

Rocky Marciano: Heavyweight Great

Written by Sam Gregory

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On June 5, 1952 Jersey Joe Walcott defended his heavyweight title for the last time. Thirty-eight year old Jersey Joe beat Ezzard Charles in a fifteen round unanimous decision.

Three months later Rocky Marciano challenged Jersey Joe Walcott for the heavyweight title. On September 23, 1952 in Philadelphia's Municipal Stadium a crowd of 40,379 fans witnessed Rocky Marciano stop Walcott in the thirteenth round to become the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. The paid attendance was \$504,645.

In the first round of the fight Walcott dropped Marciano with a left hook. It was the first time Rocky was down in forty-three fights. From then on it was a bloody battle between two great heavyweights. After twelve rounds Walcott was ahead on all three scorecards. Both judges and the referee had Walcott easily winning the fight. The only way Marciano could win was with a knockout.

In the thirteenth round Marciano had Jersey Joe against the ropes when he landed a crushing right to Walcott's jaw. The punch had Jersey Joe slumped on the canvas with one arm hanging over the bottom rope when he was counted out.

Marciano's pet name for his piston-like right was "Susie Q." It quickly became known as the winning punch in many of his fights.

In the rematch on May 15, 1953 in Chicago, Marciano kayoed Walcott in the first round. Once again "Susie Q" was the punch that ended the fight in less than three minutes.

At 5'10" tall and 185 pounds, Marciano was smaller than most heavyweights, but fought from a crouched position making him harder to hit. Other assets that helped "The Rock" prevail was his solid chin, a relentless desire to win and his power. Known as one of the hardest punchers in the sport, out of 49 wins Rocky only won six by decision.

That's a record of 49 wins, no loses, no draws, with 43 knockouts.

Marciano made his first major impact in the heavyweight division in 1950 when he won a ten round decision against then undefeated heavyweight contender Roland La Starza. It was one of only six decisions Rocky won, but La Starza never let up on his relentless claim that he won the fight. He badgered Marciano with quotes to the press saying, "Marciano must be punch drunk from all the punches he's been taking to think he won the fight."

Rocky was furious with La Starza, saying he would make him eat his words in a rematch.

Marciano did just that on September 24, 1953. By then La Starza's record had slipped to 54-3, while Marciano was still undefeated at 44-0.

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In the rematch La Starza was able to frustrate Marciano with his clever defensive skills and well executed combinations. Finally Charley Goldman, Marciano's trainer, told his frustrated fighter to "Bang his arms until he brings them down." From that point on Rocky did just that, savagely beating La Starza's arms and upper body.

By the tenth round La Starza could barely lift his gloves above his shoulders. By the eleventh round Marciano had him badly battered. After finally knocking La Starza through the ropes, the referee stopped the slaughter. La Starza had chipped bones in his elbows and ruptured blood vessels on his forearms that had to be surgically repaired.

It was July 1951 sixth round stoppage of Rex Layne and a fourth round KO over Freddie Beshore a month later that brought Rocky Marciano into the championship limelight.

In October of that year Joe Louis was on the comeback trail, racking up victories en route to a shot at regaining the heavyweight title. This was a fight Marciano really didn't want. Rocky stated he didn't want to fight Louis because The Brown Bomber had always been his idol.

In the dressing room before the fight Rocky was quoted as saying, "This is the last guy on earth I want to fight."

As it turned out, neither fighter had much of a choice. Joe Louis was being hounded by the IRS for back taxes and Rocky needed the fight to avoid any delay for his chance at a title fight.

The fight did turn out to be a good bout as the aging Louis showed he was still one of the best fighters of the era. It soon became apparent that Louis' punches weren't hurting Rocky, but Marciano's punches were hurting Louis.

Between rounds seven and eight Louis told his trainer, "He's hurtin' me, Chappie, he's hurtin' me." Marciano ended the fight in the eighth with several punches that sent the ex-champ threw the ropes. It was Louis' last fight, the end of a remarkable career.

After the fight Louis was quoted as saying, "When he beat me, I think it hurt him worse than it hurt me."

That fight was followed by Marciano's kayo victories over Lee Savold, Gino Buonvino, Bernie Reynolds and Harry 'Kid' Matthews.

Those wins cleared the way for his heavyweight championship fight with Walcott.

Winning the heavyweight title from Jersey Joe Walcott was the icing on the cake that made the Brockton Blockbuster a household name.

In 1954 Rocky Marciano defended his heavyweight title twice against former heavy-weight champ Ezzard Charles. Both fights, the first held in June '54 and the second in September, were brutal wars. Ezzard Charles is considered one of the greatest fighters that ever lived. Before his fight with Marciano, Charles beat Joey Maxim three times, Archie Moore three times,

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Joe Louis once and Walcott twice.

Both fights with Marciano were two of the most savage fights of all time.

Marciano's last fight was against Archie Moore in New York on September 21, 1955. The fight was just one more brutal bloody war for The Rock. Moore dropped Marciano in the second round. For only the second time in his career, Rocky would touch the canvas. Moore was knocked down in the sixth and twice in the eighth. Marciano won the fight by a ninth round KO. After this fight, Marciano retired with an unblemished record of 49-0 (43 KOs).