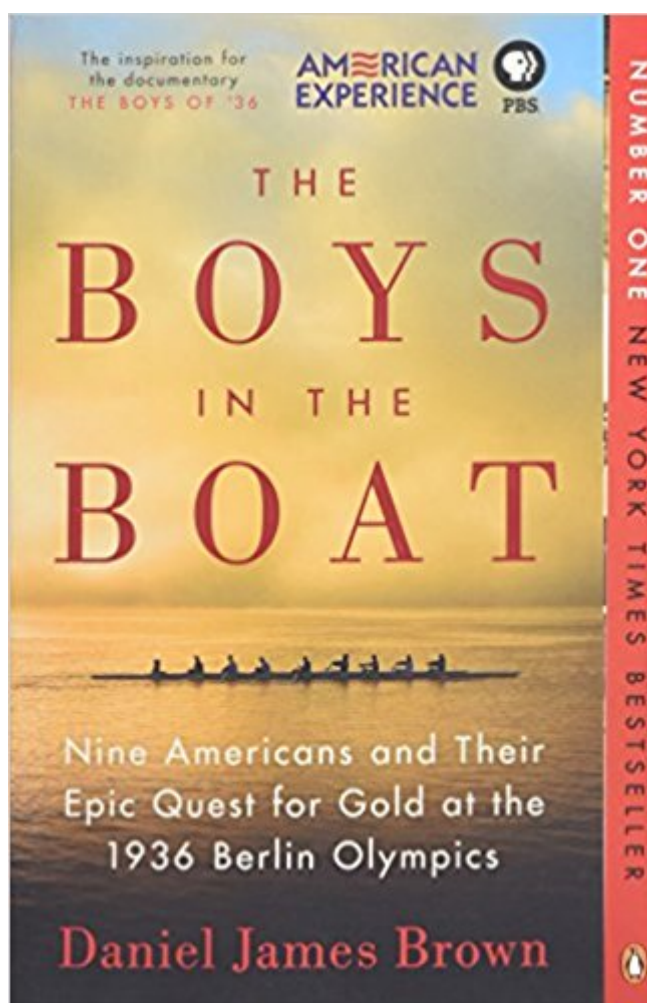


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# The Boys In The Boat: Nine Americans And Their Epic Quest For Gold At The 1936 Berlin Olympics



## Synopsis

The #1 *New York Times* bestselling story about American Olympic triumph in Nazi Germany and now the inspiration for the PBS documentary "The Boys of *Unbroken*, out of the depths of the Depression comes an irresistible story about beating the odds and finding hope in the most desperate of times—the improbable, intimate account of how nine working-class boys from the American West showed the world at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin what true grit really meant. It was an unlikely quest from the start. With a team composed of the sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers, the University of Washington's eight-oar crew team was never expected to defeat the elite teams of the East Coast and Great Britain, yet they did, going on to shock the world by defeating the German team rowing for Adolf Hitler. The emotional heart of the tale lies with Joe Rantz, a teenager without family or prospects, who rows not only to regain his shattered self-regard but also to find a real place for himself in the world. Drawing on the boys' own journals and vivid memories of a once-in-a-lifetime shared dream, Brown has created an unforgettable portrait of an era, a celebration of a remarkable achievement, and a chronicle of one extraordinary young man's personal quest.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Daniel James Brown's *The Boys in the Boat* is the kind of nonfiction book that reads like a novel. Centered around the life of Joe Rantz—a farmboy from the Pacific Northwest who was literally abandoned as a child—and set during the Great Depression, *The Boys in the Boat* is

a character-driven story with a natural crescendo that will have you racing to the finish. In 1936, the University of Washington's eight-oar crew team raced its way to the Berlin Olympics for an opportunity to challenge the greatest in the world. How this team, largely composed of rowers from "foggy coastal villages, damp dairy farms, and smoky lumber towns all over the state, managed to work together and sacrifice toward their goal of defeating Hitler's feared racers is half the story. The other half is equally fascinating, as Brown seamlessly weaves in the story of crew itself. This is fast-paced and emotional nonfiction about determination, bonds built by teamwork, and what it takes to achieve glory. —Chris Schlupe

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

*\*Starred Review\** If Jesse Owens is rightfully the most famous American athlete of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, repudiating Adolf Hitler's notion of white supremacy by winning gold in four events, the gold-medal-winning effort by the eight-man rowing team from the University of Washington remains a remarkable story. It encompasses the convergence of transcendent British boatmaker George Pocock; the quiet yet deadly effective UW men's varsity coach, Al Ulbrickson; and an unlikely gaggle of young rowers who would shine as freshmen, then grow up together, a rough-and-tumble bunch, writes Brown, not very worldly, but earnest and used to hard work. Brown (*Under a Flaming Sky*, 2006) takes enough time to profile the principals in this story while using the 1936 games and Hitler's heavy financial and political investment in them to pull the narrative along. In doing so, he offers a vivid picture of the socioeconomic landscape of 1930s America (brutal), the relentlessly demanding effort required of an Olympic-level rower, the exquisite brainpower and materials that go into making a first-rate boat, and the wiles of a coach who somehow found a way to, first, beat archrival University of California, then conquer a national field of qualifiers, and finally, defeat the best rowing teams in the world. A book that informs as it inspires. --Alan Moores

