

# Part 2: Fighting and Combat Sports

## *Wrestling, Boxing, and Martial Arts*

**M**y youngest son recently stumbled upon a boxing match on TV and commented, "I don't understand how people beating each other up is sports."

Fair enough.

As one who has never boxed, wrestled, or even punched a kid on the playground, I am the last guy to give a rationale for combat sports. Still, in working with adolescents every day, I can attest to the fact that these sports are the passion of many of them. Robert Lipsyte's fictional boxing novel *The Contender* (Harper & Row, 1967) is a popular staple of many middle and high school English curriculums. There is a very strong and visible appeal to the young adult audience for fighting sports. While these sports may be violent, there is so much more beneath the surface to understand.

Strategy, toughness, endurance, and perseverance are all characteristics of stories that involve combat sports. Boxing has a storied history, with many famous names and bouts. Wrestling remains one of the most popular youth sports in the country, and mixed martial arts is one of the fastest growing sports today.

Unfortunately, many library collections are "underweight" on fighting sport books and don't reflect the popularity of the sports. Here is a list of books that may satisfy those of your patrons searching for good nonfiction material in the fighting sports.

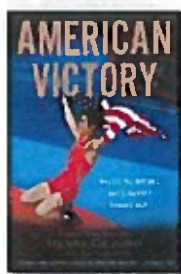
### WRESTLING

Brown, Matt. *Mission: Accomplished: Reflections of an NCAA National Champion*. CreateSpace Independent, 2015. 196p. \$14.95 Trade pb. 978-1-5120-2905-5.

Follow Penn State wrestler Matt Brown, who, after taking two years off for a church mission, won the 2015 NCAA National Wrestling Championships. The book looks into not only his success on the mat but in the classroom as well, where he finishes with a 3.97 GPA.



Cejudo, Henry, and Bill Plaschke. *American Victory: Wrestling, Dreams, and a Journey toward Home*. Celebra, 2011. 240p. \$15. Trade pb. 978-0-451-23203-8.



Henry Cejudo's remarkable journey takes the son of illegal immigrants from the mean streets of South Central L.A. to the glory of the Beijing Olympics, where he became the first American in sixteen years to win the gold medal in freestyle wrestling and the youngest American gold medalist ever in this sport.

Gable, Dan, and Scott Schulte. *A Wrestling Life: The Inspiring Stories of Dan Gable*. University of Iowa Press, 2016. 172p. \$14.95 Trade pb. 978-1-60938-326-8.

Famed wrestler and wrestling coach Dan Gable tells engaging and inspiring stories that trace his life from Waterloo, Iowa, to

the Olympics to coaching the successful University of Iowa wrestling teams. This is a great overall look at the sport of wrestling and a man who has been synonymous with success in the sport.

Gardner, Rulon, and Bob Schaller. *Never Stop Pushing: My Life from a Wyoming Farm to the Olympic Medals Stand*.

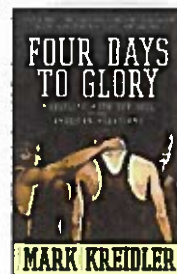


Da Capo, 2005. 352p. \$18.95 Trade pb. 978-0-7867-1593-0.

Rulon Gardner achieved, arguably, the greatest upset in individual sports history when he defeated the Russian Alexander Karelin—three-time Olympic champ in the 2000 Olympic Gold Medal match. He also

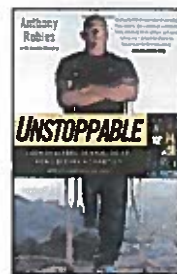
later survived a serious snowmobile accident and went on to defend his Gold Medal at Athens in 2004.

Kreidler, Mark. *Four Days to Glory: Wrestling with the Soul of the American Heartland*. It Books, 2007. 288p. \$13.99 Trade pb. 978-0-06-082319-1.



Three-time state champions Jay Borschel and Dan LeClere have a chance in their senior year to join the sport's most elite group: the "four-timers," wrestlers who won four consecutive state titles. With each fighting through their own motivations and demons, the story follows their quests for greatness.

Robles, Anthony. *Unstoppable: From Underdog to Undefeated: How I Became a Champion*. Avery, 2013. 244p. \$16. Trade pb. 978-1-59240-804-7.



