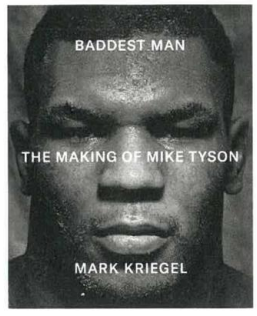
IRON GIANT

MARK KRIEGEL'S BIOGRAPHY OF MIKE TYSON BRINGS A NEW PERSPECTIVE TO THE CHAMP

BY GREG BISHOP



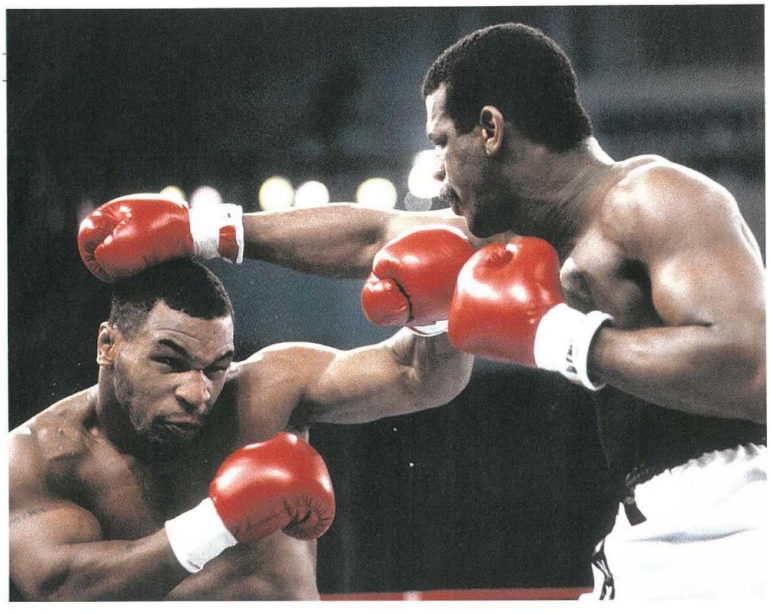
MIKE TYSON has been famous—widely famous, internationally famous, the subject of endless attention—for most of his life. But our familiarity with his story means that most anything featuring him these days trends toward mythology.

But that's not the case here, with the new book *Baddest Man: The Making of Mike Tyson*. Not with Mark Kriegel, one of boxing's finest-ever chroniclers, who has never ducked the parts of the sport that force even those who love its intrinsic nature to consider whether they really should.

On its own, that's enough credibility for Kriegel to wade into well-trodden ground. But Kriegel also used to write for the New York *Daily News*, where he covered crime, in Brownsville—the Brooklyn neighborhood where Tyson grew up—of all places. Kriegel's career would spin in dozens of directions, but it's fair to say that few, if any, writers of his generation handle biographies better. He painted Joe Namath, Pete Maravich and Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini with brushes that revealed every last detail of who they were and what drove them. Kriegel wrote, and still writes, in a fair but unsparing way.

Kriegel is, in other words, the perfect author to frame Tyson exactly as he was and is. Which means *Baddest Man* isn't like most Tyson stories at all. That's the beauty in it, the re-examination, which borders on ethnographic, and the myths upended or given critical context.

Those examinations are what compel readers. And there are many. Kriegel examines Tyson's career but focuses especially on the early parts that received far less attention, before the histrionics started. Kriegel provides context by examining writing about boxing—which has always ranked among the best writing out there, period—digging into the myths so many elite, world-famous scribes helped create and cement.



QUICK WORK
Tyson was at his peak when he dropped Spinks to run his record to 35–0 with 31 knockouts.

He casts his eye especially acutely on those in New York who covered the sport, the best of the very best. He shines a light on his own earlier work, most notably about Brownsville and about Tyson, specifically.

And what Kriegel finds—work he remains proud of, work he's now ashamed of, work of a young columnist finding his verve and his voice and, ultimately, his compassion—shows both how far the world champion and the author, who have reached similar thresholds of success, have grown.

All of which translates into the most nuanced, most human portrait of Tyson ever created. It's that different. Sure, there's Atlantic City in the 1980s, with Donald Trump and the carnivals associated with heavyweight championship fights. One victory Tyson deserves more credit for, his knockout of an undefeated Michael Spinks just 91 seconds into their 1988 title bout, forms the book's spine.

You'll also find the usual characters—Tyson's trainer and father figure, Cus D'Amato and the rest—but what you won't find is what you usually do: those same characters and events lined up, almost always, in precisely the same way.

Instead, this book's purpose is to explain Mike Tyson, the real man, and not in a cruel way or a hagiographic one. The end result presents a complete picture of Mike Tyson, the regular human, who would soon seem to become so much more. □