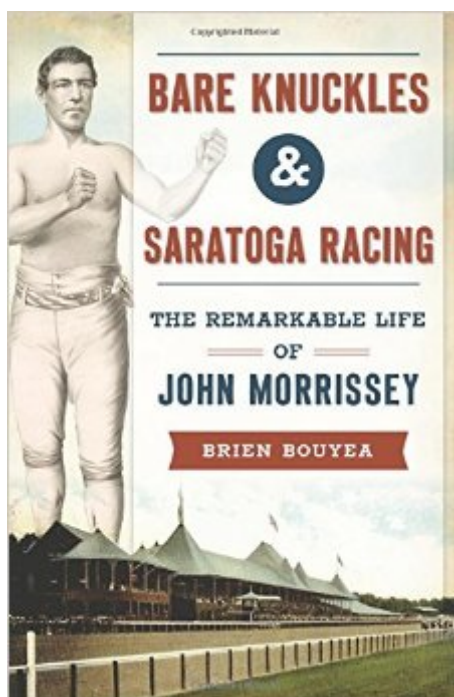


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# Bare Knuckles & Saratoga Racing (Sports)



## Synopsis

One of the more dynamic characters of his time, John Old Smoke Morrissey made his way from undefeated bare-knuckle boxer to found the Saratoga Race Course and win elections to Congress and the New York State Senate. A poor, uneducated Irish immigrant, Morrissey became a leader in the Dead Rabbits street gang. He won fame as a fighter and fortune as the operator of a string of successful gambling houses. He then took Saratoga Springs by storm. He improbably resurrected thoroughbred racing during the Civil War and opened his famous Club House, the most glamorous casino the country had ever seen. Author Brien Bouyea chronicles the incomparable life of a true American legend.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (7 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Brien Bouyea has distilled the life of John Morrissey to its absolute bare essentials, creating a terrifically fast and riveting read that ultimately feels like a delicious meal that comes in a too-small portion. Clearly "Bare Knuckles & Saratoga Racing" was not intended as in-depth scholarship of life and times, but it still wonderfully delineates a very archetypal American story - a poor immigrant's rise to great heights in society through wits, fists and a literally burning desire to succeed. Fans of the Martin Scorsese film "Gangs of New York" will recognize the character Bill Poole (Bill the Butcher) and the famous gangs and see overlap in the two tales. Morrissey's story, particularly as told by Bouyea, would make a terrific movie as well because "Old Smoke" not only conquered the

great and violent gangs that made and broke political careers in a corrupt and wildly chaotic New York, but he continually transcended his lot in life - street thug to bare knuckle champion to casino operator to congressman. His ascension through the the muck and the mire and the beatings he delivers along the way remain thrilling stuff. Bouyea delivers virtually all plot and only threadbare context and nuance, but it's enough and also hard to argue with a well-written page turner. Morrissey is invoked to this day, revered and present in Saratoga Springs life, honored in establishments and at the racetrack he built into the greatest sporting retreat in America. Up there, he deserves even greater recognition than he gets because his influence remains vast. It ought to be mandatory for visitors to the Spa to know Morrissey's story and they likely are the target audience for the book and the most likely to enjoy it.

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