Prizefighters, no matter their religion, change their Christian names, the names they had at birth, into something suited to a hands-on profession. Nicknames, sobriquets, ring monikers, are as commonplace, as everyday, as integral to the game as the uppercut and hook off the jab.

Sometimes changing a name seems the most natural thing on earth. Consider, for example, that champion of champions, Cassius Clay, first known as the Louisville Lip, who changed his name to Cassius X, then to Muhammad Ali, before finally settling on The Greatest.

A prefix to a real name sometimes says it all. Savor this quintet of sweetheart pugilists: Sugar Ray (Robinson), Sugar Ray (Leonard), Sugar Shane (Mosley), Sugar Ramos and Sucra Ray (Olivera). My mouth waters at the thought of all that talent.

The epithets used by boxers in Regency and Victorian England set a high historical tone for nicknames with punch. A Young Ruffian fought. So did an Old Ruffian. For fans that hungered for action, Beef a la Mode was a contender, as were Cabbage, Giblet Pie, Young Rump Steak and Catsmeat. Alongside these gents scuffled such well-named notables as No Neck (Duggan), Gallows Dick, Yokel Brute, The Chelsea Snob, Holy Land Pink, Cripplegate and Death.

And let’s not forget the anomalous Fighting Quaker.

Some of the animals who fought in the ring and whose bite was worse than their bark were the Pit Bull, El Terrier, Mad Dog, The Animal, The Cobra, The Old Mongoose (Archie Moore), Bobcat (Bob Foster) and Big Cat (Cleveland Williams). The Wild Bull of the Pampas (Luis Angel Firpo) gave Jack Dempsey all he could handle in 1923. There were those highflying champs The Hawk (Aaron Pryor) and Game Chicken (Hen Pearce). There was Tiger Flowers.

Now and again noms-de-guerre were an astute summing up of a fighter’s essence. Consider the Napoleon of the Ring (Jem Belcher), Old Master (Joe Gans), Toy Bulldog (Mickey Walker), Mighty Atom (Jimmy Wilde), Homicide Hank (Henry Armstrong) and Human Windmill (Harry Greb). There are Gentleman Jim (Corbett), Gorgeous George (Carpentier), Terrible Terry (McGovern) and Two Ton Tony (Galento). There’s the rags-to-riches Cinderella Man (James Braddock). There’s the Clown Prince of Boxing (Max Baer). There’s the canvas-loving Fainting Phil (Scott).

Our black brothers, especially in the past, were assigned politically incorrect honorifics. There’s no forgetting the phenomenal Brown Bomber (Joe Louis). One of Joe’s contemporaries was Gorilla Jones. The Black Terror (Bill Richmond) fought in Merry Old England. The Black Panther (Harry Wills) fought in the U.S. and Panama. There was a Young Massa. There was a Kid Chocolate, Little Chocolate, Old Chocolate and Chocolito. The Boston Tar Baby (Sam Langford) was an all-time great, as was The Moor (boxing pioneer Tom Molyneaux), also known as Snowball.

Boxing wouldn't be boxing without the surname Kid. In addition to the aforementioned Kid Chocolate, aka the Cuban Bonbon, there is Kid Gavilan, Kid Broad, Kid Dixie, Kid Francis, Kid Graves, Kid Goodman, Kid Herman, Kid Kaplan, Kid McCoy, Kid McPartland, Kid Murphy and Kid Williams. There's also George Kid Lavigne, "Billy the Kid" O'Shea, Hogan Kid Bassey, Jack Kid Berg, Ted Kid Lewis, Benny Kid Paret, The Stringbean Kid and Young Zulu Kid.

Where the fighter was born and raised looms large in the history of the fight game. Some hall of fame fighters who put boxing on the map were the Manassa Mauler (Jack Dempsey), Brockton Blockbuster (Rocky Marciano), Bronx Bull (Jake LaMotta), Boston Strong Boy (John L. Sullivan), Galveston Giant (Jack Johnson) and Michigan Assassin (Stanley Ketchel).

As we bob and weave our way across America we come across a Nebraska Wildcat, St. Paul Phantom, Livermore Larruper, Herkeimer Hurricane, Milwaukee Marvel, Kentucky Rosebud, Kansas Rube and Pottawatomie Giant. There was a Brooklyn Bomber and Brooklyn Billygoat, Harlem Spider and Harlem Harlequin, Astoria Assassin, Bronx Beauty and Brownsville Bum. Jersey Joe (Walcott) and Philadelphia Jack (O'Brien) were terrific champs, as were the Pittsburgh Kid (Billy Conn) and Boston Gob (Jack Sharkey).

Fighters representing foreign lands fought here and overseas. There's the Light of Israel (English champion Daniel Mendoza) and Croat Comet (low blow artist Fritzie Zivic), as well as the Tipton Slasher, Bristol Unknown, Belfast Spider, Durable Dane, Barbados Demon, Singular Senegalese, Basque Woodchopper, Scotch Wop, Australian Hard Rock and Elongated Panamanian.

Taking a swing at the former jobs of professional pugilists in Regency England, there were pugs who once were The Gasman, The Coachman, The Bargeman, The Waterman, The Collier, The Nailer and The Tinman. There was also a Master of Rolls and Sailor Boy, a Knight of the Cleaver and Bath Butcher.

Closer to home we had ragamuffins on street corners hawking the daily news: Newsboy Brown, The Fighting Newsboy (Mushy Callahan) and Abe the Newsboy (Hollandersky). There was a Georgia Shoeshine Boy (Beau Jack), Boilermaker and Fighting Marine (heavyweight champs Jim Jeffries and Gene Tunney). Men with nerves of steel were the Man of Steel (Tony Zale from Gary, Indiana), the macho Upstate Onion Farmer (Carmen Basilio from Canastota) and The Fighting Dentist (Leech Cross from the Lower East Side), who knocked out teeth at night and replaced them the next day.

When people say "sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never harm me," they could not be more wrong.