



Fighting Chance: Winners and Losers in the Ultimate Risk Business

Derrick Allsop

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Few sports polarise public opinion as boxing does. Some contend that it is repugnant and barbaric, for others a legitimate, regulated contest of skill, strength and willpower. What cannot be denied is that the fight game has produced some of sport's greatest icons. Many more are content to make a decent living or at least supplement their income by stepping into the ring.

Fighting Chance gets up close with those involved in everyday British boxing. It goes behind the scenes at shows and into gyms to meet champions such as Ricky Hatton, starry-eyed young men dreaming of world titles, hard-nosed pros surviving another pay day and veteran trainers who have seen it all and sometimes wish they hadn't. Many of them say this brutal trade has saved them from a life of crime and drugs, and given them an opportunity to find self-esteem. All recognise the possible cost - Paul Ingles, for example, almost lost his life in the ring - but maintain it is a risk worth taking.

Martin Jolley attempted suicide in his darkest hour but survived and sought a kind of refuge as a journeyman boxer, taking fights at short notice and then returning to his day job as a printer. Michael Jennings' brother was killed by an addiction to drugs and he is convinced the sport has spared him the same tragic fate. Others, however, are always tormented by their demons. Michael Gomez, once held on a murder charge, was hailed as a future world champion until he went off the rails, plunging his private life into turmoil and leaving his career on the brink. Brian Hughes, one of the best-known and most successful trainers in the country, admits his love of boxing has been eroded by the 'stinking' side of the business.

Often shocking, sometimes humorous, always gripping, *Fighting Chance* is an odyssey through a world few will have encountered. It gives a candid insight and many of its compelling characters.

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