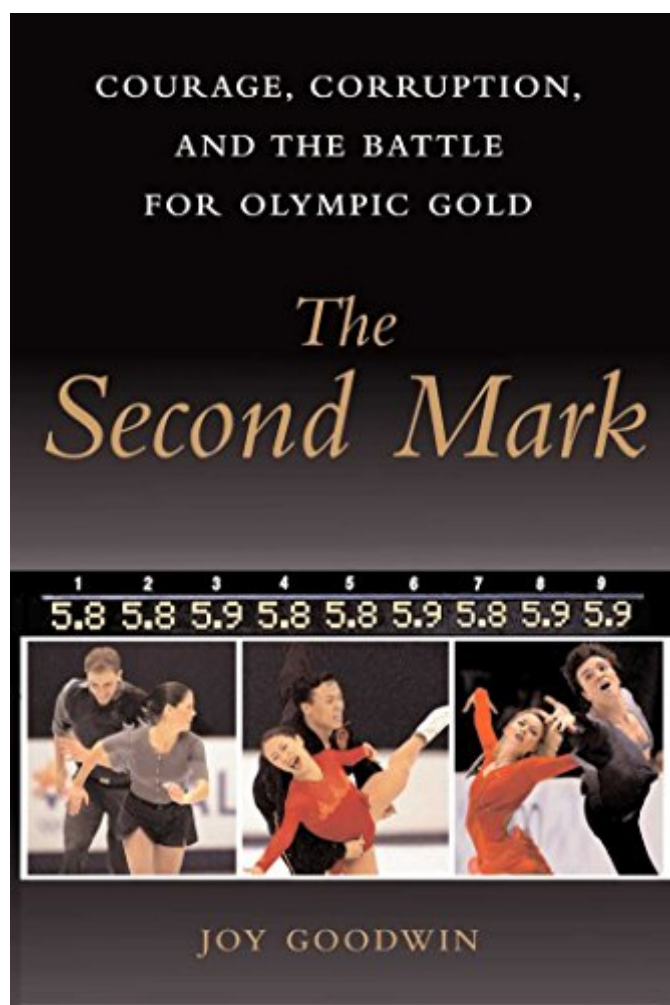


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The Second Mark: Courage, Corruption, And The Battle For Olympic Gold



Synopsis

It was billed as the greatest event in the history of pair skating: three of the best teams of all time battling for Olympic gold on one night in Salt Lake City. Technical ability was approximately equal. It was the artistic merit score that would decide the gold medal -- the second mark. Representing Canada, China, and Russia, the three pairs illuminated their distinct cultures. On the second mark, whose culture would triumph? Would it be the beauty of the Russians' ballet on ice, the thrill of the Chinese pair's heart-stopping acrobatics, or the Canadians' passionate connection with the audience? In a down-to-the-wire nail-biter, the difference between gold and silver came down to the vote of a single judge. Hours later, a bombshell: the confession of a French judge unleashed a worldwide debate -- and ultimately produced an unprecedented duplicate gold medal. The Second Mark reveals what an athlete really goes through to become the best in the world, through the riveting stories of unforgettable people. We meet Yelena Berezhnaya of Russia, who survives emergency brain surgery after a near-fatal training accident and makes it back to the Olympics in less than two years. We meet Zhao Hongbo, a young boy skating in subzero weather in remotest China, who will fulfill his coach's twenty-year dream of catching up to the West. And we meet two Canadians, a barista and a concession stand worker, who had almost quit the sport before deciding to give it one last try -- and becoming world champions. Exhaustively researched by a skating insider, The Second Mark takes readers deep into the world of the Olympic athlete, illuminating the fascinating differences between East and West. From the frozen fields of China to the secret corridors of the old Soviet sports system, from a tiny farm village in remotest Quebec to the judges' backstage world, The Second Mark tells the compelling human stories behind one of the most controversial nights in Olympic history.

