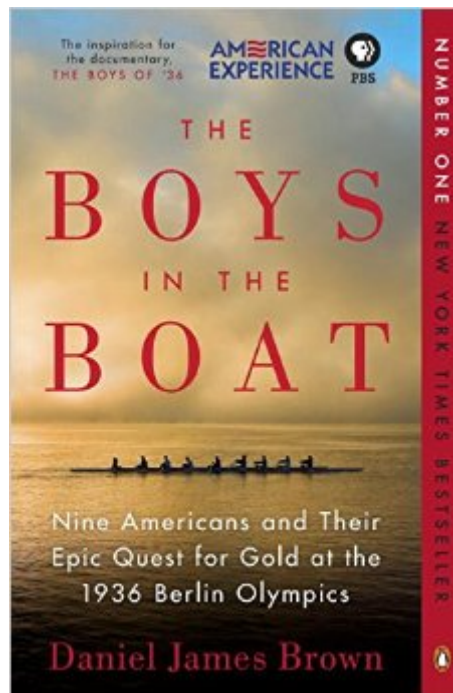


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# The Boys In The Boat: Nine Americans And Their Epic Quest For Gold At The 1936 Berlin Olympics



## 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 '36*" • For readers 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 boy's 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

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.

Based on meticulous research including considerable primary resources and oral narrative, Daniel Brown's story of the University of Washington rowing crew that won gold in the 1936 Olympics, gives an experiential look at the athletes who lacked the amenities, family devotion and corporate sponsorships that today are pretty much viewed as essential for achieving such success. Shaped by the social, economic and political challenges of the Dust Bowl, Depression and the simmering hostilities in Europe, these young men developed the "harmony, balance and rhythm" necessary not only to triumph in Berlin but to thrive in life. Knowing nothing about rowing, this book was

intellectually and spiritually satisfying. Brown did an excellent job of developing the character of the individuals as well as the society in which they lived. Parallel developments in Europe provided a good counterpoint and context for understanding the complexity of thought and behavior of the time. It also points to the significant role that coaches play in the formation of any athlete and the importance of seeing the whole person vs. some subset of the totality that is who we are. "And so they passed away, loved and remembered for all that they were ~ not just Olympic oarsmen, but good men, one and all."

This is a wonderful and true story about the 1936 University of Washington varsity crew, eight young men who rowed into history. Daniel James Brown writes so well that history becomes personal, the distant past becomes immediate, and the now dead men and women are alive again in the mind of the reader. He describes the sport of rowing in great detail and with accuracy, no mean feat for someone who never rowed. His writing is comparable to David Halberstam, author of *The Amateurs*, in quality and in scope. In fact, Mr. Brown has surpassed him with this book. The author, who is unfortunate enough to share a name with Dan Brown of *DaVinci Code* infamy, does a thorough report on the men in the boat, their families, their coaches, the history of the 1930's, and the science of sport. Many of the old luminaries of American rowing are in this story, the good, the bad, and the legendary, including Hiram Conibear, Tom Bolles, Al Ulbrickson and George Pocock. The story of the Pocock racing shell, which was still the best racing boat in the US when I started rowing, is detailed, along with the life story of George Pocock, his personality, and his contributions to Washington crews. At times the author gets a bit over enthusiastic, and comes close to melodrama. Some of the rowing details were overwrought, particularly during the races. He describes the crews as "furiously hacking at the choppy water..." That doesn't describe the sport of rowing, except for raw beginners. Nevertheless, I only have minor complaints: it is a well written story. This is a recommended read for anyone who has suffered through a season of rowing. It brought back all the anxiety of fighting for a seat in the boat, the hours of self doubt, the pain of training in bad weather, with bad combinations of rowers, and the joy of getting it right, feeling the boat fly. This is an inspirational story, one that will lift you up, and it is wonderful, not only because Brown is a great writer, but because it is true.

Daniel James Brown's "The Boys in the Boat" is an outstanding account of nine man crew that captured the gold medal in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Like "Seabiscuit" this book transcends the subject of "rowing". It transports you to another place and time. The story is told through the eyes of

Joe Rantz, a remarkable man who overcame much adversity to be sitting in that shell on the Langer See in 1936. So many colorful characters are brought vividly to life, the coach, Al Ulbrickson, the boat maker, George Yeoman Pocock. The writing is superb. this is a MUST READ!! HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!!

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