What was it Muhammad Ali possessed that allowed him to defeat "Smokin" Joe Frazier in two out of three fights? What was that one weapon that he possessed enabling him to prevail? It is something that is overlooked when evaluating the three classic fights between these two former all-time great Heavyweight Champions. When thinking back to sports greatest rivalry, it's easy to overlook the one factor, which would determine who history would regard as the better fighter. The difference maker in these three fights came down to the overall abundance of body strength and durability of Muhammad Ali. Throw out his hand-speed and lightning fast combinations, the great footwork, the overall ability to adapt and improvise during the course of the fight, and the tremendous psychological warfare Ali employed on his opponents. The Bottom line is that Ali had a cast iron chin, complemented by a concrete body and very underrated physical body strength. Not one of the gaudy weapons Ali displayed physically mattered in victory. It was the weapons we couldn't see until the terms warranted them to be brought out and shown to us. Bottom line Ali could absorb Frazier's relentless assault and return his own.

Can you picture any other boxer other than Ali surviving "Smokin" Joe Frazier, I can't! Frazier is the perfect foil for a boxer. Here's the problem with a boxer trying to survive Frazier, he won't let boxers box him; he put unrelenting pressure on them, which forces them to fight him instead of boxing him. The Heavyweight division has yet to deliver another boxer on Ali's level who can take the pressure and not be too spent to fight back. Regardless of how skillful the boxer was, boxing fundamentals frequently go out the window under the non-stop pressure of Frazier's tireless assault. The other problem that boxers face is Frazier coming in bobbing and weaving better than any swarming heavyweight in history. Frazier will hit you to the body or the head. There isn't a safe place in the ring. His punches to the body sapped a fighters strength and will; his left hook to the chin separated one's senses from one's legs. Smokin Joe would cut off your space and punching distance while closing in to position himself to thoroughly work you over. And lastly, Joe Frazier had a great chin, so if you're not George Foreman, you couldn't keep him off you. Eventually boxer's were worn down by Frazier and were counted out, or the referee came to the boxers aid by stopping the fight before they are counted out.

Look what Frazier did to some very good boxers, excluding Ali. Buster Mathis was big and had the feet of a ballet dancer; he also had fast hands and the mental advantage of defeating Frazier twice in the box-offs for a berth on the 1964 Olympic team. They fought fours years later for the New York State Heavyweight title. History would go on to show that Mathis had three beautiful rounds in 1 thru 3, and 7 terrible rounds finally being counted out in round 11. This was typical of most of Joe's fights when he fought a good boxer. Mathis started off moving and jabbing, keeping Frazier at a distance. Against Frazier this could only prolong the inevitable. While Mathis is trying to box and keep Frazier from pinning him against the ropes, he was paying a price. Frazier was forcing Mathis to use up his strength and energy by the minute. One other subtle thing was happening; Mathis slowly but surely lost his will. Mathis began asking himself what can he do to keep Frazier off of him. As the will and energy start to erode, Frazier picks up the pace and gets closer working Mathis' body over. It's only a short time before his

legs go and he will be slowed to a walk, incapable of escaping Frazier's relentless pressure. The deeper the fight went the more damage had been done. After about two minutes into round 11 the end comes in classic Frazier fashion as he dug a hook to the Mathis body taking his air and legs, then Joe shot the hook to the head which makes Mathis drop to the canvas as though he was dropped from a helicopter, Fight over. Ali not only endured this type assault, he returned it with an assault of his own! With a cast iron chin, concrete body, and physical strength, Ali could hold Joe off.

June 23, 1969 Heavyweight Champ Joe Frazier defended his title against the second ranked heavyweight in the world, the counter punching Jerry Quarry. Quarry found out that you couldn't counter punch the non-stop pressure and the continuous punching of Frazier. Being forced to fight the first two rounds Quarry got the better of Joe. Move ahead to round 5, and Quarry found himself pinned against the ropes with not a whole lot left in his gas tank to keep Frazier from working him over. During the fight broadcaster Howard Cosell called Angelo Dundee who is sitting ringside with WBA Champ Jimmy Ellis. Cosell calls Dundee over to the broadcast table and says to Dundee "Alright Angie lets hear it once and for all, is your man Ellis going to meet Frazier", Dundee replies " Jimmy will be happy to meet Frazier, I assure he won't have his back to the ropes like that ". Oh how wrong he was, Jerry wasn't on the ropes because he chose to be, Frazier had taken his legs and Quarry could not escape.

