

Preface: Why I Undertook This Project and Why You Should Read It

Before reading this book you should ask yourself why you are willing to invest your valuable time in it as opposed to many others that you could select.

I have written a book that is unique among boxing books. It is not going to give the same facts and stories that other books continually regurgitate and steal from each other, adding nothing further to history. It will be revealing and informative even to seasoned historians, for it is the most thoroughly researched and detailed accounting of legendary champion John L. Sullivan's career. This book

1. Presents facts and analysis that no other book has presented. My research reveals previously unknown historical details and addresses many unsolved mysteries.
2. Provides multiple local and national primary source fight accountings to highlight differences in what was said at the time (the 1870s through the early 1890s), rather than simply put forth one version of events. I have extensively researched primary source accountings of significant bouts and cite those sources.
3. Discusses opponents' careers so that the significance of the bouts can be analyzed. The opponents are more than just names on paper.
4. Describes Sullivan's skill development and provides critiques of his abilities over the course of his career. Very few boxing fans know much about Sullivan's skill level, or the types of techniques that he utilized. Boxing books rarely chart over the course of a fighter's career how the press and experts changed their views regarding that boxer's skills and abilities.
5. Provides sociological, legal, and historic context. Readers will further understand what happened inside the ring by learning about what was going on outside the ring. This includes a discussion of how anti-prize fight laws prevented or affected fights, as well as an in-depth and frank analysis of the color line and Peter Jackson's career. Even Australian primary sources are used, giving the perspective of Jackson's home country.

This book is distinguishable from other books written on Sullivan (including his autobiography) in that it is more thorough, corrects mistakes, adds missing information, further develops and highlights factual discrepancies, relies on local primary sources, provides multiple perspectives, and supplies greater detail and analysis regarding the fights and opponents. One thing this book won't do that many others do is focus on every detail of fighters' personal lives, unless those facts have some significant bearing upon their careers. I'm writing about boxers and their boxing lives.

Also in this book, I bring to life the era's boxing scene, to assist readers in understanding the period and who these fighters were and what their relative merits were. I consider who they fought, why they were important, what their bouts meant for the sport and society, and whether boxers were worthy contenders and champions. Facts regarding how boxers performed against different and common opponents are provided so that readers can make comparisons and assess their careers. I describe what other fighters, champions, and future champions were doing at the same time to provide context. These are the types of things that I have found to be lacking in boxing books.

Boxing history also demonstrates how history gets recorded and how different people can witness the same event and provide different perspectives regarding what occurred. It is the history of reporting, of human perception, memory, discourse and its variations. From a historian's perspective, boxing is fascinating because its history is extensive and traceable. Even with that said, many holes in boxing history remain, and sources often differ in their accountings of facts or lack citations to support their assertions. I call attention to these differences and issues in this book.

Two things that I have learned in writing about boxing history and which explain the way that I have written this book are (1) never trust a book that doesn't cite its sources (unfortunately, this is very commonplace when it comes to boxing) and (2) the most complete and accurate understanding of an event is usually derived from referring to more than one local source. Too many boxing books cannot support their assertions, or over-rely on non-local or secondary sources, or fail to give multiple views of a fight, leading to questions about their accuracy and completeness. Even today, one fight can often have multiple perspectives and analysis. Therefore, it is important to review historic bouts through more than one viewpoint.

The sport's significant controversies, mysteries and debates are addressed using mostly primary but also secondary sources. Without the benefit of film, and being able to actually watch a bout from Sullivan's time, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of written accounts. This is why I often present different versions of fights, particularly ones with some controversy—to emphasize the difficulty in determining exactly what happened, and to provide readers with an overall feel for what was said about what occurred. Boxing books generally fail to do this. This book better discusses Sullivan's fights and provides many of the details that other books on Sullivan do not. It also corrects and addresses many of the factual inaccuracies put forth by many secondary sources.

Usually, when more sources are reviewed, more is learned about an event, at times unraveling a mystery, and at times further highlighting the factual confusion which existed. Again, many boxing books fail in this respect, as they simply present their version as the gospel truth. It is difficult for authors not to do that, and I may at times inject my opinion or slant my comments based on my review of the accounts, but I also try to present different versions of an event.

The varying shades of old-time bout accountings highlight another difficulty in attempting to recount boxing history. Newspaper and written accounts of bouts are quite often inaccurate. Even discounting the failings of sight, memory, and the inability of non-fight people to understand what goes on in a bout without the benefit of instant replay, newsmen often took liberties with their accountings, either to boost sales or as the result of bribes. Sometimes, reporters or periodicals allowed personal feelings towards certain fighters, either positive or negative, to influence their coverage. Periodicals could even have their own financial reasons to promote or attack certain fights or fighters because of their own financial ties to them. Sometimes, fighters themselves or their managers would tell vastly different stories

than those reported in order to boost their own reputations or to gain momentum for a match or rematch. Writers would at times rely on the fighters for their facts, so the veracity of reports could depend on the truthfulness of the fighters.

History is also about the process of selecting which facts to discuss. Differences could be the result of one writer including facts that another did not, with both rendering truthful but incomplete stories. Many fight reports were based on one or more telegraphs, and could be an amalgamation of multiple accounts by a writer who may or may not have witnessed the bout. This is why it is so important that more boxing books provide multiple fight accountings and citations to sources, as this book does. When not utilizing multiple sources, I usually tried to rely on a local source, because most often it is those sources that are the most accurate and thorough, and the bout most likely was actually viewed by the writer. That said, those accounts are not necessarily always the final word, because sometimes non-local reporters were more interested in a fight than were the locals.

Another fascinating aspect of boxing is that it often interacted with the law and world events, having national, social, and racial symbolism. Its champions were national figures whose lives were often extensively followed by the media. Their careers can be a useful way to track world history. Sociological and legal analysis of boxing provides further insight into what occurred or was allowed to occur inside the ring, but sociology books usually neglect the in-the-ring occurrences. This book provides social and legal background where it has a significant impact on the sport or the analysis of a champion's reign, but not at the expense of the actual in-the-ring occurrences.

In conclusion, by combining factual results, well-researched analysis of primary and secondary sources, and history, sociology, and law with critical views of the bouts, I have told the story of this champion in a unique way so that readers may obtain a new perspective about John L. Sullivan.

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