



Cinderella Man: James Braddock, Max Baer, and the Greatest Upset in Boxing History

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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 twelve 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 ten-to-one 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.

Cinderella Man: James Braddock, Max Baer, and the Greatest Upset in Boxing History Details

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From Reader Review Cinderella Man: James Braddock, Max Baer, and the Greatest Upset in Boxing History for online ebook

Diane says

A very interesting book held my attention from the first page.

Shawn says

Very rarely do I find a work of non-fiction to be this much of a page-turner.
A great compliment to the movie which was equally as good.

Scott says

After watching the movie directed by Ron Howard I decided I needed to read the book. I actually bought the book over a year ago at D.I. Anyways, I was surprised by how closely the movie followed Braddock's story. The book flowed well, was fast paced and an easy read. It really is an interesting story. I thought the author did a good job of writing this with relevant good solid information. It follows both the rise and fall of both Braddock and Baer. Braddocks story is a good one. I also learned quite a bit about boxing which I didn't know before. For example, I learned George Forman was a boxer. I also learned boxing was the major sport of the early 1900's. One reason for that is because different nationalities and races could participate in the sport unlike baseball, golf, or tennis. I also liked what was happening behind the scenes with the managers of the boxers and how they went about setting up fights. Overall, I did like this book but I'm not sure when I would read it again.

Cruz Ramos says

If you have only seen the movie, you haven't heard the whole story! This is a must read for any boxing fan!

Lonnie says

Thoroughly researched and very interesting book about the life and times of the subject and his opponents. The movie, "Cindarella Man", was great but employed a lot of artistic license in dramatizing the final fight. Max Baer is represented more accurately here and Braddock's ups and downs are told in more detail without taking away from the real drama of the final fight. Braddock's rise, fall and rise is extrodinary as is his character as evidenced by his devotion to his family throughout his troubles, his re-paying of the financial relief he received from the government and his inexhaustable belief in his abilities in spite of all of the setbacks he faced. I wish we had more like him in sports and in the world.

Jefferson Coombs says

Interesting book. There is quite a bit here that was not in the movie. I enjoyed listening to it. Our culture has changed significantly since the 1930s.

Brendan Babisch says

Really good book that depicts not just the man, but also the era and the sport extremely well. In addition to being a cracking good story, Braddock's ascendency to the title was very moving. However, one interesting wrinkle: though the book crescendos with Braddock's defeat of Max Baer, I found his defeat to Joe Louis more inspiring. Louis was a far superior fighter, yet Braddock allowed himself to be pummeled for eight rounds rather than just take a dive in the second or third round, which is when he realized he had no chance of winning.

Yep. They don't make 'em like Braddock anymore.

Ulrich Krieghund says

I read this in reverse order, that is after viewing the film. I thoroughly enjoyed the parallel journeys of both Braddock and Baer. Certainly Baer was far more clown than killer, and his litany of nicknames attest to a bright but brief shining star. Braddock's rise from being down and out is nestled within the context and travails of the Great Depression.

Interestingly enough, since Braddock won the belt but didn't even successfully defend it even a single time, other heavyweights such as Buster Douglas and Hasim Rahman had Cinderella qualities.

Abraham Mathew says

Classic. Just as good as the movie.

Al says

ALSO RECOMMENDED TO PEOPLE WHO WENT DRINKING AT THE PIERS IN JERSEY CITY, HOBOKEN, WEEHAWKEN, EDGEWATER AFTER THE HIGH SCHOOL DANCE AND PEOPLE THAT HAVE WALKED THE STAIRS FROM BOULEVARD EAST TO PORT IMPERIAL.

It's incredible how much the movie embellished, exaggerated, or just flat out got wrong. This book sets a lot of things straight by telling it straight and in the process, it is way more compelling than the movie. The book opens you up to a world of boxing that is different than what it is today and introduces you to boxers that any boxing fan should acquaint themselves with, like Tommy Loughran, Benny Leonard, and all the great James

J's. It also gives nods to a lot of the great boxers of the time. The book is also very evenly handed, too, as Jeremy Schaap goes to great lengths in telling Max Baer's story. Also, if you grew up in Hudson County before they started building condos all over the waterfront, you will appreciate the Cinderella Man's story of making it through the rough times of the Depression and also you will gain a new appreciation for the county's rich boxing tradition. I never even knew that I grew up down the street and now live across from what was once known as Boyle's Thirty Acres, where Jack Dempsey fought Georges Carpentier and where boxing drew its first million dollar gate.

Ted says

4 1/2

I'm not much of a boxing fan, but a friend raved about and loaned this book to me. It was a real page-turner - great book about Braddock and Baer, but also about Depression times, the New York/New Jersey locale, and the fight scene in the heyday of American boxing. Highly recommended to anyone with an interest in any of those things.

Since I no longer have the book, I'll lay some text in here from the Wiki piece on James J. Braddock (1905 - 1974).

