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Exhibition: ex-hi-bi-tion. 1. The act of exhibiting; display. 2. Anything exhibited. 3. A public showing, as of works of art, etc. That is the Webster's Dictionary definition of the word "Exhibition." It's that date again, January 22nd. It is on this date that I can't help but remember the most devastating exhibition of punching power that I have ever seen in my years of watching and following amateur and professional boxing.

It was on January 22nd 1973 that I went to the closed circuit broadcast of the world heavyweight championship fight between undefeated champ Joe Frazier 29-0 (25) and undefeated second ranked contender George Foreman 37-0 (34). The fight was in Kingston Jamaica and was titled "The Sunshine Showdown." For it was on this night that I witnessed a display of punching power that I never saw before, or have seen since in the last 31 years. Remember, I didn't say the most impressive or devastating knockout. I said exhibition of punching power.

Over the last 38 years, I have seen more impressive knockouts than Foreman's stoppage of Frazier. Nunn's KO over Kalambay, Hearns' KO over Cuevas are just a couple that come to mind when recalling devastating knockouts. However, they weren't exhibitions, they were executions ending with one punch. The fact that they ended so quickly disqualifies them as exhibitions. To me, and exhibition of power must be sustained, even if for only a round or two. On any given night, a fighter like Hasim Rahman who is no more than a good heavyweight contender, as witnessed in his last fight versus John Ruiz, can catch a great like Lennox Lewis and knock him dead with one punch. That to me is not an exhibition.

An exhibition is when one fighter repeatedly devastates his opponent. It's when you know by the end of the fight that it doesn't matter how many times the beaten fighter beats the count, no doubt he'll be dropped again. Louis-Schmeling II is another great example of this. You knew that it didn't matter how many times Schmeling beat the count, he was only going down again. Tyson-Berbick is also a good example.

As much as Louis-Schmeling II and Tyson-Berbick were tremendous exhibitions of awesome punching power, they are no where close to the level of Foreman's 5 minute destruction of Frazier? At least not in my mind. As far as I'm concerned, Foreman's display of savage power is unmatched in heavyweight history. This is mainly because of who the opponent was, Joe Frazier. Many fighters have built up great KO records over the years, but how many of them own a destructive knockout over a fighter the caliber of an undefeated 29 year old Frazier. Maybe Hearns over Duran, but certainly no heavyweight. At least not in my opinion.

Over the years some have tried to perpetrate the myth that Frazier couldn't handle a big puncher. Anyone who says this either (A) has a bias against Frazier and wants to denigrate him, or (B) didn't closely follow his career. I have no agenda regarding Frazier, and I followed his career and knew many of the people behind the scenes who either managed or trained him. Over the years I've also spoke at length with the top writers who covered his career from start to

finish. Maybe you recognize some of these guys, Dick Young, Dave Anderson, Hank Kaplan, Bert Sugar, Lew Eskin, Larry Merchant, Stan Hochman, Jack McKinney, Jerry Izenberg, and Dick Schapp.

The fact of the matter is Joe Frazier had a great chin. If you look at the whole picture, it is evidenced by the facts. Some point out that he was dropped by veteran contender Oscar Bonavena twice in their first fight in 1966, with an over hand right. This was a punch Frazier was sometimes vulnerable too. What most fail to mention is that Bonavena was Frazier's 11th fight in a career that wasn't even fully into it's second year. They also fail to mention that Bonavena was a ranked contender with 28 fights under his belt. Bonavena was a 211 pound piece of steel who was strong as a bull, and could also punch. No, he wasn't Foreman, but he could hit. Another thing that is overlooked is that after Frazier got up from the second knockdown there was one minute left in the round. Had Bonavena been able to put Frazier down once more, the fight would've been stopped. However, Frazier made it through the last minute of the second round and was never close to going down again in the round, nor was he hurt again during the fight.

Before fighting Bonavena the second time, Frazier fought 6'3" 230 pound Manuel Ramos in June of 1968. Ramos wasn't a great fighter by any means, but he did have a devastating right uppercut. Ramos caught Frazier with probably the best right uppercut he ever threw in his career about a minute into round one of their fight. The punch straightened Frazier up completely. However, Frazier never buckled or was close to going down and beat Ramos half to death on his way to stopping him in the second round.

Frazier and Bonavena crossed paths again two years later on December 10th 1968. This fight was at the Philadelphia Spectrum and Frazier's title was on the line. My father took me to this fight, I was 8 years old. In this fight, Frazier was in complete control for all 15 rounds. Frazier won no less than 12 rounds on all three scorecards on his way to a unanimous decision victory. Incidentally, Frazier was never hurt or shook once in the fight.

In 1969 Jerry Quarry nailed Frazier with some of the best punches he ever launched, yet Frazier was never close to being hurt or shook. Again, Quarry wasn't Foreman or Shavers, but he could hit and scored some impressive KO's in his career. Jimmy Ellis had a real good sneaky straight right hand in which he caught Frazier with coming in, yet Joe was never hurt or shook. Ellis was also the first fighter to drop Bonavena, before he was stopped by the best left-hook Ali ever threw in his career. Ali was the only fighter to stop Bonavena when he turned the trick in the 15th round of their fight in December of 1970.

On March 8th of 1971, Frazier won a gruelling 15 round decision over Muhammad Ali who was participating in his third fight after a forced 43 month layoff. In this fight Ali launched some of the hardest punches he ever threw at any fighter. This was for two reasons. First off, Frazier forced Ali to fight by applying fast and hard unrelenting pressure. Secondly, Frazier forced Ali to try and hit hard just so Ali could try and slow him down in trying to keep him off. We all know that Ali is not a great one punch banger, however when Ali planted and sat down on his punches he could hit. He was a big man who was very strong and had blinding speed. Ali beat on Frazier for 45 minutes, yet only stunned him once in the 9th round. If you doubt this, go back and watch the

tape.

