



# John L. Sullivan: The Career of the First Gloved Heavyweight Champion

*Adam J. Pollack*

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Essentially the last of the bare-knuckle heavyweight champions, John L. Sullivan was instrumental in the acceptance of gloved fighting. His charisma and popular appeal during this transitional period contributed greatly to making boxing a nationally popular, “legitimate” sport. Sullivan became boxing’s first superstar and arguably the first of any sport. From his first match in the late 1870s through his final championship fight in 1892, this biography contains a thoroughly researched, detailed accounting of John L. Sullivan’s boxing career. With special attention to the 1880s, the decade during which Sullivan came to prominence, it follows Sullivan’s skill development and discusses his opponents and fights in detail, providing various viewpoints of a single event. Beginning with a discussion of early boxing practices, the sport itself is placed within sociological, legal and historical contexts including anti-prize fighting laws and the so-called “color line.” A complete record of Sullivan’s career is also included.

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