

Review of the Documentary “The Game Changers”

By Dr. Thomas Johnson

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Co-produced by Arnold Schwarzenegger, Lewis Hamilton, James Cameron and Jackie Chan et. al., Executive Producers. Written by Mark Monroe and Joseph Pace. Available on Netflix and Youtube.com. The GameChangers website: <https://gamechangersmovie.com>



The Game Changers is a documentary about world-class athletes in a variety of sports who have been able to improve their health and performances, in part, by shifting from animal-based diets to whole foods plant-based diets. The documentary features James Wilks, Scott Jurek, and Patrik Babourmian.

James Wilks is the primary narrator and one of the producers. He was a self-defense instructor and mixed martial arts athlete. While he was convalescing from a training injury, he immersed himself in the scientific research on plant-based nutrition and its effects on recovery, health and athlete performance. He also interviewed outstanding vegan athletes.

As the narrator, Wilks illustrates his own recovery from injuries suffered in training for a return to competition. As viewers we see his exceptional recovery over time and not only regaining his ability to compete but also dramatically improving his strength and stamina.

The viewer is provided with some insightful interviewing of some of the highest performing athletes in the world. For example, Scott Jurek is the world record holder for running the entire Appalachian Trail, which is 2,190 plus miles long. According to the documentary, Wikipedia and multiple other sources, each year thousands of hikers attempt a thru hike: only about one in four makes it all the way. A typical thru hike takes 5 to 5 to 7 months to hike the entire Appalachian Trail, which is 2,190 plus miles long. Jurek set a record completing it in just 46 days!

He won the 100-mile [Western States Endurance Run](#) on his first attempt, defeating five-time champion [Tim Twietmeyer](#) and becoming only the second non-Californian to win the race. He would go on to win Western States a record seven consecutive times. In 2004, he bested [Mike Morton's](#) 1997 time to set a new course record of 15 hours and 36 minutes according to Wikipedia.

Scott Jurek, physical therapist, is an advocate of plant-based eating for health and ethical/environmental reasons, and he credits his plant-based diet as the key to his athletic performance and quick injury recovery. He gave up eating meat in 1997 and became totally plant

based in 1999, motivated by the belief that poor nutrition was responsible for the chronic illnesses he had seen in his family and in his physical therapy patients.

Patrik Babourmian was also featured in the documentary as another example of an outstanding athlete who was able to improve his performance shifting from an animal-based diet to first a vegetarian diet and then to an ethical vegetarian or vegan diet. He was also featured in a January 23rd, 2022, article in the Independent.cc.uk. In both the documentary and independent publications, he is described as having won the title of Germany's Strongest Man and is seen flipping a car onto its roof in **The Game Changers**.

He acknowledged that he became an ethical vegetarian out of concern for animal welfare. Since becoming a vegan, he has broken various strongman titles including the world log lift record in the 105kg category. He has also been featured in the documentary Empathy, directed by Ed Antoja, which aims to promote a more respectful way of life towards all animals.

Some of the critics of this documentary have tried to diminish its significance by referring to two of the best-known executive producers - Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lewis Hamilton - as "fanatics." My own perspective after conducting more research on these athletes is that their involvement in the documentary was based on their ethical values and health improvements as well as the overwhelming evidence supporting a vegan diet over a meat-based diet.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is generally well known as the two-term governor of California, actor (e.g., The Terminator, Kindergarten Cop, Pumping Iron, etc.), body builder and as a promotor of a high meat protein diet. However, he is less likely to be known as a contemporary promotor of a whole foods vegetarian diet. He is highly regarded as one of the greatest body builders of all time following his achievement of winning the Mr. Universe contest at the age of 20 and subsequently winning the Mister Olympia title seven times.

As he has aged (he is now 75) and acknowledges health issues related to many years of eating unhealthy meat-based diets, he developed diet heart problems on top of congenital heart valve problems, according to an article published in [sportskeeda.com/bodybuilding/why-did-arnold-schwarzenegger-become-vegan?](https://sportskeeda.com/bodybuilding/why-did-arnold-schwarzenegger-become-vegan/) The real reason he went vegan was that "eating a diet high in plants had helped him improve his healing and overall health. It has helped him dramatically decrease his cholesterol during the previous years."