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I have never rowed. I have never read a rowing book that I can remember. If all stories about rowing were written like Daniel Brown's fabulous multi-level biography, I would read every one of them. This is a wonderful account, told with such detail and precision that I sometimes felt as if I were in this tale. Mr. Brown totally sucked me into his adventure. These young men who rowed for the USA in the 1936 Olympics faced huge obstacles. It was the Depression. Many were dirt-poor. They came from a small (then) and nondescript town of Seattle. They could not have had more difficult problems thrown their way. But by taking every sliver of hope, and mixing in superb craftsmanship

(from George Pocock), excellent coaching (Al Ulbrickson), and these nine perfectly attuned young men learning together.....the result was perfection. This is a true Team sport. I learned that. It is nice to learn something you never knew, but is common knowledge to an entire set of other people. If you want to read a great, true story of success, this will fit the bill in spades.....and you will understand rowing to boot. The research is mostly based on primary resources, including interviews with some members who were still living as the book was pulled together. Family members did supply additional information to make this undertaking feel solid and well thought out. Concepts from Daniel Brown to consider that are mixed into the story to teach all of us: 1) One of the fundamental challenges in rowing is that when any one member of a crew goes into a slump the entire crew goes with him. 2) There are certain laws of physics by which all crew coaches live and die. The speed of a racing shell is determined primarily by two factors: the power produced by the combined strokes of the oars, and the stroke rate, the number of strokes the crew takes each minute. 3) To defeat an adversary who was your equal, maybe even your superior, it wasn't necessarily enough just to give your all from start to finish. You had to master your opponent mentally. When the critical moment in a close race was upon you, you had to know something he did not- that down in your core you still had something in reserve, something you had not yet shown. 4) The things that held them together--trust in one another, mutual respect, humility, fair play, watching out for one another--those were also part of what America meant to all of them. There are other great ideas to ponder in this epic almost 400 page, could-not-put-down story. I am not giving away anything by telling you that they DO win Gold at the 1936 Olympics. It is HOW they did it that is so darn exciting. Even knowing the end result does not diminish this bigger than life adventure. This is a must read, period.

The Boys in the Boat chronicles the 1936 gold medal winning eight man crew team from University of Washington that represented the United States in the Berlin Olympics. The focus of the story is a young man named Joe Rantz, who grew up under devastating family and financial conditions in the midst of the Great Depression. It follows his career at University of Washington on the crew, while also giving insights into the coaches and other peripheral characters associated with the team and Joe's life. A separate thread which arises from time to time deals with the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and the staging of the 1936 Olympics as a tour de force propaganda effort. As Joe's Washington team qualifies for the Olympics and departs for Germany, the two threads come together. The book is captivating and educational as it relates to the subject of crew (of which I knew nothing), the region of the Pacific Northwest and the privations associated

with the Great Depression. While I felt that some aspects of the story were perhaps a little overly dramatized, the story is certainly compelling enough to stand on its own.

Fantastic book about a very fascinating topic. Not only it is a look into what people were going through during the Depression, it shows the different way that training was viewed back in that day. My current position has me working with a number of college athletes, so I recognize the amount of time and effort today's athletes put into their training and playing on top of the academic requirements placed on them. Back in the day, it was at a whole different level. These coaches were all about working and then working harder and doing it again. There are a number training regiments which have come down through the decades, but a coach that kept his rowers out on the water in the middle of a driving sleet storm would probably get in trouble now days. This is on top of spending summers hanging on the side of a cliff to work at dam building. Again, these guys are just at a whole different level. Great read, great topic.

I've read this book twice now (about a year and a half between readings) and I loved it as much the 2nd time as the first. Though I had never watched rowing, Brown brought it to life for me. Though rowing was the vessel for the story, this is truly a story about determination, heart, grit, and hard work. These boys grew up in the Depression and yet they found ways to reach their dreams. In the process, they found a family with one another--a type of bond that goes beyond what we normally think of as familial love. Even knowing the outcome, Brown presents the story of Joe and the other 8 boys in his boat (along with their coaches) in a way that made me feel as though I personally knew them. I laughed, I cried, and in the final contest, I found myself tensing up, willing them to overcome. This is a book about what America truly stands for. A great book that I would recommend to anyone.

This is one of the top 3 books I have read; as soon as I finished reading I began to miss these boys. The author did a splendid job of introducing each of these boys and the men who trained them, their backgrounds, and their families. My mind made a movie as I read each page; it was as though I knew them. In the course of history it is a rare thing when this caliber of people gathers in one place to accomplish one thing, and it was such a pleasure to watch it grow and come to fruition. These were exceptional young men who took with them through life the lessons of perseverance and determination they learned via rowing; they became wonderful men who were a credit to their families and to America. The writing style was perfect for me; it flowed so well. I read at the end of the day when my mind is spent, and I never had to struggle to remember where I was or what was

happening; I could just pick it up and read.

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