



Strong Boy: The Life and Times of John L. Sullivan, America's First Sports Hero

Christopher Klein

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“From the first page to the last, Klein’s prose retains its powers of enchantment and illumination. It is one of the best boxing books ever penned.”

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“[A] muscular, relentlessly detailed book.”

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“I can lick any son-of-a-bitch in the world.”

So boasted John L. Sullivan, the first modern heavyweight boxing champion of the world, a man who was the gold standard of American sport for more than a decade, and the first athlete to earn more than a million dollars. He had a big ego, big mouth, and bigger appetites. His womanizing, drunken escapades, and chronic police-blotter presence were godsend to a burgeoning newspaper industry. The larger-than-life boxer embodied the American Dream for late nineteenth-century immigrants as he rose from Boston’s Irish working class to become the most recognizable man in the nation. In the process, the “Boston Strong Boy” transformed boxing from outlawed bare-knuckle fighting into the gloved spectacle we know today.

Strong Boy tells the story of America’s first sports superstar, a self-made man who personified the power and excesses of the Gilded Age. Everywhere John L. Sullivan went, his fists backed up his bravado. Sullivan’s epic brawls, such as his 75-round bout against Jake Kilrain, and his cross-country barnstorming tour in which he literally challenged all of America to a fight are recounted in vivid detail, as are his battles outside the ring with a troubled marriage, wild weight and fitness fluctuations, and raging alcoholism. *Strong Boy* gives readers ringside seats to the colorful tale of one of the country’s first Irish-American heroes and the birth of the American sports media and the country’s celebrity obsession with athletes.

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