



THE FIGHTER (Cert 15)

Reel Issues Author: Steve Williams

Overview: Two boxing brothers, one a faded legend and the other with unfulfilled promise, come through testing circumstances to produce a world champion. In the process, they bring their family and loved ones together and become the pride of their community.

Director: David O Russell

Year: 2010

Studio: Momentum

Length: 110 minutes

Cautions: Contains strong language and hard drug use.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Dicky (Christian Bale) and Micky Ward (Mark Wahlberg) are brothers with contrasting fortunes as boxers. Dicky beat the legendary boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, but Micky has a patchy boxing record and works on roads part-time. Dicky has since let things slip and become a crack addict, which interferes with training his brother. Both are managed by mother Alice, who lives on the past glory of Dicky's heyday, leaving Micky with mismatched fights.

But Micky remains loyal to his family until new girlfriend Charlene (Amy Adams) begins to persuade him to look for an alternative. The family turn against Charlene, who is a college dropout and wants to make sure Micky doesn't miss out on his opportunities like she did. Micky loses the next fight organised by his family, which is the breaking point that makes him take control of his life and boxing career. Having discovered that Micky wants to take up an offer to become a professional boxer and move away from his family, Dicky promises to raise enough money to support Micky's boxing himself. He impersonates a police officer in order to extort money, but gets sent to

prison. In Micky's next fight with a new team behind him, Micky struggles until he reverts to Dicky's boxing advice. He wins and turns his career around. Dicky is filmed for a TV documentary, which he thinks is about his comeback, but is actually called 'Crack in America'. When Dicky's drug habits are caught on camera for his family and friends to see, the self-proclaimed 'pride of Lowell' becomes the shame of Lowell. Dicky starts to clean up his act.

After Dicky gets out of prison, he finds that Micky has a new team behind him and no longer wants Dicky to be his trainer. In a heated exchange at the gym, Dicky forces Micky to admit that he could not have won his previous fight without Dicky's advice. Micky then says he wants his family to return to his team. Charlene tells Micky that Dicky is a bad influence on Micky and should not be training him. With Dicky's persuasion, everyone puts aside their differences to support Micky's shot at winning a world title. In the fight, Micky wins an epic struggle, bringing his family and the whole team together. Dicky christens his brother Micky 'the new pride of Lowell'.

FIRST REACTIONS

When Micky gets beaten in a fight that his family set up for him; Micky is too embarrassed to show his face locally. Have you experienced pressure to succeed from family or friends? If so, how did you deal with their expectations?

How does the relationship between Micky and his mother Alice contrast with his relationship with girlfriend Charlene? Have you had the experience of feeling as though you weren't being listened to or respected by someone you loved? What did it feel like?

The film opens and closes with Dicky addressing the camera directly, talking about his relationship with his

brother. How did Dicky's view of his relationship with his brother change throughout the film?

INTERACTIONS

Dicky seems to be his mother Alice's favourite, leaving Micky feeling she is using him mainly for the money he earns from boxing. But it takes encouragement from new girlfriend Charlene for Micky to begin to challenge his loyalty to his family.

If you have brothers and sisters, were you aware of favourites? What are some of the positives and negatives of family rivalry and competition?

Is Micky's loyalty to his family really a disguise for his lack of confidence and self-belief? How does Charlene help Micky to believe in himself more? What is the balance between honouring your family and fulfilling personal ambition? How did the way Micky dealt with his family change throughout the film? Do you think he got the balance right?

Read Luke 15.11–31. In the story of the prodigal son, the younger son hits rock bottom and sees that he is wasting his life and harming his family. Dicky realises by watching his TV documentary in prison that he has brought shame on his family and he is failing to be a good father to his son. This leads to a radical change in his outlook.

Whilst Dicky is in jail, Micky's trainer is O'Keefe, a police officer. In one scene, we learn that he is recovering from an addiction. Dicky regularly makes fun of O'Keefe, perhaps disguising that Dicky feels threatened by O'Keefe's role in Micky's team. How does Dicky's attitude to O'Keefe change after Dicky is released from prison? What do they now have in common? What do you think was the significance of Dicky giving his celebration cake to the people in the crack house and then walking away?

When Micky tells Dicky how much of a role model Dicky is to him, Dicky admits to Micky that he didn't knockout Sugar Ray Leonard, as the legend stated. Do you have role models? If so, have they ever disappointed you? Do we expect higher moral standards of them than we do of ourselves? If so, why are we disappointed when we find they make mistakes and prove to be just as human as we are?

Read 2 Timothy 2.22–24. Paul was a role model to Timothy, a younger church leader. Paul advised him about how to use his responsibilities well. What does Paul say to Timothy about how to overcome harmful distractions?

CLIP TO DISCUSS

DVD Chapter 5 (around 45.00 to 48.52).

During a meal with Micky's family and Charlene, they discover Dicky is being beaten up by the police. Charlene tries to stop Micky stepping in to defend Dicky, but the bonds of family run deep and Micky is soon involved in the brawl. The police realise Micky is a boxer and deliberately try to break his hands.

Dicky's pride catches up with him and the events that follow put both Micky's boxing career and Micky's relationship with Charlene in danger. If you had been in Micky's position, would you have risked so much to defend a family member or friend? Do you think he acted rashly? If you had been in Charlene's shoes, would you have found it difficult to stay loyal to Micky in those circumstances?

Read Proverbs 13.10 and 16.18–19. In what way did Dicky become deceived by his pride? How did pride come between Dicky and Micky? Why is pride so deceptive? What can we do to stop ourselves being tempted by responding to its charms?

Other Angles

In the film, violence seems to be a normal part of life. Boxing is a means to local fame, as well as a way to earn a living. Is boxing a helpful way to allow working class men to channel their aggression in a positive, yet controlled, way? What alternatives are there? When might violence be justified to defend the weak? What effect might this have on society in general?

Micky and Dicky were familiar with the demands of competition and the need for self-discipline to achieve their goals.

Read 1 Corinthians 9.24–27. Paul compares being a Christian to running in a race. What does Paul say about self-discipline and its benefits to the whole of life as well as in sport?

Read Luke 14.25–27. Jesus makes clear the commitment involved in following him. Why might does loyalty to family take second place? What causes might take priority over the needs of family? Have you ever made commitments that have caused conflict between you and your family and friends? If so, think about how you resolved those issues.

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