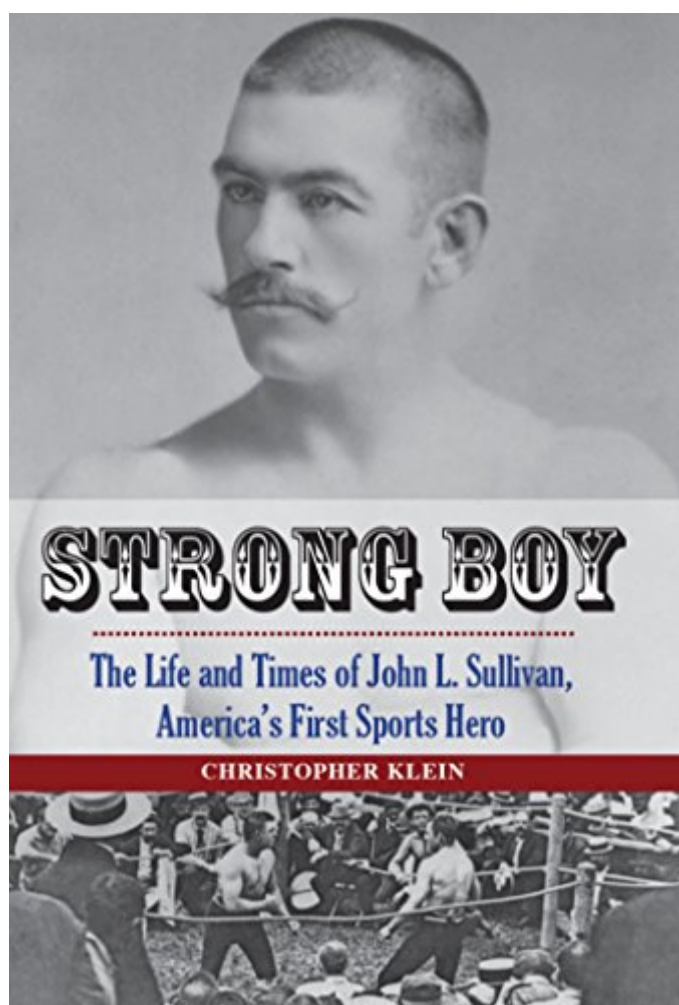


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Strong Boy: The Life And Times Of John L. Sullivan, America's First Sports Hero



Synopsis

“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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Customer Reviews

STRONG BOY is a biography of John L. Sullivan, who is generally regarded as the first of modern boxing's heavyweight champions. He reigned for ten years in the 1880's and 1890's. Known as "the Boston Strong Boy," Sullivan was a big powerhouse of a man--loud, rude, crude, obnoxious, and a borderline alcoholic. He physically and mentally abused his first wife and ignored his one child during that child's brief life. "John L.", as he liked to be called, is difficult to like. But that can't be said of Christopher Klein's biography, which is first rate--well written, well researched, and extremely well done. Klein brings Sullivan to life in all his brazen blustering ("I can lick any son of a bitch in the world"). The reader gets a ringside seat to all of his fights, and I must confess that I found myself rooting for old John L. despite his many shortcomings. Sullivan's life does have a happy ending, as later in life, he gives up drink, marries, settles down, and becomes a friendly, caring, lovable man. In short, this is an excellent biography of a fascinating man. And you need not be a boxing fan to enjoy the comet that was John L. Sullivan.

JLS's life was a testament to extreme over indulgence of one form or another. Even he, as the author describes, came to realize late in his life, the error of his ways and made his amends. He was an extraordinary sportsman with a sickness that would not allow him to control his urge to drink. For more than a decade, he dominated the heavyweight scene as undisputed Champion even while heavily under the influence of demon rum. In reading this book you have to draw the unmistakable conclusion that he behaved very badly throughout most of his life, yet was adored by most people as the first true sports superstar. It is well documented on this sad but intriguing story. This book was a true biography that brought the Strongboys life and times vividly alive with an entertaining style that flows naturally on its course. This is not simply a regurgitation of old newspaper accounts and redundant training regimens as other biographies tend to portray. Here we have a complex and complete picture of this unique Irishman nearly 100 years after his passing. I highly recommend this book and believe the reader will enjoy many of the same things that I did and discover a few of their own. I'm personally glad that John found a wee bit of peace on his farm with his loving wife and friends around him for a few years toward the end of his days. It's an Irish tale even to this very day. It's an American tale as well. Many many years ago I met a pretty fair fighter from the 1910's and

20's by the name of Ever Hammer. He was spry and gregarious when we met in 1969. The first thing he said while extending his hand to greet me was, "Shake the hand of the man who grasped the hand of John L. Sullivan." I didn't really understand the significance of it then. All these years later I do.

My familiarity with John L. Sullivan only went so far as a documentary I saw years ago on the History Channel. This book filled in a lot of the gaps and allows one to separate fact from myth. I couldn't help but cheer for him during the accounts of the fights, but I also wanted to smack him with some of the poor decisions he made. For anybody interested in boxing, history, or celebrities, this is a well-written work. I enjoyed reading it, and learned quite a bit about the former champ.

Just bought this book and though I have yet to finish it, I can't put it down. Klein paints a vivid and nuanced portrait of John L. Sullivan--the detail and research is simply impeccable. It is clear why Sullivan remains such an icon in the annals of American sports history. I heartily recommend it to anyone who is passionate about sports and sports history--but it will also have great appeal to those who love to read history and biography in general. Klein's writing transports readers right to the scene: be it inside the "coffin boats" arriving to America during the Irish Potato Famine or ring-side at a bare-knuckle bout. You can almost smell the sweat, blood, and whiskey...

Well written account of the life of America's first sports hero. This dubious hero came from poor living circumstances in the rough and tumble South Boston neighborhood of Irish immigrants. With little education and propelled by poverty, Sullivan used his brutal skills to rise to the top of an emerging, but still illegal sport. This account brings out the melancholy of his turbulent marriage, his chronic drunkenness, and his uncannily ability to prevail in the ring no matter his physical condition, the opponent, or fighting circumstances. His life story is one of poverty to riches to poverty, marked by his constant clawing for legitimacy. A page turner to say the least.

This is honestly one of the most entertaining and well-researched boxing biographies that I have had the pleasure to read (and I've read through quite a collection). Mr. Klein paints a picture of the Boston Strong-Boy that is appropriately larger-than-life, and balances descriptions of his personal life, his fights, and his battles with alcoholism. Most impressive was the attention paid to his career even after his decline. A most intimate and entertaining look at one of sports great personalities.

An excellent book which tells the story of John L. but also gives a fascinating picture of time: the plight of the Irish, racism, and media, just to name a few. I recommend it!

Many people today may not know the name John L. Sullivan, but if you pick up Strong Boy you'll know more than you ever thought possible about the man, the myth and the legend. Strong Boy is exhaustively researched filled with anecdotes and information you never thought you'd need but will always find interesting. It reads at times like a thriller, with cliffhanger-like chapter endings that make you want to turn the page and find out more. If you're a fan of non-fiction, or sports stories or biographies, this is definitely worth the price of admission.

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