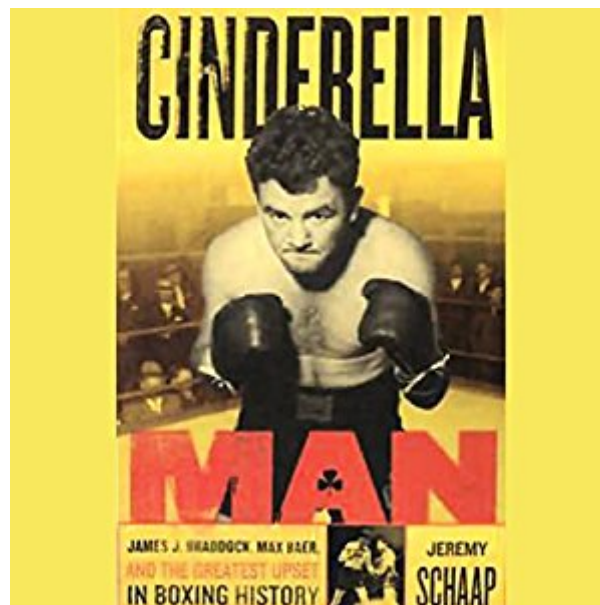




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Cinderella Man: James Braddock, Max Baer, And The Greatest Upset In Boxing History



Synopsis

Lost in the annals of boxing is the sport's true Cinderella story. James J. Braddock, dubbed "Cinderella Man" by Damon Runyon, was a once promising light heavyweight for whom a string of losses in the ring and a broken right hand happened to coincide with the Great Crash of 1929. With one good hand, Braddock was forced to labor on the docks of Hoboken. Only his manager, Joe Gould, still believed in him, finding fights for Braddock to help feed his wife and children. The diminutive, loquacious Jew and the burly, quiet Irishman made one of boxing's oddest couples, but together they staged the greatest comeback in fighting history. In 12 months Braddock went from the relief rolls to face heavyweight champion Max Baer, the Livermore Butcher Boy, renowned for having allegedly killed two men in the ring. A charismatic, natural talent and in every way Braddock's foil, Baer was a towering opponent, a Jew from the West Coast who was famously brash and made great copy both in and out of the ring. A 10-to-1 underdog, Braddock carried the hopes and dreams of the working class on his shoulders. And when boxing was the biggest sport in the world, when the heavyweight champion was the biggest star in the world, his unlikely upset made Braddock the most popular champion boxing had ever seen. Against the gritty backdrop of the Depression, *Cinderella Man* brings this dramatic all-American story to life, evoking a time when the sport of boxing resonated with a country trying desperately to get back on its feet. Schaap paints a vivid picture of the fight world in its golden age, populated by men of every class and ethnic background and covered voluminously by writers who elevated sports writing to art. Rich in anecdote and color, steeped in history, and full of human interest, *Cinderella Man* is a classic David and Goliath tale that transcends the sport.

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Customer Reviews

Before reading this book I was vaguely familiar with James J. Braddock as someone interested in boxing, especially Heavyweights. As a side note, that essentially stopped several years ago when boxing degenerated into an alphabet soup set of "champions" and it became hard to maintain any interest in the sport, but I digress. I had seen the movie "Cinderella Man," based on this book, so I was curious about those things in Braddock's life that Movies always have to cut out, or change. So my first comment is that, as much as I liked the movie, the movie has only a slight resemblance to this real life story. Much was left out (obviously due to screen time constraints), but also much was changed. This book provides much more background and life story information about Braddock than the movie could ever show, and it's all good and written very well. The author details Braddocks struggles (and successes) not only in the ring but in life, drawn vividly against the Great Depression. Braddock was a rock solid, hard working, honest, and honorable man. He personified the Horatio Alger story, in which good things happen to those who are good people and work hard at being so. The book also serves as an in-depth reference and insight into what many call the glory years of boxing, with names like Jack Dempsey, Jim Corbett, Max Schmeling, Joe Louis, Primo Carnera, Max Baer, and others. Max Baer is portrayed completely differently than in the movie. In the movie he was a wiseguy smart aleck who had killed two men in the ring. In the book, he was basically a reasonably nice guy with immense physical gifts but very little interest in boxing. The fight between Baer and Braddock for the Heavyweight Championship is completely different than in the movie. The movie angle is admittedly more dramatic, but in reality Baer had not trained hard for the bout, aimed for a knockout in the early rounds, and Braddock stayed away from his big right hand until Baer tired after the 7th round and Braddock mounted up the points - and also gave Baer a pretty good beating. It was not a one punch fight as essentially portrayed in the movie. Braddock's story is compelling. It transcends his life from an early young light heavyweight with a strong chin, a good right hand, and not much else at 21 years old to a washed up, broken handed, on-relief dock worker at 29. But through perseverance, hard work, a love of and dedication to boxing, and a faithful manager (rare in those days, or any days) who never lost hope in him, Braddock finally got a shot again at the championship and real-life had a fairy tale ending. This is truly a 'feel good' book and story, and even better it's true. I enjoyed it immensely.

This is the true story of one of boxing's greatest upsets, and come-backs. James Braddock was an

Irish-American boxer during the era of America's Great Depression, when boxing was the country's most popular sport. In 1927, for a 30-minute fight against Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney made \$990,445, more than Babe Ruth made in 14 major league seasons. Braddock was a good boxer, with a powerful right hand, but he did not develop his left hand until the very end of his career. He was also slow-footed, but he could take a punch. He would win a fight, then lose a few, then win one, then lose several more. His overall record was 46 wins, 23 losses, and 4 draws (ties), with 27 of his wins by knockout. This is not a stellar record (Max Baer's was 73 wins and 12 losses), but it shows Braddock's determination to persevere against all odds. Also determined was Braddock's fiercely loyal manager and friend, Joe Gould, who doggedly pursued fight managers to get Braddock a shot at the title. He never gave up either. One year before Braddock fought Baer for the title on June 13, 1935, he had secretly been on welfare to support his wife and children. One of the best moments in this book is the type of training that Braddock did in preparing to fight Baer. He fought against 4 sparring partners who were told to not hold back. They didn't. One of them hit Braddock so hard in the side his rib was dented and separated some of the muscles underneath it. Gould and Braddock devised a plan to keep this secret from the media, so as not to inform Baer of this vulnerability. They fashioned a leather guard that Braddock wore under two layers of sweat shirts during the rest of training camp. When June 13th came around, he was in the best fighting shape of his life. The book also helps the reader understand how Max Baer, although a supremely gifted fighter, was a reluctant boxer who once killed a boxer in the ring. He had underprepared for his fight with Braddock, and loved playing to the crowd rather than focusing on his craft. A great book.

Jeremy Schapp does yeoman's work in capturing the backdrop and specifics which lead to James Braddock's sensational upset of Max Baer to win the world heavyweight boxing title. This event may well be the most significant upset in the history of boxing. The question is, "how did this happen?" "Cinderella Man" answers that question in spades. The book not only captures the family histories and private lives of Braddock and Baer but also their managers, agents and promoters. Schapp does a great job of capturing the impact of the economic strains and constraints of depression era America and their impact on life, sports in general and boxing in particular. If anyone likes to enjoy a really interesting, good guy story, with a happy ending "Cinderella Man" will meet your needs. A terrific read !

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