



Bouts of Mania: Ali, Frazier and Foreman and an America on the Ropes

Richard Hoffer

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'Bouts of Mania is gripping and intelligent, perhaps the best book about boxing since David Remnick's King of the World. It puts Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and George Foreman in the context of their bloody, turbulent times, and reveals how The Rumble in the Jungle and The Thrilla in Manila were backlit by the conflagrations of Vietnam and Watergate, Harlem and Watts. At last, the golden age of boxing has the book it has always deserved.' Tony Parsons It was a blip, really. It lasted not even five years, from the spring of 1971 to the autumn of 1975. But if you were in the middle of it - The Fight of the Century, The Rumble in the Jungle, The Thrilla in Manila - the hysteria might have seemed unending. It was a sustained, screeching period of tumult - more than even a single country could contain. Call it an accident of history: these three men - Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and George Foreman - converging in a single space, their five fights giving us an irreproducible pandemonium. Some of these fights still resonate in ways that go beyond any appreciation of sport. Each stands for a kind of defiance or maybe foolishness that still make sense today. You still hear it now: It was good, but no Ali-Frazier. But the serendipity of their riotous occupation, three of the most compelling sports personalities ever, is nothing compared to its luck of timing, and Bouts of Mania is as much about when as about what. Their fights so perfectly bookended a particular disintegration of the American psyche that it seems more a cosmic counterpoint than coincidence. This, after all, was the era of Watergate, Vietnam, Nixon and the humiliation of America. Just as David Remnick's King of the World gave us a portrait of Ali and the hope of 1960's America, Richard Hoffer's Bouts of Mania shows how these three fighters provided a moral compass during one of America's worst patches ever. This golden age of boxing gave reassurance to a shattered country that such fundamental if sometimes elusive qualities of courage and determination still mattered. And when it was all over neither they, nor the rest of the world would ever be the same again.

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