

Rugged Game: Community, Culture and Wrestling at the Lakehead to 1933 by C. Nathan Hatton

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There are some shortcomings in this self-published work. There is no real conclusion offered to tie the complex life of James Gammell together in a succinct manner. The lack of an index makes an otherwise well written text difficult to connect and to cross-reference. There are no chapter numbers associated with page numbers on the contents page. The author relies heavily on the original narrative of Gammell's fellow Patriot Linus Miller, and on several period newspaper articles. She should have also considered use of first-hand accounts written by Benjamin Wait, Daniel Heustis, Robert Marsh, William Gates, Stephen Wright and Elijah Woodman. Another overlooked original source consists of period newspapers from Canada, the United States, and Australia, many of which are conveniently available on-line. Similarly, Hedquist often quotes from Pybus and Maxwell-Stewart's *American Citizens, British Slaves* (2002). Other secondary material such as Colin Duqemin's *Niagara Rebels* (2001) [for the Short Hills raid], Stuart Scott's book and articles [for Gammell], and publications by Tom Dunning, John Thompson and John Carter [for the Van Diemen's Land penal system and transportation], should have been consulted and

referenced more frequently. There are also several minor historical inaccuracies to be found in the text.

Why is *Escape From Van Diemen's Land* an important work? To my knowledge this is the first full-length account of a Patriot captured in the 1838 Upper Canadian rebellion to be written by a direct relative. As noted at the outset of this review, the timing of the release of this volume is significant, coinciding with the 175th anniversary of the 1838 Rebellion/Patriot War. Hedquist is also the first author to detail the complete and complex life of a Patriot exile after returning to the United States. No other period narrative, or any current secondary resource, has managed this accomplishment. Solid research, a wealth of graphics, seven useful appendices, and a very reasonable price, all contribute to make this book one you should acquire. It is a welcome addition to the research dedicated to the 1838 Upper Canadian rebellion/Patriot War and to connections to Canadian, American and Australian history of the period.

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Rugged Game

Community, Culture and Wrestling at the Lakehead to 1933

By C. Nathan Hatton

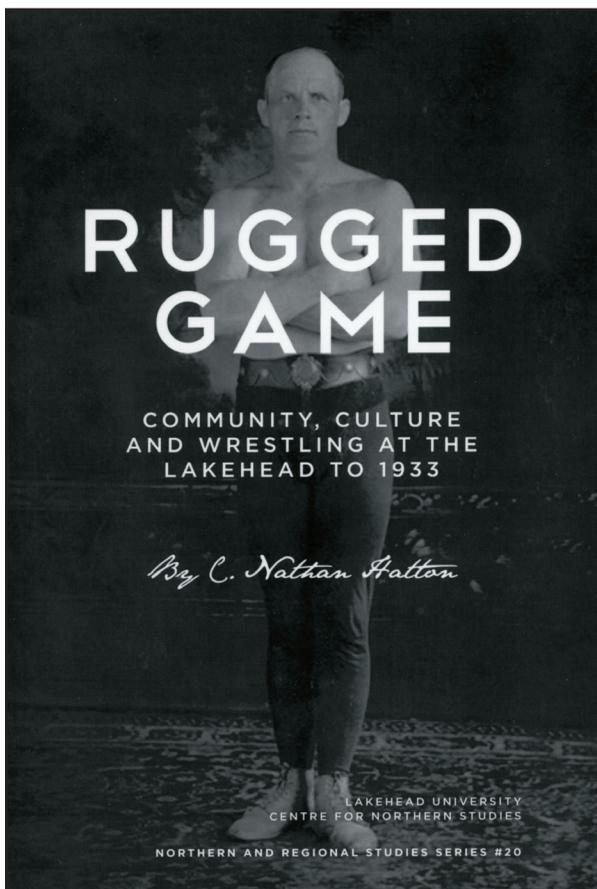
Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies, Northern and Regional Studies Series #20, 2012. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-895939-34-7. (www.cns.lakeheadu.ca)