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Customer Reviews

I liked this book because the author tried to show the event and its aftermath from the viewpoints of the Canadians, the Russians, the Chinese, and the judge. The background information about life and skating training in the three countries was very well researched and interesting. I actually found it more interesting that the actual Olympic event she was covering. Check out you tube for video of the actual performances. I will look at figure skating competitions a bit differently after reading this, which makes it a worthwhile read.

This book tells the well-known story of the vote-trading scandal in the pairs figure skating at the 2002 Salt Lake Olympics, where the Canadians were awarded a second set of gold medals. While this book opens on the night of the pairs final, much of the book is interesting background on the three skating pairs who would medal at the 2002 Games, and their coaches, parents, and others of significance to them. This is new material to most, as figure skating is one of those sports which to the average person only seems to surface every four years, but here we see the skaters progress from the provincial rinks where they started to the big time. I found somewhat disquieting (having attended the pairs final in Salt Lake) the tone of the book as it goes blow by blow through the night of the pairs final--making the claim that the crowd was unanimously on the Canadian side, and booed the marks (the second mark, which forms the title, and determined, initially, the gold medal, is for artistic merit) unmercifully. I remember some boos, some puzzlement (how many of the heavily corporate crowd really understood figure skating?), and some cheers, enchanting as the crowd found the Canadian pair. I suspect that Goodwin is indulging in a little history rewriting in a book which will be read primarily in North America, and little noted in Russia or China. Goodwin uses such phrases as "justice was done" about what was, after all, a very close decision, 5-4 including the disputed, and ultimately disqualified, French vote. A second difficulty with the book is that it

really breaks little new ground on the scandal. You learn little more than the reader motivated to buy this book could have learned from the many articles which appeared in the weeks and months following the Olympics. It is a good read for human understanding of the six skaters. But it makes clear that there are more questions unanswered than answered, and it gets us little closer to the answers.

Good read

Figure skating is a beautiful sport, this book gives great detail about all aspects of said sport.

I am a huge fan of figure skating but have read almost no books about it. This one is wonderfully done. The author traveled to China, Canada and Russia to see where each of the three pair teams she profiles grew up and trained. She interviewed their parents and first coaches, describes the rinks they first trained on as children, and extensively profiles the coaches who got them to the Olympics. The book's profiles of the teams themselves as well as their coaches are not only valuable historical documents but also make for gripping reading. I already loved Shen and Zhao, Berezhnaya and Sikhularidze and their great coaches, Bin Yao and Tamara Moskvina. Now I also know a lot about Sale and Pelletier and their story. Really a must-read and a delightful read for skating fans. My only critiques are that the author doesn't describe the SP at the Salt Lake City Olympics at all -- a very strange omission -- and her knowledge of skating technique seems superficial. She is still a wonderful journalist and writer and her mini-biographies of these teams and their coaches are truly precious.

I loved this book. Compelling, and heart-breaking at times; learning the back stories on these pairs made you wish they all could have won. A well-written book giving us the cultural hardships, bravery and nearly impossible things overcome to make it to that Olympic competition. Highly recommended.

I guess I'm wierd, but what I loved about this book was the backstories on the six skaters, their history, families, coaches, etc. Fascinating stuff. What I got from this was a whole new level of respect and admiration for the pairs skaters coming from Russia and China. I'm also happy to see that the two Chinese skaters featured in this book will be skating in Torino 2006. I'll be watching them with great interest - at least as much as NBC allows me to see of them - and thinking about

little six-year old Shen Xue and her bloody socks. There's not much new ground broken on the scandal that rocked the Salt Lake City Olympics, but for anyone interested in knowing more about the skaters involved, I highly recommend this book.

Goodwin covers the Salt Lake figure skating debacle with style, if not altogether truth - the Russian pair gave a superb performance that on any other night would have been worthy of Olympic gold (and still might have in an uncorrupted panel, since it's a subjective sport). Bad judging, however, is nothing new; it takes place at all levels from the recreational ISI to the Olympics. Recommend for those who are interested in the scandal - otherwise, there's really nothing new that skaters and people who closely follow the sport don't already know.

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