Braddock was born in Hell's Kitchen in New York City on West 48th Street. He was one of seven children being raised by both immigrant parents; Irish mother Elizabeth O'Tool and Anglo-Irish father Joseph Braddock. He stated his life's early ambition was to play football for Knute Rockne at the University of Notre Dame, but he had "more brawn than brains."

...

In 1934 Braddock was given a fight with the highly touted John "Corn" Griffin. Although Braddock was intended simply as a stepping stone in Griffin's career, he knocked out the "Ozark Cyclone" in the third round. Braddock then fought John Henry Lewis, a future light heavyweight champion. He won in one of the most important fights of his career. After defeating another highly regarded heavyweight contender, Art Lasky, whose nose he broke during the bout on March 22, 1935, Braddock was given a title fight against the World Heavyweight Champion, Max Baer.

Baer hardly trained for the bout. Braddock, on the other hand, was training hard. "I'm training for a fight. Not a boxing contest or a clownin' contest or a dance", he said. "Whether it goes 1 round or 3 rounds or 10 rounds, it will be a fight and a fight all the way... When you've been through what I've had to face in the last two years, a Max Baer or a Bengal tiger looks like a house pet. He might come at me with a cannon and a blackjack and he would still be a picnic compared to what I've had to face."

Considered little more than a journeyman fighter, Braddock was hand-picked by Baer's handlers because he was seen as an easy payday for the champion, despite his recent impressive victories. Instead, on June 13, 1935, at Madison Square Garden Bowl, Braddock won the Heavyweight Championship of the World as the 10-to-1 underdog in what was called "the greatest fistic upset since the defeat of John L. Sullivan by Jim Corbett". [The reference for this quote is the book being reviewed here.]

During the fight, a dogged Braddock took a few heavy hits from the powerful younger champion (30 years vs

26 years for Baer), but Braddock kept coming, wearing down Baer, who seemed perplexed by Braddock's ability to take a punch. In the end, the judges gave Braddock the title with a unanimous decision.

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Previous review: Sword of Honour Trilogy

Random review: A Season in Hell Rimbaud

Next review: Half of a Yellow Sun

Previous library review: The Match

Next library review: 1000 Ways to Win Monopoly Games

Arminius says

Cinderella man is a book about an underdog in boxing as well as an underdog in life trying to make something of himself in the toughest economic times of the 20th Century. It centers itself around James J. Braddock. Braddock was a very nice man who wanted to take care of his family. One of the few industries of the 1930's where one could make money was boxing. Braddock was a good boxer who at times slacked. Part of his slacking was due to the fact that he suffered from fragile hands that rarely were healthy.

He worked the New Jersey docks when he was not boxing but rarely made enough to support his family doing so. So he decided to take boxing seriously and rattled off a few impressive wins. They set him up with one of the top contenders, Corn Griffin. Braddock surprised the boxing world with an impressive knock out of this top contender. He then rattled off two more victories over opponents the experts thought he should not beat. These victories land him a shot at the heavyweight championship held by Max Baer.

Although Braddock had some impressive wins he was still a huge underdog. The champion, Baer, joked around a lot but had tremendous power in his punches. It seems as though he was carrying Braddock at first but once he noticed how serious Braddock was he fought it out with him. Baer relying on his tremendous power could not stop the iron-chinned Braddock and lost a unanimous decision and his heavyweight belt with it.

At this time, Joe Louis was coming up and was viewed as the best heavyweight and next champion. Braddock, however, was the new champion and gained that championship in what was the greatest upset of a heavyweight champion since Boxing began in the 1880's. That's why Damon Runyon called Braddock "Cinderella Man."

As champion Braddock was set to fight Max Schmeling in his first defense. Schmeling earned the title by pulling off an upset himself, by knocking out Joe Louis. Braddock's manager, who was a real good friend, pulled off a sensational deal setting up Braddock to fight Joe Louis instead of Max Schmeling. He made a sweet deal with the Louis camp. In exchange for Braddock giving Louis the chance Louis, if he wins, would agree to pay a certain percentage of Louis's purse to Braddock for all of Louis's title defenses.

Louis beat Braddock and dominated boxing for a decade. Braddock went on to live a comfortable life.

Rachel says

James Braddock was a Depression-era light heavyweight contender who after a series of losses and a broken right hand, looked all but washed up. Working sporadically as a day laborer on the New Jersey docks and having to go on county relief to get enough money to feed his family, through the loyalty of his manager Joe Gould, he managed to work his way back into the ring and eventually to a title shot against heavyweight champion Max Baer.

It's one of the better stories in sports history, yet author Jeremy Schaap renders it pretty lifelessly. I don't know what it is about his writing, but I get the sense that if it were read aloud, it would sound like a high school oral report. I was also distracted by how much he focused on which fighters were Jewish and which weren't. It's not that it was completely irrelevant, particularly in light of the possibility that were Max Schmeling to regain the title, the Nazi Party might then control who he fought and refuse to allow any black or Jewish challengers, but even so, when Schaap began cataloging who was 100% Jewish and who was only 25% Jewish, I began to feel like I was watching the "Jew/Not a Jew" skit from Saturday Night Live.

