

Bundini: Don't Believe the Hype

Todd D. Snyder

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Todd D. Snyder's "collection of stories" about Muhammad Ali's motivator and cornerman "Bundini" Brown vivifies the cultural icon who was instrumental to Ali's success.

Bundini is alive with voices. One of its primary sources is Bundini's son, whose memories are supplemented by observations from those close to Bundini, Ali, and the sport of boxing. These voices reveal Ali's colorful hype man, telling tales of his wise and loving nature, as well as of his ingrained flaws.

The audience learns that a kind word or a sad story could make Bundini cry, but also that he was a drinker, a hustler, a womanizer, and a reckless spender. Abused and abandoned, Bundini joined the US Navy at thirteen. At fifteen, girls in a foreign port dubbed him "Bundini," or "lover."

Bundini later gravitated to Harlem, where he became a legend. As an "odd-job man" for Sugar Ray Robinson, he was recommended to the young Cassius Clay, and as a cornerman for forty-four of Clay/Ali's sixty-one pro fights, Bundini originated Ali's "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee" boxing persona. George Foreman called Bundini "the source of Ali's spirit."

Bundini employs quotes and anecdotes in a skillful way alongside solid contextual information. Drew Brown III is a character in, as well as chief witness to, his father's story. He was the product of Bundini's marriage to a white Jewish woman, Rhoda Palestine, and Ali referred to him as a "'lil' nappy-headed Jew." Brown recalls that his father would not allow him to travel to Africa for Ali's "Rumble in the Jungle" with George Foreman because Drew, then a college freshman, had lied to him about excused absences from classes.

Authoritative and entertaining, *Bundini* comes through for boxing fans and for those interested in Black American culture.

JOE TAYLOR (September / October 2020)

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