Many people will agree that James “Buster” Douglas’s shocking victory Mike Tyson in Tokyo in February 1990 was the upset of the last century. At the time, Tyson was considered a force of nature and his primal appeal made him the most talked about athlete in sports.

He was a human wrecking ball, both inside and outside of the ring. Anyone with even a passing interest in boxing remembers what they were doing when they heard that the self-proclaimed “Baddest Man on the Planet” was dethroned in the tenth round by Douglas.

If anyone could have found betting action, the odds on Douglas winning would have been 42-1.

Using that historic fight as the backdrop for an intense sociological and familial drama, author Joe Layden’s excellent book “The Last Great Fight: The Extraordinary Tale of Two Men and How One Fight Changed Their Lives Forever,” which was published by St. Martin’s Press in October 2007, pulls you into several stories that are difficult to emotionally extricate yourself from.

Layden brilliantly tells the story of two compellingly different people, whose lives merged on one fateful night and catapulted them in totally different directions.

Layden is too good of a storyteller to resort to the obvious. He refuses to portray Tyson as nothing more than the social pariah that so many people think he is. Instead he does what good writers do: he presents the good, the bad and the ugly traits and idiosyncrasies of a very troubled man.

Anyone who has ever been around Tyson will concur that he has many good qualities about him.

Readers will come to better understand what makes Tyson tick, as well as his myriad foibles and frailties.

And rather than portray Douglas as coming from a stable, two-parent environment, which is partly true, Layden goes behind the curtains to explore the complex, convoluted and often troubled relationship between Douglas and his late father, a hardscrabble ex-fighter named Billy “Dynamite” Douglas, who would make a great subject for his own book.

Buster is a genuinely humble, decent and simple but not unintelligent fellow who was thrust into the craziest of circumstances. While his paternal relationship is a theme that runs throughout the book, so are his challenging relationships with others, some of whom should have put his interests over their own egos.

Layden gives readers a blow-by-blow on how Douglas, a standout basketball player who had been a chronic underachiever as a boxer, managed to rise to the occasion for the biggest fight

of his life.

As easy as that is to understand after reading this book, it is just as easy to understand what caused Douglas to basically relinquish his title to Evander Holyfield in his very next fight and then eat himself into a diabetic coma a few years later.

“Booklist,” which gave this book a starred review, said that Layden has “researched and written the most compelling and moving book on the sweet science we’ve seen in years.”

Wayne Coffey, who wrote the best-selling “The Boys of Winter,” said the book “takes you into the corners, the locker rooms, the minds of the two protagonists, producing revelations that arrive in combinations and a story that packs a heavyweight punch.”

I usually ignore boxing books because they are all too often predictable and plodding. What I personally find most interesting about boxing is not the actual fighting, but the fighters themselves.

All seem to have remarkable stories, but rarely are those stories written about with such precision and depth as in this book.

Layden should have a Ph.D in street psychology. I challenge anyone even remotely interested in what makes both ordinary and extraordinary people tick to pick this book up and not have trouble putting it down.

It grips you and grabs you, as it eloquently describes just how fickle the concept of fame and the consequence of obscurity can be. Not only will you find yourself rooting for Douglas, the quintessential underdog, but also for Tyson, who in his own tragic way is no less of an underdog.

This book is about fostering and nurturing dreams, only to watch them shattered. It is also about family, loyalty, grit, determination and ultimately redemption, makeshift or otherwise.

It will make you laugh and cry, sometimes on the same page. Most importantly, it will make you think. You will muse about your own ambitions or lack thereof, your own personal quest for some type of spiritual immortality, and your own belief or disbelief that the human spirit, when properly motivated, is not capable of magnificent feats.

Very often, when a movie based on a book comes out, people complain that the movie didn’t do the book justice. In this case, a different analogy is necessary. The Tyson-Douglas fight took place more than 17 years ago.

It was a great fight, not only for its historical significance, but also because of its unrelenting action.

This book, however, is better than the fight. You can’t get a more starred review than that.

“The Last Great Fight” is available in all bookstores and on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com .