In their second fight, Ali rocked Frazier with a terrific right hand in the second round. Yes, Frazier was stunned and caught a break when referee Tony Perez separated them after thinking he had heard the bell ending the round. However there was only 20 seconds left in the round, no way Ali would've finished him. Plus, Ali caught Frazier with better rights after that and never shook him.

In the third Ali-Frazier fight, a 224 pound Ali hit Frazier a million times with stinging rights and uppercuts, yet never came close to putting him down. The fight was stopped after the 14th round because Frazier's eyes and face were severely swollen and he couldn't see Ali's punches coming at him. I'm sure some Frazier detractors are saying, "don't use Ali as an example for making a case for Frazier's chin." My response to that is, I'd bet everything I own that if the same Ali who hit Frazier in any of their three fights hit Lennox Lewis or Mike Tyson as many times as he did Frazier, they both would've gone down and would have been stopped. I'd bet anything on that.

I've heard many say that Tyson has a great chin. I say it's no better than Frazier's, if it's even as good. Tyson was shook by Tillis, and he can't punch a lick. Buster Douglas and Evander Holyfield are certainly not punchers, yet Douglas had Tyson falling all over the place in their fight. Had the ropes not held Tyson up, he would've gone down three or four times during the fight. And if you want to you use the excuse Tyson wasn't in top shape, than the same applies for Frazier in the first Foreman fight.

Neither Douglas or Holyfield ever stopped any upper tier heavyweights other than Tyson. Both Douglas and Holyfield were credited with being better punchers than they really were, only because they stopped Tyson. And remember, it was easier for fighters to compile big knockout records from the early 80's on. After Mancini killed Du Ku Kim in 1982, referee's stopped fights much quicker, opposed to the protocol in the 60's and 70's. This is evidenced by many fighters since then having high knockout percentages. Just because a fighter has a high KO percentage, it doesn't automatically mean he's a terrific puncher. The thing that counts is who you stopped, not how many?

Dempsey, Marciano, and Tyson are swarming fighters like Frazier, and are credited with having a great chin. It is often noted that neither of them took a beating or were punched around like Frazier was by Foreman. This is very true. However, other than Willard, Dempsey never faced a puncher like Foreman, and Willard wasn't Foreman. In all honesty, Marciano and Tyson also never faced a puncher in Foreman's league. Had Dempsey, Marciano, and Tyson fought Foreman of 1973-74, I could easily see them getting mauled as badly as Frazier did, if not worse. It's just Frazier's misfortune that Foreman was around during his era. Like Frazier, Dempsey, Marciano, and Tyson can only fight effectively when they push the fight. Pushing the fight vs Foreman is suicide. Something Cus D' Amato often was quoted as saying. Had Dempsey, Marciano, and Tyson faced Foreman of 1973-74, they would've had two choices. One, bring it to Foreman and get stopped, or try moving away and tiring Foreman out. Unfortunately, Dempsey, Marciano, and Tyson would've been a fish out of water if they were forced back, just like Frazier was.

Some fans question why Frazier never fought Lyle or Shavers. These fights didn't happen because both Lyle and Shavers were knocked off by Quarry on the way up to Frazier. Which of course wasn't Frazier's fault. If you were around then, you know there was never an out-cry for Frazier-Lyle or Frazier-Shavers. If ever anyone tries and pass it along that Frazier avoided Lyle or Shavers, it's not true. Shavers was stopped by Ron Stander, and Lyle was beat pillar to post by Quarry before their names could've been mentioned in the same sentence as Frazier's. Maybe they could've got lucky 2 out of 10 times vs Frazier, but if you have to pick a winner in a proposed match up between Frazier and Lyle or Shavers, I'll take all the money you have on Frazier. Lyle and Shavers could hit, but no way were they in the class of George Foreman 1973-74.

Fighters like Jeff Merritt and Blue Lewis were also good punchers, and neither of them ever fought Frazier. That is because they never made it high enough up the rankings when Frazier was on top of the division. Like in any fight involving Frazier, Joe was vulnerable in the first round, he was a slow starter most of the time. Maybe Lyle, Shavers, Merritt, and Blue Lewis could have got lucky and caught Frazier early and hurt him, but no way they finish him. And in all fairness, Shavers, Merritt, and Blue Lewis didn't have the strongest beard's. I can't see them finishing on their feet in a fight vs Frazier.

On January 22nd 1973. George Foreman took Joe Frazier apart in 5 minutes of actual fighting. Frazier was a more than tried and tested world champion. Frazier was never ever one time really hurt or close to going out in his career until his fight with Foreman. Yet Foreman had him falling all over the place after a minute and a half of fighting. Just to prove it wasn't a fluke or a lucky punch, Foreman dropped Frazier six times. Frazier got up all six times. The fact that Frazier was up all six times is also often overlooked. He was never close to being counted out, despite having no legs under him!

Foreman's destruction of Frazier is the most awesome massacre of a great fighter that I ever saw. It was definitely no fluke or lucky punch. Nobody made Frazier back off, but Foreman did. No other heavyweight destroyed another great heavyweight like Foreman did Frazier. Foreman actually damaged Frazier's legacy. And to this day, the aura of Frazier's career is severely tarnished because of Foreman. Seeing Frazier getting drilled by Foreman makes it too easy for some to envision another big puncher doing the same to Frazier. The problem with that is there has only been one Foreman. In my opinion, only Foreman could've beat Frazier so convincingly. I'm not saying Frazier is the greatest heavyweight champ in history, I'm just saying NOBODY takes him apart like George Foreman did circa 1973-74. NOBODY! Foreman ruined Frazier's image as an all-time great to some fans. Just don't count me as one of them!