seems to blot everyone's copybook and rightly so thank god that age of blind ignorance and believe in 'clean' Olympic athletes has come to an end. Although a few modern day winners still seem to dip under the radar.

Heather Fineisen says

Remember Carl Lewis and Ben Johnson? I was watching Espn's 30 for 30 and came across this riveting documentary and needed to know more. This book provided an interesting and exciting snapshot of this rivalry as well as the story of doping in the international running arena. This was a subject I didn't even know I was interested in, but the book captured my attention and never let go. Riveting for any reader. Moore also covers the dilemma of college and amateur sports vs. Sponsors and what goes on behind the scenes. Recommended reading for any sports enthusiast, runner or Olympic junkie. And if you just like a good story with colorful characters and a place in history, pick it up. A good read all around.

Corinna Liscumb says

So, so good. It read almost like a thriller. I'm left with lots of feelings and wanting to know more about doping in sports.

Simon says

"I did nothing wrong. I didn't kill anybody." - Ben Johnson

But what Johnson admits to doing or not doing has changed over the years. As this riveting book makes clear, there's no definitive account of what happened in Seoul in 1988 or the years leading up to it. There are self-justificatory accounts, confessional accounts, official reports run through with political vested interests, media narratives framed by race and nationalism, and memories and false memories that intersect and

overlap and contradict. This was a pivotal era in the history of sport, as money and big business overwhelmed traditional structures of governance, and corruption broadly defined was a feature from the throne rooms of the IOC to the flat tracks of the Olympic stadia. Nobody really emerges from this book with any credit - Lewis is cold and enigmatic and annoying, Johnson is by turns shifty and defiant and naïve, and it's pretty clear that everybody was up to their nuts in everything. It would be nice to think that track and field today is different, but people are people, money talks, and how many of us could say with absolute certainty that we wouldn't sell our souls for 9.92 seconds at the top of the world.

(Thanks to my kind and thoughtful friend Rob for this present.)

Colin Leak says

crazy read...hard to know who to believe...

Pinar Gungor says

O kadar cok detay ve kisi var ki okurken karisitirmaya basladim. Doping dunyasi icin guzel bir kitap.

Adrian Gray says

A fascinating account of the 1988 Men's 100m final and its two main characters: Carl Lewis and Ben Johnson. Moore has unearthed some fascinating details and tells the story well. You come out with a lot of sympathy for Ben Johnson and an awareness that Lewis was a very complex and contradictory personality.

Conrad Timon says

Just ok a bit of a boor.

Davidmaher says

This was the race of my childhood. I re-call a group of us staying over in a friends house setting our alarms to watch the race. We must have been around 11. Of course we tried to stay up all night but fell asleep 30 mins before the race and missed it. We say it on the news over our breakfast and was still as amazing as we watched it live. What a build up and what a race. Who know the background to the cheating. So if this is you memory of this race then perhaps you are best to keep the innocence and not read this book. After Lance Armstrong , the Russians and the Olympics itself this is another book that just leaves a whole in my hearth about the cheating in sport.
