

Memories Of Frazier-Foreman

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Sunday, 20 July 2003 18:00

It was Monday night January 22, 1973. Earlier that day, former U.S. President Lyndon Johnson passed away, and the controversial abortion law Roe v. Wade was passed. I was 12 years old at the time. I remember in wrestling practice that afternoon during one of the rare breaks, saying to one of my friends how much "I'd love to be Joe Frazier tonight." He said, "Why do you wish you were Joe Frazier tonight?" I said, "Think about it, he's the undisputed, undefeated heavyweight champion of the world, he beat Ali in the biggest fight in history and tonight he's fighting George Foreman, who he won't miss with his left hook even if he closes his eyes."

At that time in my life, I was obsessed with boxing. In fact, the only reason I wrestled was because I wanted to fight in some form. Growing up in Haddonfield N.J., boxing wasn't an option so wrestling had to do. I remember begging my father at dinner that night to take me to the closed circuit showing of the Frazier-Foreman heavyweight championship fight being shown at the Cherry Hill Arena. The Cherry Hill Arena is where I went to see all the major fights on closed circuit TV (the first fight I saw on CC was Frazier-Quarry I on June 23, 1969).

My father was a huge Joe Frazier fan and didn't like Ali. As a kid, I thought Frazier was unbeatable by any fighter, and remember feeling sorry for the opponents who were getting ready to fight him. Going into some of his major fights, I remember reading in the newspaper what Bonavena, Quarry and Ellis were saying that they were going to do this and Frazier couldn't do that, and thinking to myself, "Yeah right, you have no shot!" Throughout Frazier's entire career, I always wanted him to lose. I just didn't want to accept that he was so good and I wanted somebody to beat him. The only time I ever rooted for Frazier to win a fight was the night he defended his title against George Foreman. It was reported at the time that Frazier and Ali were close to agreeing to meet a second time. The only obstacles were Frazier had to beat Foreman, and Ali had to beat Joe Bugner three weeks later (February 14, 1973). Since I wanted to see an Ali-Frazier rematch, I rooted for Frazier.

Monday Night January 22, 1973

I convinced my father to take me to the fight that night (I promised him everything under the Sun, I would do any chore that he or my mother wanted, just please take me to the fight). Along with my father and me, my brother and a friend came along. I remember being mad at my father for bringing my brother because he wasn't even a boxing fan and had no idea what hinged on the outcome of this fight, although I dared not tell my father because he would have taken my brother and left me home. We arrived at the Cherry Hill arena about 9 PM and it was packed. My father paid for four tickets at ten dollars a piece (that was a lot back then and I still have the ticket stub). Just as we got to our seats, I saw a friend from school who yelled out to me, "Lotierzo, who do you like?" I remember yelling back, "Ice 'em Joe!" After yelling "Ice 'em Joe," I turned to my father and said, Dad, "You watch, for the first time in my life I actually want your boy Frazier to win. Watch 'em lose!"

Just as George Foreman was entering the ring, Don Dunphy was saying welcome to Kingston Jamaica and the "Sunshine Showdown" featuring heavyweight champion Joe Frazier vs.

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second ranked challenger George Foreman (although many of the replays are Cosell's ABC call "Down Goes Frazier," Dunphy called the CC broadcast). Once Frazier entered the ring time flew, and the next thing I realized, Frazier and Foreman were at ring center getting instructions from referee Arthur Mercante. I remember thinking, while watching the fighters stare at each other, that this was the meanest stare-in I had ever seen (and still feel that way to this day). Next time you see a replay of the fight watch how Joe and George stare at each other, while Mercante is talking. I remember Foreman looking down at Frazier with total disdain, and Frazier looking up at Foreman with his face projecting how dare you look at me like that!

The bell rang for round one and Frazier came out in typical Frazier fashion applying the pressure. About a minute into the round Foreman started pushing Frazier off him, keeping him at the end of his punches. Two minutes into the fight, Foreman put Frazier down, as I sat there in disbelief. Frazier gets up and goes back at Foreman, shortly after that Foreman has Frazier's back against the ropes and is throwing bombs at him. Frazier is making many of them miss, but the ones that are getting through are hurting him! Then it comes, one of the most vicious right uppercuts I've ever seen, lands flush on Frazier's chin and he sinks to the canvas. Again, Frazier gets up and before he can get his hands up, Foreman is all over him. Right before the bell rings to end round one, Foreman grazes Frazier as he's trying to back away with another right uppercut and drops him like he's a fleabag.

