



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

Christopher Klein

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Strong Boy: The Life and Times of John L. Sullivan, America's First Sports Hero Christopher Klein Now in paperback! "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." --Boston Globe "[A] muscular, relentlessly detailed book." --Wall Street Journal "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.

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

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From Reader Review Strong Boy: The Life and Times of John L. Sullivan, America's First Sports Hero for online ebook

Dann LaGratta says

After seeing the "Overly Manly Man" meme pop up on FB a little while back, I decided to look into who he actually was. The name that Google fed me was "John L. Sullivan" (JLS). Comparing the pictures now, I believe that my Google-Fu was weak, but it did provide me with the name of one of the MANLIEST SONS OF BITCHES WHO EVER LIVED. Wikipedia him for yourself, if you think that I'm a liar.

Now "manley" has been redefined over the years to mean something less than it used to. It's become watered down, like coffee grounds that have had too much water passed through them (only the coffee grounds are manliness and the water is liberalism).

I've spent the better part of today reading Sullivan's new biography titled Strong Boy by Christopher Klein and learned about this great hero in boxing history and have decided to list some more facts that are found in the book (but probably not on Wikipedia, though maybe they are, but if they are, rest assured that they are worth reading multiple times).

*Early in his career, JLS toured America (and its Western Territories) and posted \$50-\$100 that no one could last four rounds with him. No one ever did. (Well, one guy did, by repeated throwing himself on the ground w/o JLS ever laying a hand on him... for four rounds.) Some people who tried were happy just to have been knocked out by this great man.

*When JLS met the President, the newspapers reported "The President Met Sullivan", not the other way around, b/c JLS WAS MORE OF A MAN THAN HIM.

*JLS once got drunk and kidnapped an organ grinder (and his monkey) and forced him to play while he drove a carriage around town.

*For a title bout in Mississippi, fought bare-knuckled, for 2 hours and 16 minutes, in the sun, with the temperature over 100 degrees. In the 44th round he threw up b/c he mixed in too much whiskey with his iced tea. The match lasted 75 rounds.

*The above factoid was after he was recovering from consuming so much alcohol that he destroyed his stomach lining SIX MONTHS PRIOR.

*First athlete to make >\$1,000,000, most of which went to support drinking... his and everyone else's... but mostly his. He also purchased two different bars.

*His scowl was so powerful that the one man who ever beat him would not look him in the eye before the fight.

*Was friends with Teddy "A Bullet Won't Stop My Speech" Roosevelt.

*Once mistook heart problems for over-eating, b/c HE ATE SEVEN CHICKENS.

*He denied his wife's request for divorce. He applied for divorce 25 YEARS LATER (b/c that's when he felt like it). His wife wasn't notified of the proceedings.

For real though, if you know anyone this Christmas who enjoys biographies, history, books, owning a piece of processed tree, sports, or anything close to those things, show this book a little love. As of this writing, this book had one review on Amazon and one on Goodreads (which was just stars, 5/5 stars, which is great, but nothing written, which is not). The book is amazingly well researched and runs just shy of 300 pages, so it's not overly long and tedious like some bios tend to be.

Abraham Thunderwolf says

A must read for anyone who's interested in boxing, American culture in the late 18th and early 19th century, and The Great Outdoor Fight. The book is full of characters that are seemingly made up, people like Wild Bill, Theodore Roosevelt, Jack Johnson, among many others. Of course let's not forget John L Sullivan. I'm sure you'd recognize The picture of him, hair slicked with pomade, thick mustache curled up, fist casually raised up for fisticuffs. Sure he was kind of a jerk, a racist, and a drunk, but the man lived, grabbing life by it's throat and punching it square in the face. Christopher Klein has put together book that captures not only the life of Sullivan but America in a grand rollicking manner, it's almost overwhelming at times. Fresh and sharp overall. Read it while drinking a good bourbon. Neat.

Michael says

"Strong Boy" is a fascinating and well-researched look at the life of John L. Sullivan. Having only knowing of Sullivan as a boxer, I was surprised to learn about the variety of endeavours that John L took part in during his life. Klein does an excellent job of providing context as the reader is informed and reminded about people and society in Boston and the United States during John L's time, over a hundred years ago. Highly recommended for fans of boxing, biographies, or Boston!

Please note that I received a copy of the book from the author in exchange for my honest review.

Ben says

I received this book for free via Goodreads First Reads.

Fantastic book. A definite must-read for boxing fans, sports fans, Irish Americans, and generally fans of biographies and interesting people. Christopher Klein has a clean good prose that makes it easily accessible to both sporting/boxing fans and non-fans alike. He holds nothing back and besides the segments near the end about John L. and the color line, Klein is very unbiased in his portrayal of John L. He totals and depicts both the good and the bad of John L. Sullivan's life without commentary or criticism (again - until the end about John L.'s racism). A fantastic read and an extraordinary book that definitely belongs on any boxing fan's bookshelf.

Eric Parker says

Wow, what a fascinating book! If you are interested in the life of Teddy Roosevelt you'll love this as well. These guys were from the same era and cut from some of the same cloth.

John L. Sullivan was one of America's first sports heroes. He rose to boxing greatness around the time that transcontinental railroads were finished and photography became mainstream. This made him incredibly recognizable.

I love the descriptions of his exploits in the ring and outside of it. A super gripping book that had me on the edge of my seat wanting to read more. For fans of history, biographies, sports and stories of redemption, this one is for you.

Casey Trowbridge says

<http://randomcatastrophe.net/2015/07/...>

Vince Ciaramella says

This was one of the best books that I've read in months. I've always had an interest in this era of boxing and especially John L Sullivan. My great-great grandfather was a featherweight fighter named Jack McClland "The Pride of Pittsburgh" who fought around the same time as Sullivan (though they never met in the ring) and reading this book really brought to life a bygone era of crazy fight locations, London Prize Ring rules, handlebar mustached fighters, and just the strange laws and attitudes surrounding prizefighting at the end of the 19th/ early 20th century.

I recommend this book to anyone, even if you don't care for modern boxing (which I don't).

victor harris says

A biography that has some punch to it. Entertaining, no holds-barred account of Sullivan, considered to be the first legitimate heavyweight champion. As one of the major post-Civil War celebrities, Sullivan lived a life of excess in the ring, with women, and with the bottle. It would be the latter which would prove to be his undoing as his alcohol addiction led to abusive conduct in his domestic and public relationships, frequent run-ins with the law, and contributed to inflating his stomach and eroding his legendary pugilistic skills. Although he would eventually quit drinking and achieve some measure of tranquility in his waning years, he left a trail of destruction and debt in his wake. To maintain his lifestyle (he squandered over a million dollars in the currency of the era), he took to barnstorming tours, fighting expeditions, and was even featured in a number of plays. His celebrity status masked any of his deficiencies in thespian roles. In many ways, he was a forerunner to many sports superstars who feel they can act with impunity and become social liabilities. It is a tale well told, instructive and intriguing.
