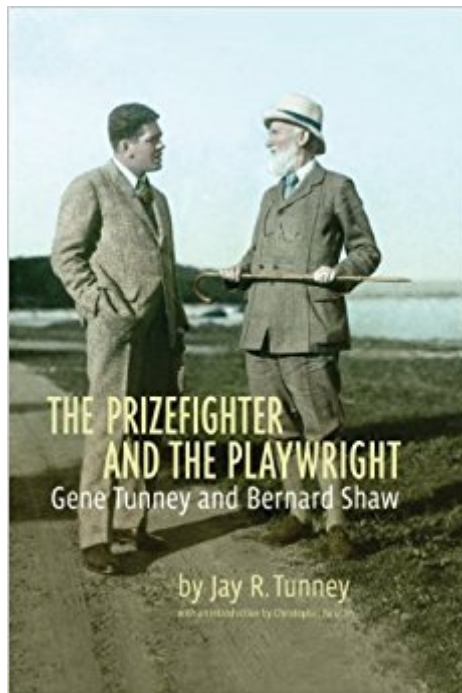




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# **The Prizefighter And The Playwright: Gene Tunney And George Bernard Shaw**



## Synopsis

The curious story of the unlikely relationship between a champion boxer and a celebrated man of letters. Gene Tunney, the world heavyweight-boxing champion from 1926 to 1928, seemed an unusual companion for George Bernard Shaw, but Shaw, a world-famous playwright, found the Irish-American athlete to be "among the very few for whom I have established a warm affection." The Prizefighter and the Playwright chronicles the legendary -- but rarely documented -- relationship that formed between this celebrated odd couple. From the beginning, it seemed a strange relationship, as Tunney was 40 years younger and the men could not have occupied more different worlds. Yet it is clear that these two famous men, comfortable on the world stage, longed for friendship when they were out of the celebrity spotlight. Full of surprises and revelations about Shaw and Tunney, this handsome book is also a fascinating look at their times. Author Jay R. Tunney is the son of the famous fighter, and his book is a beautifully woven and often surprising biography of the two men. The book evolved from the acclaimed BBC radio program *The Master and the Boy*. Fans of George Bernard Shaw will enjoy the little-known stories in this intensely personal account that includes never-before-published images from Tunney's own family collection.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: Firefly Books; First Edition, First Printing edition (April 1, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1554076412

ISBN-13: 978-1554076413

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 21 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #775,676 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #124 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Boxing, Wrestling & MMA > Boxing](#) #218 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Irish](#) #304 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Individual Sports > Boxing](#)

## Customer Reviews

A beautifully written book on a fascinating and little-known subject. (Andrew Patner: The View From Here 2010-11-01) In setting down the tale, Jay Tunney frequently had to play detective in reconstructing a credible chronology of events that took place in the very house he grew up in. To