On the plus side, he portrays Max Baer in a much fuller light than was done in the movie based on this book. In the movie, Baer was portrayed as a blood-thirsty jackass who didn't care if his opponents actually died as a result of his punching them in the head; here, Schaap reports (albeit somewhat matter-of-factly) that Baer forever suffered over the incident early in his career when he killed Frankie Campbell and that it continued to impact to his detriment the way he fought even at the end of his career. Nonetheless I will always love the movie if only because someone once described it as being "just like *Seabiscuit*, but with Russell Crowe playing the part of the horse."

The book was just okay but probably of no interest if you're not a boxing fan.

Stacy K B says

A wonderful read, if you are a fan of boxing. Jeremy Shaap writes a wonderful rendering of the boxing career of Jame. J. Braddock.

The story spends much time reviewing other boxers, along the way as well... Such as Jack Dempsey and Braddock's amazing fight with Max Baer. The book also gives some insight into Max Baer. This caused me to want to cheer Baer on, as well, while reading.

I am glad to have read this book (in two days), as I have been waiting to read before watching the movie.

For sports fans and closet Boxing-freaks, like me, I recommend this book!

Tracy says

If you watch the movie, this book is based on that screen play with some additional information from other sources. In one respect I was disappointed because I was hoping it was a true biography, and would have

more about his childhood, And more about his life after he became heavyweight champion. Other than that it was really enjoyable read about a man who fought back from very difficult odds, and always put his family first.

Jason says

A quick review, fuck you Sylvester Stallone, you stole your Rocky storylines directly from James Braddock's life.

A great primer for folks who wanna learn about boxing in its heyday. Lots of "characters" and stereotypes which turn out to be true. Max Baer figures prominently in this book, but not until the middle, so the story-telling aspect of the book felt uneven. Jeremy Schaap is not afraid to latch onto old-timey sportswriter language here and there and I approve.

Reasons to read:

1. You don't know who the Chocolate Kid is.
2. You like boxing/mma but talk out of your ass about them.
3. You're a dude.
4. You're Irish and you wanna how tough your great-grandpa was.
5. You liked Rocky.
6. You like the idea of Max Baer fucking a chick in the locker room at Madison Square Garden before a title fight.

Nathan Peterson says

All my life I've loved watching sports. Everything from the history to the stats and more importantly the thrill a person gets when the unexplainable happens. When something so unlikely happens; that you stand there and say "I don't believe what I just saw." The story of James Braddock is one of those unexplainable moments.

All throughout the book I felt like I was witnessing history in the making although I wasn't there I could feel the excitement that people would have felt then and there.

I love feel good stories and to read about how Braddock went from being a promising boxer to living almost on the streets and then getting his second chance. The moment he stepped in the ring with Max Baer I could just see the determination Braddock was fighting with. He was fighting with a purpose. Not for his own personal glory but for his family. I loved the book. From beginning to end I was hooked. James Braddock truly was and always will be the Cinderella Man.

John Somers says

B. R. Reed says

A very good book about the American boxing scene circa the late 1920s and early 30s, the Depression Era. This book focuses on the rise and fall and the subsequent and unexpected comeback of a NJ heavyweight boxer named Jim Braddock, the Cinderella Man. The book is much more about boxing than the movie based on the book and full of interesting boxing anecdotes. Back in those days boxing was big, right up there with baseball. Boxing was and is a very violent sport. A champion boxer needs to be ferocious, cold-blooded and a gamer. Despite Braddock's modesty (the anti-Ali), affability and character he possessed the "right stuff" to become the heavyweight champion in 1935. The book tells a very human story about the Irish-American Braddock (born in Hell's Kitchen) who teams up with the good and decent Jewish-American, Joe Gould. Gould was his manager and was a big part of Braddock's success. Braddock was a devoted married man with three young children trying his best to keep his family fed and sheltered during the early Depression. He sought work where he could find it (worked the docks) and kept up with his training. Braddock won three big fights immediately before getting a shot at the title in a championship bout vs Max Baer in NY. Baer was the opposite of Braddock in personality. Baer cared little for the fight game. It was just a way to make big money and Baer's right hand was his meal ticket. Baer was a playboy and a clown. He did not respect the sport like Braddock. Baer was an overwhelming favorite to destroy Braddock but as the fight progressed Braddock, Gould and the fans (most all of them pulling for Braddock) sensed an upset in the making. Bottom line, Jeremy Schaap wrote a very good book about a great American sports story. Well done.

Chris S. says

This is an excellent book. Schaap does an excellent job weaving together the narratives of Braddock and Baer, coloring in the margins with contemporary reports. Hearing what the columnists of the time had to say - significant due to their influence (and verbosity!) - feeds into the social awareness that made it possible for a kind of ordinary boxer into "Cinderella Man."
