



FAIR PLAY is a subtitled feature drama from the Czech Republic and Slovakia that Kino Ken screened recently at the 2015 Carnegie Mellon International Film Festival in Pittsburgh. Here is his review of that film.

Czech Republic / Slovakia 2014 color 100 minutes subtitled live action feature drama in Czech Negativ Film / Departures Film / Arina Film Producers: Katerina Cerná, Undine Filter, Christine Haupt, Thomas Král, Silvia Panaková, Pavel Strnad

10 of a possible 20 points

****1/2 of a possible *******

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 1 Direction: Andrea Sedláčková**
- 1 Editing: Jakub Hejna**
- 1 Cinematography: Baset Jan Stritezský**
- 1 Lighting**
- 1 Screenplay: Irena Hejdová and Andrea Sedláčková**
- 0 Music: Miroslav Zbirka**
- 1 Art Direction: Viera Dandova and Petr Fort**
- Costume Design: Simona Rubáková**

- Makeup: Katka Horská and Anett Weber**
- 2 Sound: Daniel Nemeč (Supervising Sound Editor), Daniel Nemeč (Sound Effects), Johannes Doberenz and Marc Meusinger (Sound Recordists)**
- 1 Acting**
- 1 Creativity**
- 10 total points**

Cast: Judit Bárdos (Anna, a sprinter), Vlastina Svátková (Nurse), Anna Geislerová (Irena), Berenika Kohoutová (Voice of Anna), Roman Luknar (Bohdan, Anna's trainer), Eva Josefíková (Marina, a sprinter), Igor Bares (Novotný), Michaela Môtiková (Athlete), Michaela Pavlátová (Mother of Tomáš), Jiri Wohanka (Kracík), Roman Zach (Kříz), Ondrej Novák (Tomáš), Tatjana Medvecká (Doctor), Pavel Lagner (Father of Tomáš), Zuzana Mistríková (Clerk), Petra Môtiková (Athlete), Sárka Kavanová (Member of State Secret Security), Tereza Gübelová (Judge), Slávek Bilský (Member of State Secret Security), Ivana Nagyová (Nurse), Ondrej Malý (Doctor Pavelka), Katerina Ulrichová (Athlete), Karolina Hlavatá (Athlete), Vladimira Otahelová and Veronika Machovia (Slovakian Extras)

As the Czech Republic's official submission for the most recent Best Foreign-Language Film Oscar® and a nominee for fifteen Czech Lion Film Awards, FAIR PLAY arrived at the Carnegie Mellon International Film Festival loaded with honors. Unfortunately, it does not live up to its reputation. Rather than exhibiting unusual technical prowess, the movie presents a rather bland drama concocted from real incidents but mirroring none precisely. This causes dramatic impact to shrink significantly.

Its plot revolves around a former Czech athletic star and her teenage daughter, both unhappy with life in Communist Czechoslovakia in the months preceding 1984's Summer

Olympics. Anna is a teen sprinter with a boyfriend she finds useful. Though not, perhaps, an essential companion. She is recommended by her coach for intensive pre-Olympics training at a national sports center. Part of the regimen imposed there on athletes involves periodic injection of a steroid to boost endurance and increase muscle.

Accepting that drug as a safe supplement, Anna improves her racing times, then experiences life-threatening inflated heartbeat problems. Suddenly, going to the Olympics strikes the girl as considerably less important than remaining healthy. On her own initiative, she stops taking the internationally banned enhancer.

This action leads to slower times on the track, causing consternation to Coach Bohdan and discouragement for mother Irena. Mom wants to use the upcoming international sports gathering to catapult female members of her family in Czechoslovakia to a better life in the United States. Anna doesn't wish to leave her boyfriend in order to rejoin a father she feels abandoned them. Irena's husband is apparently living comfortably in a capitalist paradise across the Atlantic Ocean. At this juncture, he's willing to welcome back two stranded family dependents.

That is an offer Irena relishes. She's weary of continual supervision and bullying by Party spies and bureaucrats, so fed up she even openly applies for an exit passport. Communist bureaucracy refuses to approve her request. Irena's their key to gathering evidence against a dissident writer. Repeatedly, state security service personnel belittle her, at the same time using Anna as a pawn to insure Mom's cooperation with their ongoing investigation of her friend.

If she can't extricate herself, Irena still might be able to liberate her daughter. The girl must get to Los Angeles and can only do so by beating out other national contenders. If that means reinforcement from illegal steroids, so be it.

That kind of thinking leads the woman to make a devilish pact with Bohdan. She will sneak the banned substance Anna rejects into her vitamin supplement, making sure it gets injected along with natural boosters. Bohdan will be satisfied. Anna needn't be informed about their deception. So long as her darling qualifies for the national team, it will be worth a bit of subterfuge.

Thanks to interrogation of boyfriend Tomas, Anna learns more about negative features of Czechoslovakia's approved wonder drug for Olympic hopefuls. When she communicates this new information to Irena, Mom confesses to secretly continuing administration of the controversial chemical. Appalled at such duplicity, Anna packs. She storms out of their apartment, beating a retreat to what she assumes will be a welcoming reception from Tomas and his parents.

For a brief while, it seems she has found a satisfactory refuge. More trouble soon follows. Her boyfriend and his parents emigrate without advance notice to Austria. They do not propose she accompany them. Anna is betrayed again, this new revelation reaching her just before final Olympic qualifying sprints.

Can a dejected teenager rally back from this crushing disclosure? Watch the conclusion of FAIR PLAY and find out.

Merely adequate acting does nothing to galvanize viewers. Since the plot is actually fiction, no documentary facts or footage can be marshalled to support it. Ultimately, audiences are left without a compelling reason to root for Anna and Irena to reconcile and triumph through successful departure from oppressive motherland.

Lighting, screenplay, production design, and editing are all unremarkable, if adequate. Musical accompaniment is conventional, at times positively grating, empty of melodic charm or rhythmic drive. Both leads are fairly colorless, neither being especially sympathetic.

Sound recording is excellent and ought to have been expended on a better production.

FAIR PLAY fails to rise to a lofty film festival standard. It lacks passion, insightfulness, grace, beauty, and humor. Nor is there even a compensatory breathtaking race shown. While thematic material sounds promising, treatment is mundane and character development inadequate. Lackadaisical directing teams with perfunctory editing. Neither proves able to sustain a strong narrative drive. The movie ends up predictable and unrewarding, though containing nothing offensive for adults. It's too tame for teens and too mature in situations depicted for younger audiences.