In between the first and second round I'm standing, but I'm numb and in shock. I remember the guys around me were also shocked, yet we still felt Frazier was going to get him in the next round. I remember (like it was yesterday), telling the guy next to me not to worry, Frazier will really get him now because Foreman made him mad.

The second round picks right up where the first let off and it's target practice for Foreman. Early in the round, Foreman drops him again, Frazier jumps up again, but he's being beaten so badly he looks like a stumblebum. I remember thinking that Ali hit Frazier for 15 rounds continuously, yet only backed him up a few times. How is it that George Foreman can knock him down like he's some bum. After Frazier gets up a fourth time, Foreman traps him again and catches him on the back of the head as Frazier is trying to get away and puts him down for a fifth time. By this time, it's obvious to all except Frazier that it's over. As Foreman approaches Frazier again, Foreman nails him with a series of left and right uppercuts that cause Frazier to start to sink. Then in a delayed reaction, Frazier hops in the air and goes down for the sixth and final time. Frazier beats the count, but referee Arthur Mercante waves the fight off as Frazier's manager and trainer Yank Durham is coming through the ring ropes to rescue Frazier.

After the fight was over and Don Dunphy had interviewed Foreman, the lights came on and we just stood there and looked at each other as if we had just seen Martians land in a flying saucer. My father, who had always referred to Ali as Clay, tapped me on the shoulder. As I turned to look at him, our eyes met and he said with a grin on his face, "What will he do to Clay!" Little did he know that was all I could think about.

Driving home in the car, my father asked if we wanted to go to a diner to get something to eat. I answered for us and said no, because I was still in shock and couldn't believe what I had just witnessed. As soon as I got home, my brother and I went straight upstairs to go to bed. Within

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minutes, my brother was sound asleep. I lay in bed for hours thinking how could any fighter do this to "Smokin' " Joe Frazier? I wanted to wake my brother up and say, how can you sleep, you idiot? Do you realize George Foreman just stopped Joe Frazier in two rounds? After hours of lying in bed, I finally fell asleep, but a nightmare soon awakened me. My nightmare was George Foreman punching down the walls of our solid brick house, trying to get me for rooting against him.

On January 22, 1973, former heavyweight champion George Foreman put on the most devastating exhibition of punching power I have ever witnessed in 37 years of following boxing! To knock down a fighter like Frazier six times in five minutes is as impressive as it gets. Many heavyweight fighters have scored impressive knockouts in their careers, but nothing to this magnitude. This was Joe Frazier, a fighter who never seemed bothered by his opponents' punches. This wasn't Gus Dorazio, this wasn't Don Cockell, or Trevor Berbick or Hasim Rahman. This was Joe Frazier, and nobody did that to Joe Frazier! At least nobody until George Foreman.

Writers Note

Joe Frazier was a 3-1 favorite over George Foreman the night they fought. At the time, Ali was the top ranked heavyweight contender and Foreman was the second. The Frazier-Foreman bout came to fruition because the Frazier camp was fighting with the Ali camp over money. Frazier refused to split \$6 million with Ali like he did \$5 million in their first fight. Frazier's contention was that since he had beaten Ali in their first fight and was the undisputed champ, Ali didn't deserve parity. Ali's contention was that he was the draw who the fans wanted to see, and that his fights were shown throughout the world on CC TV, while Frazier was fighting the likes of Terry Daniels and Ron Stander on free TV. Thus Frazier, in trying to outlast Ali, signed to fight Foreman for a guaranteed \$800,000, instead of fighting Ali for a guaranteed \$3 million.

On January 5, 1973 (17 days before the Frazier-Foreman fight), Muhammad Ali was a guest on the Mike Douglas show. Ali told Douglas that he was very concerned about Frazier losing in his upcoming fight with George Foreman. He went on to say Frazier was partying and singing with his group "Joe Frazier and the Knockouts" and wasn't staying in good shape. Ali told Douglas that Foreman was real strong and if Frazier wasn't in good condition, he could lose to Foreman blowing their proposed rematch.