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Lords of the Ring: The Triumph and Tragedy of College Boxing's Greatest Team

Doug Moe

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Lords of the Ring revives the exciting era—now largely forgotten—when college boxing attracted huge crowds and flashy headlines, outdrawing the professional bouts. On the same night in 1940 when Joe Louis defended his heavyweight crown before 11,000 fans in New York's Madison Square Garden, collegiate boxers battled before 15,000 fans in Madison . . . Wisconsin.

Under legendary and beloved coach John Walsh, the most successful coach in the history of American collegiate boxing, University of Wisconsin boxers won eight NCAA team championships and thirty-eight individual titles from 1933 to 1960. Badger boxers included heroes like Woody Swancutt, who later helped initiate the Strategic Air Command, and rogues like Sidney Korshak, later the most feared mob attorney in the United States. A young fighter from Louisville named Cassius Clay also boxed in the Wisconsin Field House during this dazzling era.

But in April 1960, collegiate boxing was forever changed when Charlie Mohr— Wisconsin’s finest and most popular boxer, an Olympic team prospect—slipped into a coma after an NCAA tournament bout in Madison. Suddenly, not just Mohr’s life but the entire sport of college boxing was in peril. It was to be the last NCAA boxing tournament ever held. *Lords of the Ring* tells the whole extraordinary story of boxing at the University of Wisconsin, based on dozens of interviews and extensive examination of newspaper microfilm, boxing records and memorabilia.

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