



# Up to Scratch: Bareknuckle Fighting and Heroes of the Prize-ring

*Tony Gee*

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Such was prize-fighting's appeal during the 18th and 19th centuries that, at its zenith, the sport was patronised by royalty and aristocracy and, notwithstanding its illegality, its contests often attracted thousands of spectators from all walks of life. *Up to Scratch* covers bare knuckle fighting from early English stage bouts to boxing's transitional period between knuckles and gloves. Although concentrating mainly on a region, then just north of the metropolis, which was a favourite venue of the London prize-ring, it is essentially an anecdotal account of what was unquestionably one of England's most dramatic sporting pastimes. Included are tales of some of the great champions - Tom Johnson, Daniel Mendoza, Jem Belcher, Tom Sayers and Jem Mace - as well as many forgotten, but no less colourful, fistic heroes. *Up to Scratch* powerfully evokes an age when pugilism was a barbaric, corrupt and yet primarily noble activity which makes today's boxing look positively tame by comparison.

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