No athlete is in better shape than a disciplined, well-trained fighter. Even the biggest detractors of boxing cannot argue against that. Just keeping one's hands up for twelve rounds and requires tremendous stamina. Being in good enough shape to throw a decent punch in the final round requires months of blood and sweat in the gym

However, as with all sports, some boxers have stricter workout regimens than others, which is why I was excited about the release of Joe Frazier's "Box Like the Pros." Smokin' Joe's training methods were the stuff of boxing folklore. Growing up in Beaufort, South Carolina, Frazier could not afford a heavy bag so he made his own out of a burlap sack filled with junk. When he moved to Philadelphia, he served as the precursor to Rocky Balboa, punching slabs of meat. Those brutal exercises created a straight-ahead, bobbing, voluminous attack that is, hands down, one of the most physically exerting styles in ring history.

While the fundamentals of training are similar with every fighter, one wonders what type of extra wrinkles all-time greats like Jack Dempsey, Muhammad Ali, and George Foreman added to their workouts. With "Box Like the Pros," Frazier, teaming up with The Ring magazine senior writer William Dettloff, lays outs his workout in a step-by-step fashion. It is almost the equivalent of spending a couple of hours in the gym with an ex-heavyweight champion who walks the reader through each step.

The book begins with Frazier providing a twenty-page history of prizefighting from the early beginnings to modern times. The main curiosity of this section would be Frazier's assessment of the 1970s. His blood feud with Ali, or as he likes to call him, the Butterfly, became common knowledge among sports fans in the late 1990s. Although the two publicly made peace at the 2002 NBA All-Star Game, Frazier's feelings on Ali have not made a 180-degree transformation. And he makes that clear in the book's introduction, writing: "there's no love there, between Muhammad and me. But I like to respect people right. I think I've done that and I'll continue to do that. Maybe we can sit down together and break bread someday before we shut our eyes. I never had any problems talking and laughing with people."

After the brief synopsis on pugilism, Frazier begins his lesson on the squared circle and starts with the basics. Chapters two through six focus on the core fundamentals: the rules, the gear, the exercise, and the stance. Once that foundation is laid, Frazier then goes into his training for ring warfare. Every punch from the jab to the body shot to basic combination is discussed in detail. In the next chapter, Frazier explains how to avoid and counterpunch every one of those shots. He also describes the different styles of fighting and how to neutralize each of those styles.

The book's most endearing quality is Frazier's concern for the reader's well-being. He takes the time to inform his amateur wannabe readers how to spot a bad trainer on the front end. Frazier also provides insight on how to tell the difference between a quality boxing gym, a slaughterhouse, and health club that uses boxing for cardiovascular training only. One of the

book's two appendixes features a directory of reputable boxing gyms throughout the United States. "Box Like the Pros" also features a day-by-day gym workout and an overview for what potential fighters should expect during their first sparring session.

This could have been a boring technical manual that would have sold because of the attachment of Frazier's name. But the hard-working ex-champion puts in the extra effort to make sure the reader has a thorough understanding of the sweet science. