

Deep Water: A Doping Investigation

Freediving is often described as the purest way to enjoy the water: One breath and a descent into the silent blue. But beneath the serenity lies a fiercely competitive world where national pride, sponsorships, sportsmanship, and personal ambition collide. [Deep Water](#), the latest series from Tortoise Investigates by [The Observer](#), pulls listeners into this high-pressure environment and the scandal that shook it to its core.

Across six gripping episodes, investigative journalist Lydia Gard traces the events surrounding one of the most divisive controversies in freediving history. Through eyewitness accounts, expert insight, anti-doping officials, and even one of the accused athletes himself, the series peels back the layers of a community suddenly forced to question its own values.

This is not just a story about drugs in sport; it's about trust, ethics, safety, and how quickly a tight-knit world can fracture when a new approach is aggressively introduced.

We are going to take a look at the series and give you an idea of what you can expect from this captivating podcast (without any spoilers, don't worry).

Get ready for a wild ride!

Episode One: Depth Wish

The first episode introduces listeners to freediving both as a serene activity, and as a competitive sport. Lydia starts by walking us through the concept of freediving on a line, while we hear snippets of voices from deep divers expressing their personal journey from the surface to the bottom of the line, and the feelings attached to that journey.

Episode one introduces the concept of freedive training perfectly, in a way that is easy to understand for non-divers and that seasoned apneaists can relate to. After learning about the competitive freediving culture, Lydia grabs our curiosity by telling us the real subject that the next five episodes will explore: A doping scandal at a competition in 2023, and how it tore the community in half.



Photo by Daan Verhoeven

Episode Two: Fair Play

Starting to delve further into the story, episode two introduces listeners to the main suspects at the heart of the scandal, two Croatian divers: Vitomir Maricic and Petar Klovar. Freedivers who exploded onto the scene and achieved impressive results quite quickly. Lydia tells us more about the 2023 Vertical Blue competition scandal, where they were allegedly found to have PEDs (performance enhancing drugs), and touches on the rumours that surrounded these divers even prior to this.

British champion freedivers David Mellor and Gary McGrath talk to Lydia about what they knew at the time, and how they feel now about doping within competitive freediving. [Podcaster](#) and freediver Donny Mac also tells us about a group that was formed prior to the competition to try and catch these divers red-handed, but presents us with the question: Were they actually doping? Or are they just extraordinary freedivers?

Episode Three: In The Bag

So what drugs are banned and were any of them actually found in the bag check? Lydia talks to William Trubridge; a deep competitor as well as the organiser of the Vertical Blue competition in which the bag check that started the scandal took place. In episode three we learn of William's motivation behind the bag check, why these particular divers were singled out, and how it was carried out. Lydia then presents him with the allegations that this was all a big witch hunt, and that he was fueled by jealousy that one of the Croatian athletes might have been en route to taking his long standing record.

With recorded audio from the event, and an eyewitness testimony, this episode certainly grips our attention and furthers curiosity.