Born without his right leg, Anthony Robles began wrestling in high school as the smallest kid on the team and finished the year in last place. But he completed his junior and senior years with a 96-0 record to become a two-time Arizona State champion and went on to win an NCAA wrestling title in college. This is a great story about conquering adversity and coming out on top.

Russell, Dan, and Craig Borlase. *Finish Strong: The Dan Russell Story*. Rising Star Studios, 2015. 288p. \$15. Trade pb. 978-1-936770-70-0.

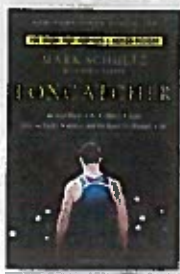


With his brother and fellow champion wrestler Joe by his side, Dan reached the pinnacle of his sport. But God had other plans for his life, and the book discusses how our struggles can be overcome in unexpected ways.





Schultz, Mark, and David Thomas. **Foxcatcher: The True Story of My Brother's Murder, John du Pont's Madness, and the Quest for Olympic Gold.** Plume, 2015. 320p. \$16. Trade pb. 978-0-14-751648-0.



In 1996, Dave Schultz was shot in the back by du Pont heir, John E. du Pont, at the family's famed Foxcatcher Farms estate in Pennsylvania. The book is the fascinatingly bizarre story of the Olympic wrestling gold medalist brothers Mark Schultz and Dave

Schultz and their fatal relationship with the eccentric John du Pont who wanted to train them.

Takata, Allen. **Last Chances.** CreateSpace Independent, 2011. 214p. \$12. Trade pb. 978-1-4565-0368-0.

This great story of high school wrestling drama traces the obstacles that two wrestlers must face as they make their final attempt at a state title. In the end, they must face hardships, loss, and each other. Unfortunately, only one can succeed in his last chance.



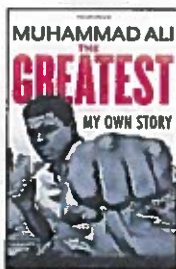
## BOXING

When he was only twelve years old, someone stole Cassius Clay's bike. Clay complained to a police officer. "If I find the guy who took my bike," he said, "I'm gonna whup him."

As fate would have it, the officer also operated a boxing gym in his spare time. After admiring Clay's tenacity, an offer was extended to the boy to learn to fight in his gym. And so, the champion Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali, was born.

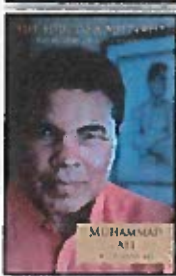
When it comes to books about Ali, these three do a great job of exploring his life and philosophy, each in their own unique way. The rest tell stories of other boxers.

Ali, Muhammad. **The Greatest: My Own Story.** Graymalkin Media, 2015. 398p. \$14.99 Trade Pb. 978-1-63168-049-6



\_\_\_\_\_. **The Soul of a Butterfly: Reflections on Life's Journey.** Simon & Schuster, 2013. 268p. \$16.99 Trade pb. 978-1-4767-4737-8.

Myers, Walter Dean. **The Greatest: Muhammad Ali.** Scholastic, 2001. 172p. \$6.99 Trade pb. 978-0-590-54343-9.



My Own Story is a comprehensive, traditional, autobiographical look at the fighter's life and accomplishments, and in **The Soul of a Butterfly**, Ali takes readers on a spiritual journey through the seasons of life, from childhood to the present, and shares the beliefs that have served him well. Walter Dean Myers's book is a fantastic biography with similar information, but aimed at the traditional young adult audience—written at the appropriate level.



Hirsch, James S. **Hurricane: The Miraculous Journey of Rubin Carter.** Mariner, 2000. 368p. \$16.95 Trade pb. 978-0-618-08728-0.

This book chronicles boxer Rubin Carter's twenty-year imprisonment, discussing why he was accused of three

murders he did not commit, how racial issues affected the outcome of his trial, how he earned the support of celebrities like Muhammed Ali, and why a group of Canadians decided to help him prove his innocence.

Kriegel, Mark. **The Good Son: The Life of Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini.** Simon & Schuster, 2013.

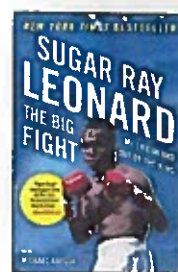


336p. \$15.99 Trade pb. 978-0-7432-8636-7.