According to the documentary and Wikipedia, Lewis Hamilton is a British racing driver currently competing in Formula One, driving for Mercedes. In Formula One he has won a joint-record seven World Drivers Championship titles. In an enlightening report in a 2017 interview, he spoke with the BBC about his concern for his health and the environment. Like so many of us who shift to a vegan diet he was warned by his doctors that he wouldn't get enough protein to keep up with the physical demands of F1 driving(see www.insider.com/lewis-hamilton-vegan-diet-f1-2023-6). Since being discouraged by his doctors not to go vegan he has won four championships and his energy has improved.

World champion in the sprints and long jump, Carl Lewis is seen in the documentary being interviewed saying that after going vegan he established his personal bests in his early 30's.

The Game Changers shatters the animal protein myth that animal protein is needed to be healthy and a successful athletic performer. The evidence regarding the superiority of plant protein reported is consistent with the conclusions reached by Doctor T. Colin Campbell with Nelson Disla in *The Future of Nutrition* (Benbella Books, Inc 2020).

The documentary includes interviews with highly regarded physicians like Olympic team physician Dr. Scott Stoll and Dr. Walter Willett, Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition at Harvard and author of more than 1500 scientific articles. Both report advantages of plant protein and disadvantages of animal protein including greater risks of certain types of cancer including higher risk of prostate cancer.

Another physician interviewed was Dr. James Loomis who served as team physician for both the former world champion St. Louis Rams football team and world champion St. Louis Cardinals baseball team. During his interview for this documentary, he reported that a lot of athletes mistakenly believe that their primary source of energy comes from animal protein. In reality, our primary source of energy comes from the carbohydrates that we eat and store in our muscles.

Dr. Campbell is the Jacob Gould Schurman Professor Emeritus of nutritional biochemistry at Cornell University and has authored over 350 research papers. He and his son, Thomas Campbell, MD (co-director of the University of Rochester School of Medicine Nutrition in Medicine Research) are the co-authors of *The China Study*. This study was referred to in the *New York Times* book review by Jane Brody as the “most comprehensive study ever undertaken of the relationship between diet and the risk of developing disease.” She references the fact that “eating a lot of protein, especially animal protein, is also linked to chronic disease... Those Chinese who eat the most protein, and especially animal protein, also have the highest rates of the ‘diseases of affluence’ like heart disease, cancer and diabetes.”

In my judgement, in order to begin to appreciate the critique of promoting the high value of including animal protein in one’s diets—especially athletes’ diets—it is important to know the basis of what Campbell refers to as the myth and “cult of animal protein” (the title of chapter 5 in *The Future of Nutrition*).

On page 98 Campbell states “The primacy of animal nutrition compared to both plant protein and other nutrients, has become so normalized that it’s almost compulsive. It is never far from our minds, whether conscious or subconscious. This is why nearly everyone on a plant-based diet has been questioned about where they get their protein rather than their vitamin B-12, or any other nutrient of note.”

Faster rate of childhood growth, results in earlier “sexual maturation, higher levels of sex hormones, and increased risk of cancer of the reproductive organs. I find it scandalous that these well-documented adverse effects have been omitted from our valuation of protein quality for so many decades” (p. 101).

In summary and conclusion, **The Game Changers** is a documentary about world-class athletes in a variety of sports who have been able to improve their health and performances, in part, by shifting from animal-based diets to whole foods plant-based diets. The documentary stars James Wilks, Scott Jurek, and Patrik Babourmian.

I highly recommend this documentary for anyone interested in improving their health, recovery from injuries and athletic performance. The documentary provides solid scientific evidence supporting the many advantages of plant-based protein and disadvantages and risks of relying on animal protein diets. It is truly inspiring watching the performances and responses of some of the highest performing athletes in the world who also report improved personal health. A number of the athletes also report feeling better as they are showing more respect for all animals and the overall environment itself!

Thomas Johnson, Biographical Notes

Thomas B. Johnson completed his graduate studies at Brown University (US Public Health Fellowship in social psychiatry and medical sociology), Harvard University (master's degree in counseling psychology), UC Berkeley (doctor's degree in counseling psychology) and Duke University (doctoral internship in psychological services). He is a licensed psychologist, nationally certified school psychologist and a health psychologist and certified by the National Register of Health Services Psychologists. He has served as an adjunct professor at Bates College, Rutgers and the University of Southern Maine. He was a contributing editor of the NASP Communique for 10 years as their editor for alternative and complimentary approaches to health and learning. He has been providing a full range of psychological services including assessments, consultations, education, psychotherapy, supervision and research. He currently works as a consulting health psychologist and researcher.