February 16, 1970, Frazier and Ellis meet for Undisputed Heavyweight title. Ellis, a cute boxer with a sneaky stiff right hand won the first two rounds. Frazier got closer in each minute of the fight. Midway through round 3 Frazier caught Ellis with a brutal left hook to the chin, Ellis is wobbled for a brief second and you see the wind taken from his sail. By the end of the round Ellis was pinned against the ropes and Frazier is landing body shots and short hooks to the head. When the bell rings to end the round Ellis was a different fighter going back to his corner. The bell rang for round 4, and the fight has now turned Frazier's way. Frazier had Ellis right where he wanted him, it's now predator vs. prey. Frazier pinned Ellis to the ropes and once again is landing hooks to the head and short rights to the body. Ellis crumbles to the canvas. Ellis shows tremendous heart and rises at about the count of five. Frazier and Ellis meet at center ring after the first knockdown and Frazier starts crashing Ellis with hooks to the body and head. Frazier dipped and came up with a left hook, which was the second best left hook I have seen a heavyweight land. (Frazier's hook, which dropped Ali, was the best.) Ellis was down and badly hurt, and the bell rings to end round 4. Referee Tony Perez reached five in the count and the bell couldn't save Ellis. Ellis showed tremendous heart once again he beat the count and stumbled to his corner. Dundee new the fight was over and merely saved his fighter for another. Ellis, a very good boxer with a stiff right hand had found out Frazier doesn't let you box, and if you don't have guns big enough to keep from being steam rolled the end is a foregone conclusion. Frazier and Ellis met again in 1975, Frazier was sharpening up for his upcoming third bout with Ali. Ellis is hoping that if he could upset Frazier, it could lead to a rematch with Ali and a title shot. This time Ellis makes it to round 9, with the pattern almost the same as the first fight; Ellis had a pretty good first 3 or 4 rounds and at the least has split them by a close margin. Once again it's just a matter of time before the steamroller was at running temperature and Ellis is stopped in round 9. Ali endured this type of assault and returned his own assault, which slowed Joe's pace of pressuring him. Cast iron chin, concrete body, and the physical strength to tie Frazier up and bring the steamroller to a halt. This enabled him to catch a breath and

regroup for the remainder of the round. In case it hasn't sunk in, Cast Iron chin, concrete body, underrated physical strength and determination equal to Frazier's.

(Frazier-Ali 1)
Ali came out extremely fast throwing the hardest punches he's ever thrown at any opponent from round 1 thru 5. His plan was to get Frazier out and if he didn't Frazier would've taken so much punishment that he wouldn't be effective in the last third of the fight. As we know Frazier was stunned pretty good in those rounds but they took a toll on Ali going for the execution, now it was Joe's turn. Ali had found out that there is no half-court game with Joe Frazier; it's fast break all the way. In rounds 6, 7, and 8 Ali is now flatfooted and had to endure the relentless Frazier assault. About a minute into round 9 Ali summons great reserve and has a big round and stunned Joe in the last twenty seconds to have his last big round. Round 10 was a pretty close round with Frazier having a slight edge. In round 11 Ali came the closest he had ever been to being stopped in his career. Midway through the round Ali is spent and is forced to rest in the corner, Frazier connects with a double left hook to the body and head that has Ali in the dream room and close to being stopped, Ali's underrated physical strength and cast iron chin allowed him to make it through the round. Rounds 12 and 13 Frazier worked Ali's body and head and over, cast iron chin, and concrete body allow Ali once again to make it through the round. Ali has a good round 14 moving and boxing winning the round. Twenty-four seconds into the 15th and final round Frazier hits Ali with the fiercest left hook I ever saw a heavyweight throw, Ali goes down as if his legs were taken out from under him, he got up at the count of two, concrete chin. Frazier worked his body and head for the remainder of the round, however Ali made it through the fight and loses a unanimous decision Why; cast iron chin, concrete body and unmatched physical strength and recuperative powers never seen before in a heavyweight.