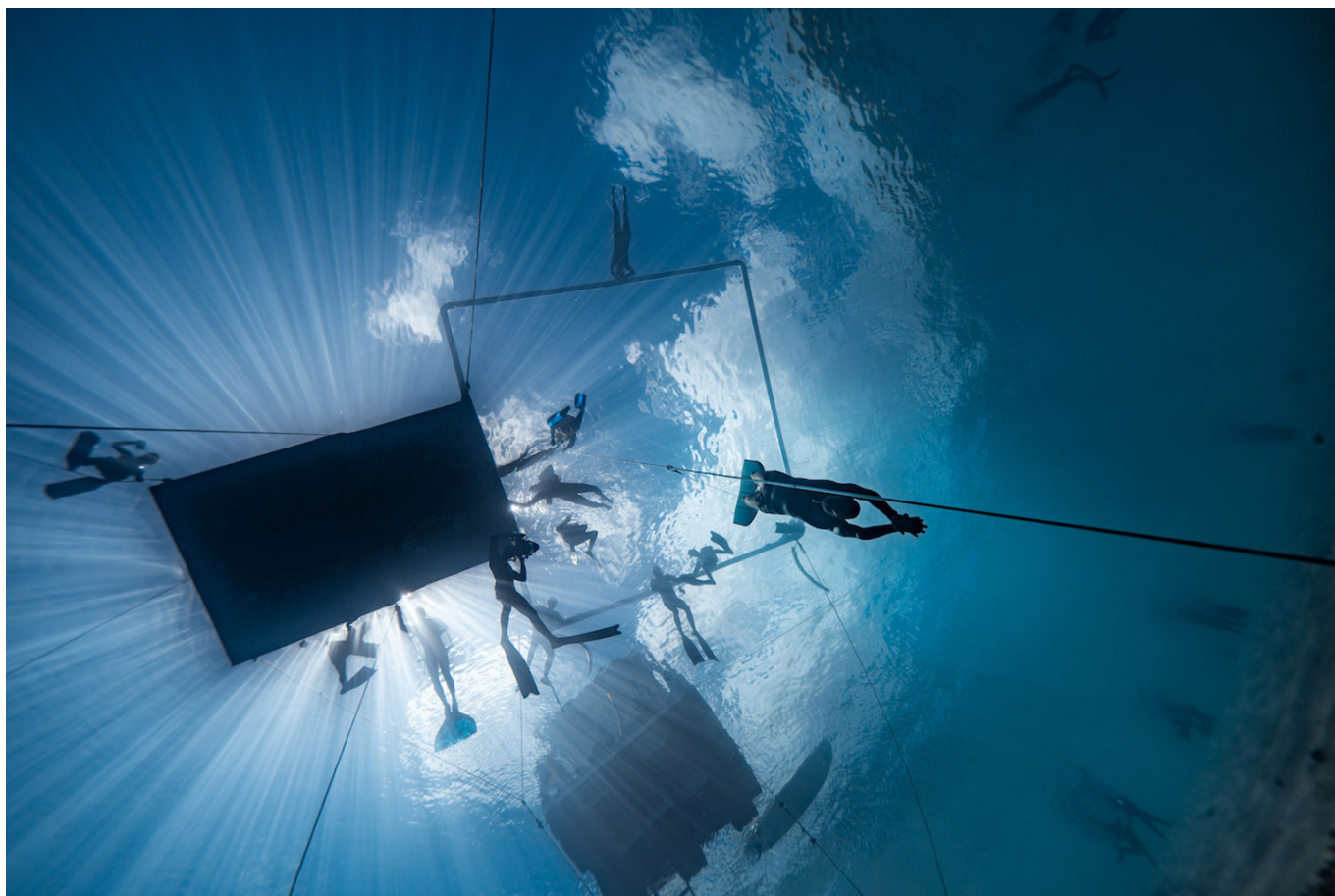


Photo by Daan Verhoeven

Episode Four: Don't Hold Your Breath

Episode four opens with a bang (or with a very telling forwarded voice note!). We then meet former Croatian team coach Boris Spajic, who argues that money has corrupted freediving, and how -as Lydia explains it- “we are all zoomed in on the wrong thing and missing the bigger picture”. We are then introduced to USADA (United States Anti-Doping Agency) CEO, Travis Tygart, who talks about his experience of doping in sports, and helps us to understand the nuance and differing opinions about what constitutes ethical training practices and cheating.

Episode Five: Click Bait

A new scandal involving the very same divers leaves viewers horrified after witnessing some shocking scenes of a viral video posted online. If the community wasn't split before, it certainly is now! Lydia explores the aftermath of this post, and asks whether it was the right way to showcase the sport to outsiders.

We hear the professional opinion of emergency doctor-turned-freediver Fernando Bizo Silva. The episode concludes with a very surprising take on the subject of freediving doping from an anti-doping officer, Nenad Dikic.



Photo by Daan Verhoeven

Episode Six: In Good Faith

Episode six: The moment we've all been waiting for. We finally get to hear from Vitomir himself, and Lydia presents him with the questions we've been asking over the last five episodes, and challenges him with allegations that contradict his answers. What is his explanation behind what was found in their bags? What was the motivation behind posting the viral video? And has he ever taken drugs that can potentially enhance his diving performance? ...You'll have to listen to find out!

Deep Water takes listeners into the niche world of competitive freediving. Across six episodes, Lydia Gard unravels the allegations that split the community in two. Through interviews and investigation, the series examines not just what happened, but why it matters. Each voice adds nuance and tells a story about truth, perception, and the fragile balance holding a tight-knit world together.