This is the fascinating story of Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini and his famous 1982 fight against the obscure Korean challenger Duk Koo Kim who went down in the fourteenth round and never regained consciousness. Three months later, Kim's grieving mother took her own life. The deaths would haunt

Ray and tarnish his image, suddenly transforming boxing's "All-American Boy" into a target of scrutiny.

Leonard, Sugar Ray, and Michael Arkush. **The Big Fight: My Life In and Out of the Ring.** Plume, 2012. 320p. \$16. Trade pb. 978-0-452-29804-0.



After winning a gold medal at the 1976 Olympics, Ray wanted to call it quits and go to college, but his family's financial needs made him go pro. This is a great look at Ray's troubled personal life, his boxing persona, and how he comes to terms with both sides.

Tyson, Mike, and Larry Sloman. **Undisputed Truth.** Plume, 2014. 608p. \$18. Trade pb. 978-0-14-218121-8.



Bullied as a boy in the toughest, poorest neighborhood in Brooklyn, Mike Tyson grew up to become one of the most ferocious boxers of all time—and the youngest heavyweight champion ever. But his brilliance in the ring was often compromised by reckless behavior.

## MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

Faber, Urijah, and Tim Keown. **The Laws of the Ring.** William Morrow, 2013. 240p. \$14.99 Trade pb. 978-0-06-211241-5.



The book is a portrait of Faber's physical and mental toughness, a serious reflection on his success and failure, and a colorful account of his rise to greatness inside the cage.

Leben, Chris, and Dan Patinkin. **The Crippler: Cage Fighting and My Life on the Edge.** Skyhorse, 2016. 280p. \$24.99. 978-1-63450-566-6.



Chris Leben, otherwise known as "The Crippler," has the type of abrasive personality necessary for an ultimate fighter. Leben's account of his rise to the top is a story of a renowned wild man dealing with his personal demons and learning that the toughest opponent is always yourself.

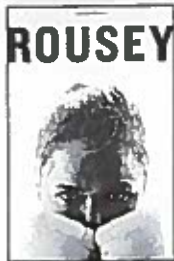
Merlino, Doug. **Beast: Blood, Struggle, and Dreams at the Heart of Mixed Martial Arts.** Bloomsbury, 2015. 272p. \$26. 978-1-62040-155-2.

Merlino spent two years embedded with Florida's American



Top MMA team, studying them in the gym and traveling with them to fights around the world. The book is an honest look at what it takes to be a mixed martial arts athlete and an inside look at the challenging training taking place in the gyms.

Rousey, Ronda, and Maria Burns-Ortiz. **My Fight/Your Fight**. Regan Arts, 2015. 320p. \$27.95. 978-1-941393-26.



Rousey, an Olympic medalist in judo and reigning UFC women's bantamweight champion, discusses her difficult path to glory, revealing the painful loss of her father when she was eight years old, the intensity of her judo training, and her rise to fame and success.

Shamrock, Frank, and Charles Fleming. **Uncaged: My Life as a Champion MMA Fighter**. Chicago Review, 2012. 272p. \$24.95. 978-1-61374-465.

This is an autobiography of MMA champion Frank Shamrock, who discusses his difficult childhood, his time in prison, his cage fighting career, and his life after retirement.



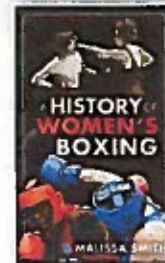
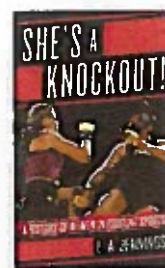
## WOMEN IN THE RING

While most of the books above are male-dominated, there are two fantastic books that take a look at the role women have in fighting.

Jennings, L.A. **She's a Knockout!: A History of Women in Fighting Sports**. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 222p. \$40. 978-1-4422-3643-1.

Smith, Malissa. **A History of Women's Boxing**. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 346p. \$40. 978-1-4422-2994-5.

Both titles offer a comprehensive and fascinating look through history at various women who have stepped into the ring and ways in which fighting sports have been impacted by women. ■




Jeff Schreiber is a library media center director at Germantown High School in Wisconsin who also happens to be an aging jock. This past year, he used his two passions, sports and reading, to create a blog called *Jockbrarian.com*, which discusses great nonfiction sports titles. He enjoys presenting about the value of sports literature in young adult lives and hopes to prove that athletes and books do mix!



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**BULLYING,**  
use **THIS**  
**EM**  **JI**  
TO **do** **SOMETHING**  
**ABOUT it.**

