



# Bare Fists: The History of Bare Knuckle Prize Fighting

*Bob Mee*

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In its heyday, which spanned the mid 18th to the late 19th centuries, the bare-knuckle prize-fight was a wildly popular sport which, as gloved boxing does now, produced some extraordinary characters and legendary bouts, both in Britain and the United States. With contests lasting hours and going into over 100 thrilling, punishing rounds, the sport drew crowds both common and elite-from royals and politicians to writers like Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope to Dickens and Thackeray, to the middle and working classes-all drawn together by the brutal excitement and the spirited wagering the sport generated. Much like gloved boxing today, average men could become superstars overnight, and they could lose the accolades and their health just as quickly.

In *Bare Fists*, Bob Mee shows the fascinating evolution of bare- knuckle boxing, from the earliest days when there were no rules, to the introduction of the Broughton and London Prize Ring Rules, to what was, for bare-knuckle fighting, the beginning of the end-the Marquess of Queensbury Rules, with their call for gloves and timed rounds and their banishment of such brawl-like moves as wrestling holds. Rich in rare and exhilarating anecdote, *Bare Fists* recreates with thrilling immediacy all of the big bouts of the sport, including those of the legendary American champion of the 1880s, John L. Sullivan. Bob Mee brings the coverage full circle, with a report on how this strange sub-culture continues to flourish, fueled by films like Brad Pitt's *Fight Club*. *Bare Fists* is an exciting and important addition to the literature of boxing.

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