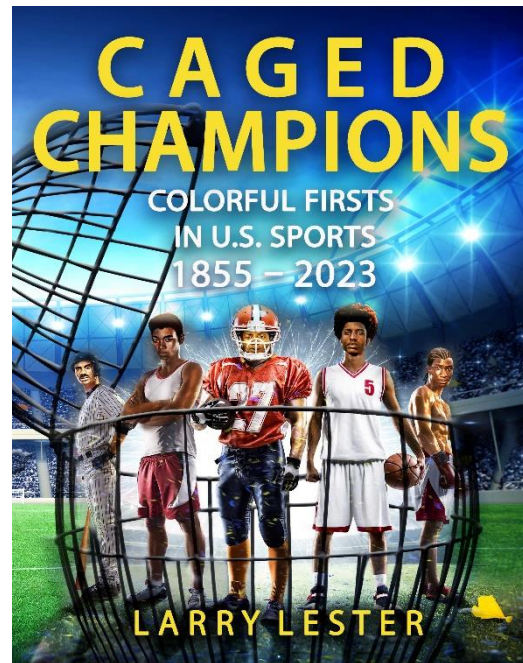


Book Review by John Graf
5.0 out of 5 stars Unlocking Black Athletic Achievement
Reviewed in the United States on April 29, 2024

Larry Lester, author or editor of numerous seminal works on the history of Negro Leagues baseball, has been at the forefront of chronicling Black achievement. He invites readers to discover greatness in his latest volume, "Caged Champions: Colorful Firsts in U.S. Sports, 1855-2023."

Lester issues that invitation with an expanded range that goes beyond just baseball to document firsts and other accomplishments in football, basketball, track and field, boxing, and more. And, the book calls on readers to experience sport history with its social and cultural connections.



"Caged Champions" opens with Lester's "The Trophy Cage," verse which unlocks the cage within which Black athletes—even the greatest—have been ignored, obscured, erased or forgotten. He reports on their sporting splendor chronologically and cross-referenced by sport and by individual. Brian Carroll's Foreword acknowledges the author's longstanding historical research activity and helps set the stage for the deep remembering that fills the book.

"Caged Champions" is a chronicle with a point of view. It not only lists names, dates, and locations attached to athletic achievements, but calls attention to roadblocks that stood in the way of those achievements and rules that influenced the competition. Furthermore, it cites protests that demonstrate that the games these champions played occurred within a social context in which athletes take their places as citizens and not only places as sports figures or entertainers.

Quotations from far and wide enhance the text, encouraging readers to reflect on what can be learned from history, literature, and social action. Lester takes up the cause by example, following his dedication with a listing of the names of victims of racist violence.

Whatever the spirit might move a reader to investigate in its well-indexed pages, the book offers a route to discovering greatness. In addition to the chronology for those who want to sample a timeline, readers can look for their favorite individuals and find out about previously unknown future favorites. And Lester builds upon his impressive body of work as a baseball historian with chapters covering much more terrain in the realm of sport.

How we play, at whatever level, helps illustrate how we view the world, and vice versa. Larry Lester's efforts help ensure that the feats and pioneering—notably in the face of repression—that have occurred in a vital part of our culture are not disregarded.