(Ali-Frazier rematch)
Once again Ali came out moving and circling forcing Frazier to chase more than stalk, but Ali can't do this the entire fight. Ali takes 4 of the first 6 rounds. Rounds 7 and 8 Ali needed a rest, Frazier is Smokin now. Ali is too tired to move and had no choice but to lean against the ropes and endure Joe's bombs. Again, concrete body, cast iron chin allow Ali to remain on his feet. When the body starts hurting, Ali called on his physical strength to grab Frazier. By clinching with Frazier, Ali prevented further damage. After taking a good going over by Frazier in rounds 7 an 8 Ali came out fast and hard in round 9 moving and stopping to plant and fight Joe scoring with stinging three and four punch combinations. The physical strength allowed Ali to recuperate and do damage. Round 10, Ali needed a rest again and Joe takes the round landing good shots to Ali's body and head. In round 11 once again Ali comes out fighting and wins a very competitive round. In round 12 Frazier senses he may need a big round. Frazier came out to kill Ali. Frazier lands some big hooks to Ali's chin early in the round, once again Ali's recuperative powers came to life and Ali finished the last minute with a big rally taking the round on two of three cards. Ali wins a Unanimous decision. Once again, cast iron chin, concrete body, and physical strength helped to fuel Ali's unmatched recuperative power.

(Ali-Frazier Thrilla in Manila)
As the pattern in the previous two fights, Ali started quickly once again and shook Frazier in rounds 1 and 2. The pace had slowed a little in rounds 3 and 4, with Ali picking his spots he scored cleanly. Round 5 saw Frazier starting to get inside and work Ali's body while slipping in

exploding left hooks to Ali's jaw. Round 6 sees Frazier land one of his calling card left hooks against Ali's chin and stops him in his track. Ali stopped and pinned against the ropes is now in Frazier's kitchen and the heats starting to rise as Joe takes the round. In round 7 Ali came out moving and circling while scoring with the jab. Again, recuperative powers allowed Ali to box cleanly and win the round. Round 8 saw Ali come out landing some of his best punches of the fight and had Frazier covering up. Here Joe showed his ability to recuperate and by round's end Frazier cleaned up on Ali. In rounds 9 and 10 Frazier whacked Ali from corner to corner, by rounds end Ali looked like a beaten fighter. Half way through round 11 Ali got his second or third wind and started fighting Frazier on even ground winning a close round. Round 12 saw Ali display for the viewing audience the unbelievable strength to grab Frazier and push Frazier off him, and at the same time started to land stinging combinations on Frazier. By the end of the 12th round, Frazier looked the way most of his opponents look after a long grueling fight with him. Rounds 13 and 14 saw Ali get his fourth or fifth wind and cleaned up on Frazier with accurate stinging combinations which seemed almost impossible after enduring one of the most brutal body attacks ever seen in a heavyweight championship fight. After knocking out Frazier's mouthpiece in the process the bell ended round 14 with Frazier walking slowly to his corner, Frazier now experienced once again what a majority of his opponents have, hitting an opponent with everything and still can't keep him from coming at you. With Frazier's eyes almost swollen shut, his trainer Eddie Futch stopped the fight and saved Frazier from taking any further punishment in round 15.

How did Ali do this? The reason Ali survived Frazier being a boxer who doesn't have the punch to keep Frazier from coming after him was because, his overall body strength was grossly underrated and he had one of the best chin's of any heavyweight ever, which enabled him to endure Frazier's never ending pressure. Just look at the way he could tie up Frazier, Foreman, and Liston and keep them from being able to do anything. If Ali's body strength and chin were less, he would have been 0-3 vs. Frazier. And no way could he have withstood the onslaught of Liston and Foreman as well. That's why he is the greatest heavyweight champion who has yet lived. Cast iron chin, concrete body to take unbelievable body shots and extremely underrated physical body strength which allowed him to give out more than he took. What a fighting machine. Not only was Ali gifted with never before seen skills in a heavyweight before him, this package of fighter was wrapped with every bit the toughness and determination of a Greb or Marciano an even Frazier. Toughness and will coupled with unbelievable strength is why he could survive with and ultimately defeat a steamroller like Joe Frazier. Muhammad Ali had more ways and weapons to defeat great fighters than any other Heavyweight champ in history. Muhammad Ali, yes he could've defeated any other heavyweight champion in boxing history if they were both to meet at their best. And that's not up for conjecture!

Writers Note: And to you "Smokin" Joe Frazier, Ali is the only Heavyweight "boxer" who could've defeated you. And he didn't shut you out. We'll never forget the night of March 8, 1971 for on this night you were not to be denied, not even by Ali. On this night you stamped the pattern as to how swarming fighters should fight movers and boxers. And no body did it better than you for 15 rounds. As far as other past boxers or counter punchers who have held the heavyweight title. None of them could have lived with you, or dream of surviving you. To those of you who are unsure of the fighters I' am talking about, they are the following: Jack Johnson, Gene Tunney, Jersey Joe Walcott, Ezzard Charles, Floyd Patterson, Larry Holmes, and

Evander Holyfield. On their best day they don't get a win over Frazier, on Frazier's best day.