

Discussion Guide

Introduction

What Freddie Steinmark (Finn Wittrock) wants most in the world is to play football. Deemed too small by the usual athletic standards, his father trains him hard, and Freddie brings a fight to the game that ultimately gets him noticed — by none other than legendary University of Texas coach Darrell Royal (Aaron Eckhart). Awarded a scholarship and a chance to play for the Longhorns, Freddie sets off to Austin with his loving high school sweetheart Linda (Sarah Bolger), determined to make the team. Alongside his old teammate Bobby Mitchell (Rett Terrell) and new pal James Street (Juston Street), Freddie is put through the paces of a grueling practice schedule, but the boys' camaraderie off the field translates into solid playing on it, and they rise up the depth charts, giving the Longhorns a real chance to turn around their losing record. But just when they're reveling in the success of the season, Freddie suffers an injury that leads to a shocking diagnosis and the biggest challenge he will ever face.



The following are a list of conversation starters and discussion questions intended for group screenings of all ages.



Hope and Hard Work

AARON ECKHART FINN WITTROCK ROBIN TUNNEY SARAH BOLGER

MY ALL★AMERICAN

NOVEMBER 13TH



We never doubt for one second that Freddie Steinmark gives his all in every aspect of his life. He's a straight-A student in the classroom and a standout on the football field, even if he is slightly under-sized. As a result of his hard work and determination, Freddie receives a football scholarship to the University of Texas. After visiting the campus, he returns home to Colorado to tell his parents the good news. His dad embraces him, beaming with pride, and says, "You worked so hard for this." Freddie responds, through tears, "Answered prayers."

Freddie is obviously exhibiting his characteristic humility, but his statement should make us think differently about how we approach the work we do in life, whether it be in the classroom, on the athletic field, or at a job. We all know what it feels like to hope for something special or significant to happen in our lives. But we can't just sit around hoping for this to happen. We have to pair our hopes and dreams with hard work. If we think about it in terms of a car, we could see the hard work as the engine that moves us forward and our hopes as the fuel that keeps that engine running.

Questions for Consideration

1. What have you hoped for in your life? What was the hard work that you did to make it a reality?
2. How have you responded to hopes and dreams that didn't come to fruition? How do those motivate you going forward?



Making Plans and Having a Vision

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Freddie is so full of life, joy, and physical talents. He takes them all together and builds out a plan for his life: he's going to Notre Dame to play football, graduate to the pros, and marry Linda and raise a family with her. He sits on the hood of his car with Linda on top of a hill and sees his entire future mapped out before him. Well, he doesn't end up at Notre Dame, but attends the University of Texas instead, where tragedy strikes late in his collegiate career, derailing his NFL plans.

We've all experienced the pain of derailed plans, even if they weren't as tragic as Freddie's situation. We make plans and they fall apart or don't come to fruition like we had hoped. We find ourselves at a fork in the road. Do we continually mourn those broken dreams or do we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and plot a new course?

Plans aren't a bad thing. In fact, they're a necessity that keep us moving forward in life. But they must be accompanied by a larger vision. Lying in the hospital bed after his amputation, Freddie's plans come crushing down around him. He is on the verge of giving up hope, until Linda arrives. She begins to

Questions for Consideration

1. Talk about the plans that you have made for your life. Are things going according to your plans? If so, how? If not, how have you adapted?
2. What is your vision for your life? How is it greater than your plans?

outline new plans for Freddie, but hers are based on a vision that she (and Freddie) has always had for their life together. Freddie might not be playing in the NFL, but he can still be around the game of football as a coach. More importantly, they are still going to get married and raise a family together.

No matter what we plan for in our lives and whether or not those plans work out, we must have a vision and it must be grounded in something deeper than where we will live or work. What is the vision that encompasses your plans?

Order Your Day

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Questions for Consideration

1. What type of person are you? Do you appreciate structure or run from it? Why?
2. What are practices you can pursue to better order your life?

One of Freddie's defining characteristics that we see in the film—and that others don't see—is that he lives a very ordered life. He starts his day with a time of devotion, goes to school and football practice, eats dinner with his family, and then studies. Closely related to having a plan and a vision, is implementing a schedule that can help make those a reality.

