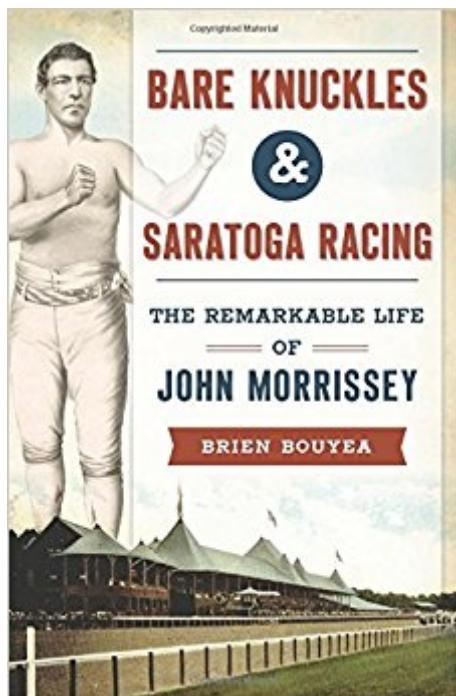


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# Bare Knuckles & Saratoga Racing (Sports)



## Synopsis

One of the more dynamic characters of his time, John "Old Smoke" Morrissey made his way from undefeated bare-knuckle boxer to found the Saratoga Race Course and win elections to Congress and the New York State Senate. A poor, uneducated Irish immigrant, Morrissey became a leader in the Dead Rabbits street gang. He won fame as a fighter and fortune as the operator of a string of successful gambling houses. He then took Saratoga Springs by storm. He improbably resurrected thoroughbred racing during the Civil War and opened his famous Club House, the most glamorous casino the country had ever seen. Author Brien Bouyea chronicles the incomparable life of a true American legend.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Brien Bouyea is director of communications at the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in Saratoga Springs, New York. Prior to joining the museum, he was an award-winning sportswriter for the Record and executive sports editor for the Saratogian. His awards include honors from the Associated Press Sports Editors, the New York State Associated Press and the New York Newspaper Publishers Association. He is a graduate of the College of Saint Rose and lives in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Brien Bouyea has distilled the life of John Morrissey to its absolute bare essentials, creating a

terrifically fast and riveting read that ultimately feels like a delicious meal that comes in a too-small portion. Clearly "Bare Knuckles & Saratoga Racing" was not intended as in-depth scholarship of life and times, but it still wonderfully delineates a very archetypal American story - a poor immigrant's rise to great heights in society through wits, fists and a literally burning desire to succeed. Fans of the Martin Scorsese film "Gangs of New York" will recognize the character Bill Poole (Bill the Butcher) and the famous gangs and see overlap in the two tales. Morrissey's story, particularly as told by Bouyea, would make a terrific movie as well because "Old Smoke" not only conquered the great and violent gangs that made and broke political careers in a corrupt and wildly chaotic New York, but he continually transcended his lot in life - street thug to bare knuckle champion to casino operator to congressman. His ascension through the the muck and the mire and the beatings he delivers along the way remain thrilling stuff. Bouyea delivers virtually all plot and only threadbare context and nuance, but it's enough and also hard to argue with a well-written page turner. Morrissey is invoked to this day, revered and present in Saratoga Springs life, honored in establishments and at the racetrack he built into the greatest sporting retreat in America. Up there, he deserves even greater recognition than he gets because his influence remains vast. It ought to be mandatory for visitors to the Spa to know Morrissey's story and they likely are the target audience for the book and the most likely to enjoy it. Yet, for others, who already know Morrissey, it's going to read like a primer for another, greater book. This one's goodness is a double-edged sword, satisfying yet leaving the reader yearning for more. What it achieves in propulsion it lacks in depth, even as all the important pieces are there. I couldn't put it down and it went by way too fast.

Just finished reading Bare Knuckles & Saratoga Racing and it's a wonderful read, a real page turner. The story was told very clearly without stripping out any of the thrilling details. The fact that it was so well written made a few pages turn into a few chapters each time I picked up the book. The character of John Morrissey was told brought to life with the right balance of bio and prose. The story telling was like sitting listening to some one who was there reminisce, which allowed me to visually be there as well. A great deal of research went into to piecing together this bit of history, but the academic side of the book never interfered with how entertaining the book is. As for the content - not to spoil the story, but it is based upon a truly larger than life character that left you with the question: who plays Morrissey in the movie - because one should certainly follow on the heels of this book.

Brien Bouyea has written a fantastic piece of work chronicling Morrissey's rise as

an Irish immigrant from Troy NY to become the father of thoroughbred racing in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.. Amazingly, "Old Smoke" as Mr. Morrissey was known arrived to that point in his life by way of his exploits as a street-fighter, a heavyweight boxing champion, political influencer and NYC casino owner. This unique life is colorfully depicted with the detail that a well-researched historically relevant biography deserves. You'll see the subject as he survived, then thrived through the tumultuous political and social times of America's early industrial era. Great read!

Author Brien Bouyea does a masterful job chronicling the extraordinary tale of an American legend, John Morrissey. Mr. Bouyea brings you back to a different era with compelling detail. You can visualize all that entailed Morrissey's life. From his impoverished beginnings as a first generation Irish immigrant, to his rise as a U.S. Congressman. Along the way, Morrissey became a champion prize fighter, and established America's greatest thoroughbred racetrack- Saratoga Racecourse. A truly amazing story that takes you back in time !

Brien Bouyea does a masterful job of bringing the colorful John Morrissey to life on these pages. As many racing fans know, Morrissey was a fascinating character; Bouyea's stylish, flowing prose truly does justice to the life and times of the man known as "Old Smoke." I read the book in less than a weekend - it was that good. This book is a must read for racing fans and history buffs in general. I'm looking forward to Brien Bouyea's next book!

I liked reading about the colorful history of Troy, New York City and of course Saratoga springs as well as upstate New York the politicians , gamblers and wealthy guys of the time was of great enjoyment.

Brien Bouyea has written a wonderful book about John Morrissey, who is an amazing character to say the least. The man lived the American Dream and Bouyea captured his life and his spirit in a very enjoyable way. I highly recommend his book to everyone. It is very well written and an enjoyable read.

Let's call this 3 1/2 stars. With more details, this would have been a 4 star read. Good primer on John Morrissey and the founding of Saratoga Racetrack.

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