



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Damon Runyon (1884-1946)

Damon Runyon was a multi-talented media professional and writer, having written everything from sports columns to poetry to short stories. Born Alfred Damon Runyan in Manhattan, Kan., the Runyan family soon moved to Pueblo, Colo., where the father was a printer and small newspaper publisher. Runyon's mother passed away when he was just seven years old, and he grew up on the streets, learning to take care of himself.



In the sixth grade, Runyon was expelled from school and, instead, began learning the newspaper business with his father. Runyon quickly became a full-fledged news reporter, at which time one of his columns printed with a typographical error in his last name, leading him to keep the spelling "Runyon" rather than the original "Runyan." In 1898, he took his abilities overseas after enlisting in the Spanish-American War where he served in the Philippines.

Upon return from the war, Runyon began writing for small daily papers before taking a job with the Denver Post as a sports writer. He also wrote poetry and short stories on the side, getting published in McClure's and Harper's Weekly. In 1910, Runyon moved to New York City, and for the next 10 years, he covered the New York Giants for the Hearst daily American.



Just a year later, Runyon's first book was published, titled "The Tents of Trouble" and composed of numerous poems. He then became Hearst's foreign correspondent in Mexico and Europe during World War I. Runyon's unique style and voice appealed to readers, and he wrote in a historical present tense that was distinctly his. Runyon also offered a more humanistic side to his sports columns, covering baseball, boxing and other events. His popularity reached a daily readership of more than 10 million.

Runyon was friends with numerous notables, including best friend Otto Berman (a mafia accountant), Al Capone, Jack Dempsey, Babe Ruth and others. The people in his life helped him create memorable characters, such as the Lemon Drop Kid, Harry the Horse and Dream Street Rose. In 1932, Runyon's collection "Guys and Dolls" debuted with much success, which was adapted into a Broadway hit and a feature film.



Runyon continued to write, publishing more than two-dozen books, of which several were adapted for film. Runyon's stories included a rich slang, jargon that fitted characters who were gamblers, gangsters and petty thieves. Additionally, he never used contractions in his writing. Runyon himself was a reputable gambler. He also owned a horse stable and was a fan of horse racing.

Runyon was always a heavy smoker and developed throat cancer. In 1946, the cancer proved fatal, and Runyon died at age 62. In 1949, "The Damon Runyon Theatre" was broadcast on the radio, featuring 52 of his short stories over a one-year period. Runyon was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1967 for his coverage of the sport and is also a member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, supposedly having dubbed fighter James J. Braddock "Cinderella Man."

