



Brass Bonanza Plays Again: How Hockey's Strangest Goon Brought Back Mark Twain and a Dead Team--And Made a City Believe

Robert Muldoon

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What happens when a major league pro sports team leaves a city? The Hartford Whalers left on April 13, 1997—leaving behind devastated fans. The players left, too—except one who stayed and suffered like the fans.

Tiger Burns is an unlikely hero—even for a hobbit-sized, smash-faced, hockey goon with 600 fights. Standing 5’3”, with one-eye, cauliflower ears, and a full-rigged ship tattoo on his chest, his most unusual feature is this: he loves Hartford and its team, the Whalers. In a league where players date super models, ice princesses and Miss Americas, he is a misfit. But in a league of Los Angeles, New York and Boston so is Hartford.

Brass Bonanza Plays Again tells the riches-to-rags story of Mark Twain’s hometown, once the nation’s richest, now the butt of jokes. It relates the true saga of a small city’s beloved team moved away, like Brooklyn’s Dodgers. And it weaves the tragicomic tale of the muscle-bound gnome who blows the jump-the-shark game against arch-rival Boston on April 11, 1990, lives homeless under a bridge, only to rise up and lead a dead team, out of the stands onto the ice.

Tiger rallies not only a dead hockey team, but awakens the ghosts of Hartford’s past. He brings to life a ragtag band of 19th century legends and is saved by a guardian angel Rube Waddell, one of sport’s “goats” from the 1905 World Series. Can a one-eyed, homeless underdog make a faded city believe and rescue a star-crossed spirit? In Brass Bonanza Plays Again, we have Rocky (on Skates!) meets Field of Dreams.

Rocky came out of a Philly row house, Rudy out of an Indiana steel mill, and now Tiger Burns comes out from under a Hartford bridge to bring a dead team to life. A book of provincial aspirations and condescension, Brass Bonanza Plays Again tells the story of this small city, midway between New York and Boston, long considered just a urine-stop or ass-wipe between Wall Street and Cape Cod.

The New York Times recently printed an essay “In Search of the Great American Hockey Novel” lamenting that hockey, unlike other sports, has yet to be celebrated in a notable work. “Where is the Chekhov of the Chicago Blackhawks?” the Times asks. “Who is the Stendahl of the stick to the groin?” To that, we humbly say: read on.

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