



Abel Kiviat, National Champion: Twentieth-Century Track and Field and the Melting Pot (Sports and Entertainment)

Alan Katchen

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Abel Kiviat (1892-1991) was one of track and field's legendary personalities, a world record-holder and Olympic medalist in the metric mile. A teenage prodigy, he defeated Hall of Fame runners before his twentieth birthday. Alan S. Katchen brings Kiviat's fascinating story to life and re-creates a lost world, when track and field was at the height of its popularity and occupying a central place in America's sporting world. The oldest of seven children of Moishe and Zelda Kiviat, Jewish immigrants from Poland, Abel competed as "the Hebrew runner" for New York's famed Irish-American Athletic Club and was elected its captain. Katchen's engaging biography centers Abel Kiviat's life and his sport firmly in the context of American social history. As a quintessential New Yorker, Kiviat embodies the urban and ethnic roots of American track. From his first schoolboy competitions on city playgrounds, to his world records at Madison Square Garden, to his pioneering role as track's press steward in the age of emerging media, Kiviat's life reveals how his sport was shaped by the culture of the emerging metropolis. New York City is not only the setting for these developments but also a subject of the book. The narration is enriched with brief portraits of celebrated track athletes including Kiviat's Olympic roommate, Jim Thorpe. In addition, Katchen offers a detailed account of the I-AAC's evolution, including its close ties to the Tammany Hall political machine, and sheds light on the rapid modernization of the sport and the ways it provided a vehicle for the assimilation of working-class, immigrant athletes. Finally, Katchen explores the social origins of the ideology of amateurism and its devastating impact on Kiviat's career. Kiviat died at ninety-nine, just months short of carrying the torch for the opening ceremonies of the Barcelona Olympics. *Abel Kiviat, National Champion* pays tribute to a remarkable athlete and the sport during its most dynamic and celebrated era.

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