his credit, his approach for the most part reflects a scholarly and meticulously researched narrative so attuned to the facts that one has to periodically remind oneself: This is his father he is writing about. (George Kimball Irish Times 2010-09-23)The brawny man and the brainy man often find themselves at odds, each denigrating the other's gifts. The man of the body bullies, while the man of the mind retreats to intellectual arrogance. Such was not the case with 1920s heavyweight boxing champion Gene Tunney and famed playwright George Bernard Shaw, who forged a close relationship, recalled here by one of Tunney's sons. Despite humble beginnings and his chosen profession, the Irish American Tunney was a self-taught lover of the arts who strove to raise himself in society, marrying into the upper class and rubbing shoulders with other literary giants of his time, while the Irish Shaw, several decades older, had dabbled in boxing as a young man. Tunney's intellectual interests were met with much scorn, especially in the boxing world, causing him to be, as his son writes, "a man between two worlds and a part of neither one." (Jim Burns, Jacksonville Public Library Library Journal Xpress Reviews 2010-11-05)One might dismiss the book, unread, as only a testament of filial devotion, but *The Prizefighter and the Playwright* is an engrossing read, packaged in an attractively and liberally illustrated volume. Gene Tunney comes warmly alive as someone worthy of Shaw's almost paternal interest, and G.B.S. emerges in a more private dimension than he is often seen by biographers trying to encompass an encyclopedic life... Jay Tunney has been thorough... One hopes that *The Prizefighter and the Playwright*, an authentic page-turner, will capture the wide non-Shavian audience it deserves.... Gene Tunney lives on... in Jay Tunney's fascinating re-creation of a most unlikely friendship. (Stanley Weintraub *Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, Volume 3)Writer Jay R. Tunney, who is the grandson of the boxer, provides an unsentimental account of a friendship that defies expectations. Despite his relationship to the boxer, the story is no mere encomium, and Tunney emerges as a flawed, rather than lionised, hero. The book is weighted more towards boxing than literature but, even for the relatively uninitiated reader to the heady world of pugilism, *The Prizefighter and the Playwright* is never less than compelling. (Sara Keating *The Irish Post* / thepost.ie / Sunday Business Post 2010-09-19)*The Prizefighter and the Playwright* promises to be a treat for boxing fans, dedicated Shavians, and anyone who enjoys a personal tour through the lives two peerless figures. Our thanks to Jay Tunney for bringing us the story. (The Lawrenceville School 2010-05-25)This book is not only important to historians, but it is also a book with a great love story and a testament to a man who became a scholar without any traditional schooling. It is also one of the most fascinating non-fictional studies of a friendship that I have ever read.... When Gene Tunney died in 1978, at the age of 81, the *Boston Herald* said, "Gentleman Gene left a legacy of physical and intellectual

stamina that should inspire us all." The Washington Star added, "Mr. Tunney was given to quoting Shakespeare. He looked like an actor; he sailed to Europe to talk with George Bernard Shaw; he did not act like a pug. The fans would not forgive him he died a hero. But there was never any real understanding of this man, who was too gifted, too fast and driven, to stay where the people wanted him." His son Jay has corrected that. His story of Gene Tunney will be considered the final, incisive word. (Mary Whipple marywhiplereviews.com 2010-10-12) Taking readers beyond the bad press his father once received, Jay shows Tunney to have been a complex and highly admirable man. (Peter Worthington Toronto Sun 2010-12-10) There is plenty of room for a book about the Shaw-Tunney connection. The boxer is rarely mentioned in Shaw biographies and Tunney, a private man with a special aversion to dealing with the press, never said or wrote much about it for public consumption. To fill this long-empty gap Jay Tunney delivers a 267-page text that is straightforward, graphic, occasionally eloquent and as a family narrative at times almost excruciatingly personal. (Richard Pyle The Hour (New York, NY) 2010-10-05) The Prizefighter and the Playwright: Gene Tunney and Bernard Shaw draws on a mass of material (including the memories of the author's mother, Polly Lauder Tunney, who died in 2008, aged 100) to provide the first truly satisfying account of Tunney's character and of much of his life after boxing (largely ignored in two recent biographies). Wisely avoiding detailed descriptions of his father's ring achievements, Mr. Tunney concentrates instead on his parents' engagement and marriage, one of the great romances of the Roaring Twenties, and the boxer's subsequent friendship with Shaw, which blossomed during a month-long stay on the island of Brioni in the Adriatic in 1929, a year after Tunney's retirement.... A beautifully produced book, with some wonderful black-and-white photographs, The Prizefighter and the Playwright is highly recommended to all pugilist-specialist-readers. (John Exshaw Boxing Monthly) In December 1928, boxer Gene Tunney fulfilled his dream of meeting playwright George Bernard Shaw. The result was an unlikely friendship, powered, among other things, by Tunney's love of literature and Shaw's fascination with boxing. The Prizefighter and the Playwright: Gene Tunney and Bernard Shaw pulls readers instantly and inescapably into this surprising relationship and the lives of its protagonists.... While the book will certainly appeal to Shaw fans and Tunney fans, one doesn't need to know anything about either man -- or about literature or boxing -- to be entranced by the friendship of the prizefighter and the playwright and the world they shared. (Jacqui Daniels Palmetto Bay (Miami) 2011-01-11)(A) magnificent, revelatory and fascinating book. (Rick Kogan Chicago Tribune 2016-08-19) Jay Tunney writes nicely and understands boxing. (Thomas Hauser Sweet Science 2011-11-29) This book is a love story, a portrait of the times, a metaphor of a struggle through adversity and best of all, a darn

