



# Heroes & Ballyhoo: How the Golden Age of the 1920s Transformed American Sports

*Michael K. Bohn*

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**Heroes & Ballyhoo: How the Golden Age of the 1920s Transformed American Sports** Michael K. Bohn  
A handful of star athletes, along with their promoters and journalists, created America's sports entertainment industry during the 1920s, the Golden Age of American sports. The period had an extraordinary impact, profoundly changing individual sports, establishing the secular religion of sports and sports heroes, and helping bond disparate social and regional sectors of the country. It's when sports became a cornerstone of modern American life.

*Heroes and Ballyhoo* profiles the ten most prominent Golden Age heroes and describes their effect on sports and society. Babe Ruth saved baseball after the Black Sox Scandal. Boxer Jack Dempsey made the "sweet science" a respectable sport. Red Grange single-handedly set professional football on a path to eventual success. Knute Rockne helped transform college football from a game to a colossal enterprise. Bobby Jones changed golf into a spectator sport, and Walter Hagen sparked the first national interest in professional golf. Bill Tilden put tennis on the front of the sports section. Tennis player Helen Wills Moody joined swimmer Gertrude Ederle in empowering women athletes. Johnny Weissmuller astonished international swimming before becoming Tarzan.

The book also explores the ballyhoo artists—sportswriters, promoters, and press agents—who hyped the stars to a receptive public. Simultaneously, the spectators established themselves as the focus of popular sports. The personalities and events of the 1920s thus created today's entertainment conglomerate of heroes, promoters and advertisers, fans, arenas—and money. Sports as a profit center started with the Golden Age's heroes and PR artists, and the public's obsessive interest in sports helped shape America's emerging mass society. *Heroes and Ballyhoo* tells the story of what was both a symptom and a cause of modern America.

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