



# 1941 -- The Greatest Year In Sports: Two Baseball Legends, Two Boxing Champs, and the Unstoppable Thoroughbred Who Made History in the Shadow of War

*Mike Vaccaro*

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Joe DiMaggio . . . Ted Williams . . . Joe Louis . . . Billy Conn . . . Whirlaway

Against the backdrop of a war that threatened to consume the world, these athletes transformed 1941 into one of the most thrilling years in sports history.

In the summer of 1941, America paid attention to sports with an intensity that had never been seen before. World War II was raging in Europe and headlines grew worse by the day; even the most optimistic people began to accept the inevitability of the United States being drawn into the conflict. In sports pages and arenas at home, however, an athletic perfect storm provided unexpected—and uplifting—relief. Four phenomenal sporting events were underway, each destined to become legend.

In *1941—The Greatest Year in Sports*, acclaimed sportswriter Mike Vaccaro chronicles this astounding moment in history. Fueled by a somber mania for sports—a desire for good news to drown out the bad—Americans by the millions fervently watched, listened, and read as Joe DiMaggio dazzled the country by hitting in a record-setting fifty-six consecutive games; Ted Williams powered through an unprecedented .406 season; Joe Louis and Billy Conn (the heavyweight and light-heavyweight champions) battled in unheard-of fashion for boxing's ultimate championship; and the phenomenal (some say deranged) thoroughbred, Whirlaway, raced to three heart-stopping victories that won the coveted Triple Crown of horse racing. As Phil Rizzuto perfectly expressed, “You read the sports section a lot because you were afraid of what you'd see in other parts of the paper.”

Gripping and nostalgic, *1941—The Greatest Year in Sports* focuses on these four seminal events and brings to life the national excitement and remarkable achievement (many of these records still stand today), as well as the vibrant lives of the athletes who captivated the nation. With vast insight, Vaccaro pulls back the veil on DiMaggio's anxieties and the building pressure of “The Streak,” and chronicles the brash, young confidence Williams displayed as he hammered his way through the baseball season largely in DiMaggio's shadow. He takes readers inside the head of Billy Conn, a kid who traded in his light-heavyweight belt for a shot at the very decent and very powerful Joe Louis, and tells the story of the fire-breathing racehorse, Whirlaway, who was known either for setting track records or tearing off in the wrong direction.

Rich in historical detail and edge-of-your-seat reporting, Mike Vaccaro has crafted a lasting, important book that captures a portrait of one of America's most trying, and extraordinary, eras.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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