Those interested in the history of martial arts will be familiar with C. Nathan Hatton's work. He has published on a variety of subject matters

ranging from wrestling's role in military training to the generally unknown boxing career of film star Victor McLaglen. *Rugged Game* however, is not simply a history

of wrestling in the Lakehead, but explores the complex interrelation of several topics including the changing nature of entertainment, ethnicity, gender, class and culture. He argues that wrestling is not simply an “isolated spectator and participatory sport but... an activity that reflected, was influenced by, and at times took advantage of, the social tensions present in the communities during the twentieth century.” Wrestling was originally a highly technical sport with little of the flair modern audiences have become accustomed to. With the rise of cinema and other spectator sports wrestling gravitated towards the more active, high energy model familiar to modern day enthusiasts. The sport became less of a singular focus for promoters, rather becoming part of larger events in which wrestling was a component of wider exhibitions. The author’s passion, knowledge and mastery of the subject matter are evident throughout the book. While *Rugged Game* touches upon a number of topics and delves into their interconnections, the work is primarily an attempt to fill in a significant gap in Canadian sport history—namely wrestling, which receives scant if any attention from others.

Hatton’s work is divided into six chapters covering the emergence and development of wrestling in the Lakehead region. This follows a fairly straightforward chronological approach, detailing events and issues from early European settlement through the Great War and into the early 1930s. The terminal date of 1933 at first may seem arbitrary, but as Hatton points out it marks the beginning of modern pro-



fessional wrestling, which is clearly demarcated from the amateur wrestling under examination. Intermixed throughout the chapters is a discussion of ethnicity, gender and class, which provides interesting insights into these factors. As the author points out, wrestling and ethnicity were intimately linked. Ethnic communities such as the Finns were active participants in local wrestling, but as tensions between differing groups arose and the nature of wrestling moved towards the professional model, wrestlers adopted these ethnic fears as part of their in-ring persona. Monikers such as the “Terrible Turk” became commonplace on promotional material. While

the sport was primarily a working class male pastime at the turn of the century, there were efforts to curb the use of profane language and raucous crowd activity in order to appeal to both high-class males and women, thereby adding a new dynamic to both the marketing and interest in the sport. Hatton points out that matches often promised no foul language and ample security for this very reason. While these factors are discussed they are done so as part of a discussion of wrestling rather than in-depth analysis of ethnicity, class and gender in the Lakehead.

The author makes extensive use of local newspapers throughout as they often served as the only record of individual matches and results. This not only includes local English language papers, but translated Finnish newspapers, which adds an interesting dynamic to the coverage. Hatton does not exclusively rely on local sources and maintains a solid grasp of the secondary works pertaining to his topic. Additionally, the depth and breadth of primary research is truly impressive. Hatton makes use of difficult to find wrestling publications from the nineteenth century as well as multi-media wrestling resources detailing the history of numerous wrestling styles used during the era (such as Greco-Roman and Catch-as-Catch-Can). The use of such sources turns what could have easily become a simple recounting of matches into a substantial, integrated work, drawing in details from a wide array of sources.

Rugged Game is incredibly strong and entertaining work with a flowing narrative style, in-depth examinations and an ability to discuss a number of topics without losing its core focus. There are however, some shortcomings that deserve some examination. Ethnicity and the role it played in shaping the nature of wrestling in the Lakehead is a constant theme throughout.

Hatton however, while mentioning popular and successful wrestlers from an Anglo or Franco background, does little to detail how the then-dominant ethnic extractions influenced wrestling's development in the region. The bulk of Hatton's attention centers on the Finnish community's involvement in Port Arthur's wrestling scene. While significant attention is certainly merited given the accomplishments of wrestlers such as Ole Kolehmainen, who claimed the Canadian Middleweight title in the early 1920s, the depth and focus on wrestling's ethnic component is reserved almost exclusively for Finnish wrestlers. Given that wrestlers from other backgrounds also enjoyed significant success during the period under examination, some additional work concerning how their ethnic communities shaped local wrestling would serve to strengthen Hatton's argument concerning the interrelation. This marks the only notable criticism of an otherwise enjoyable and informative work.

The author is a tremendous researcher and highly competent writer, which comes across throughout his work. *Rugged Game* is clearly a passion project—the author's knowledge and love of the subject matter is perpetually evident. This fact does not, however, compromise the work's academic integrity. C. Nathan Hatton's *Rugged Game: Community, Culture and Wrestling at the Lakehead to 1933* is a first rate work and an enjoyable read. While it primarily concerns wrestling history, those interested in several other subjects will find the book a useful resource. Hatton's work marks an important step towards filling a gap in Canadian sport and social history.

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