good read. (Byron Toben The Suburban 2009-09-15)

Jay R. Tunney is vice president of the International Shaw Society and a member of the Governor's International Advisory Council for the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. His articles have appeared in the New York Times Magazine and other national publications.

Very well written biography of the boxing champ, Gene Tunney. This detailed, intimate look into the Tunney's character and relationships, touching on his relationship with George Bernard Shaw. You don't need to be a boxing fan or a fan of George Bernard Shaw to enjoy this biography about two great men.

I have been following the career and life of Gene Tunney up until the time of his death. Never a more classy fighter, with intellect in volumes. An Irish success. Jay Tunney the writer did a remarkable feat of beautiful writing to bring Gene Tunney to life that no other writer has done. I could go on for hours about the life of a man who you could argue was the very best boxer in heavyweight history, but would not do justice to his son Jay, who hit the jackpot with his wonderful book. I have purchased 34 of them to give away to friends and libraries. Trust me you won't be able to put it down!

You would have trouble thinking up a more unlikely friendship than a playwright in his 70's and a World Champion boxer in his 20's but this book tells of it. George Bernard Shaw and Gene Tunney had a close friendship borne of interest in the work of the other combined with a near tragic incident in their lives. Tunney's son writes an extremely loving book about his father, one can tell that he put a lot of time into the work and it shows a very readable and moving book. Tunney was a misunderstood champion and seemingly only became semi-popular after he gave up the title to concentrate on other pursuits. A book that is well worth one's time in reading whether you are a fan of Shaw or Tunney, or just of human interest stories.

Definitely well written. Jay is the writer his father never was. Especially interesting take on GBS and Charlotte's relationship. ... much warmer than I had thought. ... or does theirs simply reflect Gene and Polly's, which I know from personal observation, was exceptionally strong. A lovely book.

As a boxing historian, I have spent the past thirty years eagerly devouring every new boxing book I

could get my hands. Over the past decade the emergence of the web has made access to information much easier. At the same time my own palate has become far more sophisticated. Standard biographies rarely interest me. Autobiographies or sociological portraits of men in their time and the impact on society have become far more interesting to me ... Mr. Tunney's book succeeds on both parts. Gene Tunney was a complex and unique figure in the history of sport. He remains one of the most underrated and misunderstood of all champions. Jay Tunney manages to bring Gene to life as never before. After thirty years of reading about this man I feel I am finally learning who he was. His relationship with the brilliant Shaw opens us up to a whole world within an era .... The work is a gem and highly recommended.

I would not have read this book if had not been the October book for my book club and it was quite a pleasant surprise. I had heard about Tunney off and on from the men in my family & knew that they held in high regard as a fighter and as a gentleman but I didn't focus on the detail, after reading this book I found out what a remarkable man he was.. The book is written by Jay Tunney his son , he writes well and he avoids sentimentality.

A detailed but fascinating story about an improbable relationship between two outstanding men, each of whom reached the top of his profession and shared their common intellectual interests. Any reader with interests broad enough to appreciate the accomplishments of these two disparate men will soon understand how such a relationship could exist.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I live in Speculator, the small town in upstate N.Y., where Tunney trained for his fights with Jack Dempsey. Gene was very much loved and admired by the townspeople. This book is an excellent tribute to him as a person and a professional boxer. I liked this book so much I purchased it as a gift for several family members. I think this could become the basis for a great movie.

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