

Hauser, Thomas. *The Black Lights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986. pp. 257. \$16.95.

Herbert G. Goldman, managing editor of *The Ring*, prominently featured Thomas Hauser's *The Black Lights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing* in his July "Solid Goldman" column. First, Goldman quoted Jim Jacobs and Bill Cayton, co-owners of Big Fights, Incorporated: "Of all the books we have read . . . it is our considered judgment that Thomas Hauser's book . . . is unquestionably the most important, interesting and informative book on boxing either of us has ever read." Then Goldman noted, "I have to agree." Although I don't know much about Cayton, I have the greatest respect for Jacobs and Goldman. Their knowledge of boxing-its history, its characters, and its present state-is

remarkable. Until reading Herb's column, I had neither heard of Hauser nor *Black Lights*, but I immediately bought and read the book.

Were Goldman et al. right? Not entirely. *Black Lights* is not the most interesting book on boxing I have ever read. A. J. Liebling's *The Sweet Science* (1956) would receive my vote. Nor do I feel Hauser's book is the most important. Barney Nagler's *James Norris and the Decline of Boxing* (1964) is a better example of investigative journalism. However, Hauser's insight is more critical than Liebling's and his canvas is broader than Nagler's. And Hauser's mission is more ambitious than any other writer of a book on boxing. In roughly 250 pages, Hauser attempts to detail the modern world of professional boxing. He examines the fighters—where they come from, why they go into boxing, how they learn their profession, how they conquer fear and pain, and what financial and psychic benefits they receive. In addition, he scrutinizes the motives and tactics of trainers, managers, promoters, television executives, and the other official and unofficial members of the boxing fraternity.

Like most books aimed at a popular audience, *Black Lights* is unencumbered by the usual scholarly hallmarks. There are no footnotes, bibliography or even index in the book. However, Hauser examined a wide range of sources. He conducted hundreds of hours of interviews, examined trial transcripts, studied the contemporary boxing literature, and mastered the medical issues. The result is a thoughtful, well-researched study. And Hauser, whose most famous previous book was the Pulitzer Prize nominated *Missing*, has an engaging style.

Hauser uses the career of Billy Costello, former World Boxing Council Superlightweight Champion, as a vehicle to enter the world of professional boxing. Hauser follows Costello as he prepared for and then successfully defended his title against Saoul Mamby. Much of this material is drawn from his interviews with Costello, his family, his manager (Mike Jones), and his trainer (Victor Valle). Costello, Jones, and Valle emerge from the study as compassionate, thoughtful men who successfully function in a shady, largely unregulated world where even moral relativism is an unreachable idea. Hauser illustrates Costello's sense of decency by describing the aftermath of his fight with Bruce Curry. After taking the title from the older Curry, Costello was about to ride back to his hotel in a limousine. Before getting into the car, however, Costello saw Curry, his mother, and his brother standing in a downpour outside the stadium. Costello turned to his manager and said softly: "Mike, tell Curry he can have the limousine. We'll take the bus back to the hotel." (p. 121) Nothing more needs to be said about Costello's class.

Less noble are the power brokers in boxing. Hauser aptly describes boxing as "the red-light district of professional sports." (p. 57) Even more graphic, heavyweight contender Randall "Tex" Cobb described his business: "I'm a whore who sells his blood instead of his ass, but that comes with the sport. I never made much money being good looking, but there's always somebody who'll pay me to take a punch. And I can take a punch, darlin'." It is Hauser's examination of this world that makes his book special. Throughout the volume Hauser maintains an heroic balance. The characteristics emerge full-blooded

and multi-faceted. Hauser's portrait of Don King is particularly insightful, as are his discussions of television's relations with boxing, the working of the World Boxing Council and World Boxing Association, and the recent medical research on boxing.

The range of Hauser's topics creates problems. No one could fully cover all of the topics that Hauser discusses. He obviously relied heavily on the research of others. For example, Hauser does not say much more about the WBC and the WBA than *Sports Illustrated* reporter Pat Putnam said several years ago. And he only discusses the medical findings of other scholars' research. In the final analysis, Hauser has written a very fine book. Every student of sport history and the state of contemporary sport should read *Black Lights*.

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