

The Dark Side of Sport

This is a story of broken dreams, of young athletes who become imprisoned by silence. They are traumatised children, who no longer dare to run, swim or enter into combat. Over a period of eight months, the NGO Disclose has investigated the issue of sexual violence in the world of French sport.

My assignment was to photograph the most emblematic victims across France. I asked them to pose for a series of portraits in their apartments, during their trainings or where the assaults occurred. The challenge was to hide their faces to protect their identity, while showing at the same time their resilience: they all seek justice, fight to be heard, as if they want to leave the shadow and step into the light.

The investigation looks at 77 cases of sexual violence which were either covered up or which could have been avoided. The revelations involve 276 victims, most of whom were minors at the time of events. Beginning in the 1970s and up to the present day, the cases involve 28 sports, including football, gymnastics, athletics, archery, roller-skating and chess. In around 50% of the cases, the perpetrators had already been convicted for offences of a sexual nature. There are many men who have been investigated by the judicial authorities on suspicion of committing sexual violence or who have been convicted of such acts, yet who have held on to roles in close contact with or supervising young sports players.

Disclose reveals major failings by clubs, federations, local and national public authorities and the justice system. These include the lack of monitoring of sexual offenders and the inaction of officials and sports bodies. The extent of sexual abuse and the recurrent nature of the problem calls for urgent preventive action.