Order and schedules work better for some people than it does others. You might need structure in your daily life, or the idea of a schedule might drive you crazy. Either way, there are actions you can take to set and implement goals in your life. If you're the type of person who can't stand structure, commit yourself to a task once a day (not necessarily at an appointed time) and see if this sparks a change in your life.

A Peaceful Presence

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Freddie's teammate and best friend, Bobby, loses his brother in the Vietnam War and experiences all the usual emotions of anger, sadness, and doubt. He also confronts Freddie with an impossible question: why did my brother have to die? Freddie responds, "I don't think anybody can answer that question." Freddie has no easy answers, and rather than trying to talk Bobby out of his grief, he simply kneels down beside him and quietly prays for him.

Most of us have been on both sides of this conversation. We have lost someone we love and experienced sadness, anger, and confusion. Or we have known friends that have lost loved ones and responded to their questions and grief with words or silence. It's natural to want to ease people's

Questions for Consideration

1. When have you been overcome with grief? Who was by your side? Did they sit in silence or talk you through it?
2. When have you tried to console someone who was grieving? How did your efforts make you and the other person feel? What did you learn?

troubles, but sometimes, it's impossible. We need to be aware of the difference between moments that require words and those that demand silence. Many times, those who suffer just want someone to sit with them in peaceful, comforting silence. As we see in the case of Bobby and Freddie, such silence may be more powerful than words.

Is Life Arbitrary?



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The characters in **My All American** know all too well the arbitrariness of life. Basically, they are examples of that age old question: why do bad things happen to good people? Freddie contracts cancer in his bones and loses both his leg and his dream of playing in the NFL. Bobby's brother dies in the Vietnam War. Linda loses her partner far too young. It would be a cruel thing to say that any of these people did anything to deserve such tragedies. They are basically good people who have bad experiences.

One of the toughest lessons we all have to learn growing up is that life, simply, is unfair. Bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. This doesn't mean that we should go out and live recklessly. Our ability to accept or understand this fact isn't the most important thing, but how we respond to this reality is. Can we react to this sometimes frustrating reality with patience and kindness, giving comfort to those good people who undergo bad experiences and encouraging those bad people who experience good to share it with others?

Questions for Consideration

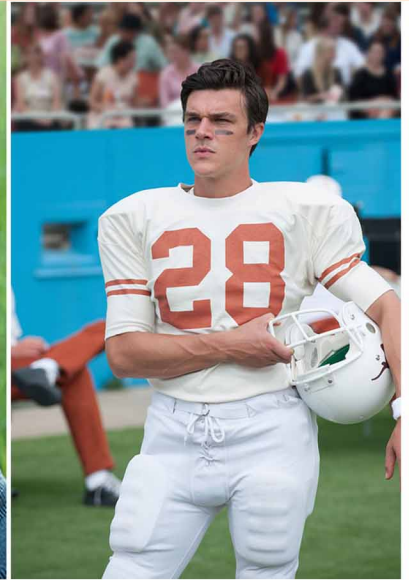
1. When has life seemed the least fair to you? How did you make sense out of it?
2. How have you heard others respond to the questions about bad things happening to good people? Have they helped you make sense of the world...or made it more difficult to understand?

Coaches, Teammates, and Partners

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It doesn't matter how hard Freddie worked or what he sacrificed to make his dreams of playing college football come true. He could not have succeeded without a vast network of coaches, teammates, and partners surrounding him and supporting him every step of the way. He talks to Linda after learning that he received a football scholarship to the University of Texas and tells her, "Coach Royal believing in me makes me think anything is possible." On the field, his teammates block for him, play defense, and score game-winning touchdowns. After his amputation, Linda keeps Freddie on his path by showing him her new vision for their future together and reminds him, "Whatever you're going through, I'm going through."

We are not meant to be alone. We need relationships and partnerships to get through life together. **My All American** reminds us that teenagers are in great need of supportive families, educators, and coaches to instill in them a sense of pride and accomplishment. Unfortunately, we also see people around us who lack such vital support systems. We see how difficult life can be for people when they have no one to cheer them on or pick them up when they fall. In an effort to make our communities better places, we need to be on the lookout for people who need a teammate, to walk alongside them during difficult times in their lives and give them strength for the journey ahead.

Questions for Consideration

1. Who are your coaches, teammates, and partners in life? How do they support and encourage you?
2. Talk about the times in your life when you have seen others struggle. Did a lack of a support system cause or contribute to that? What are ways you can partner with those who are struggling?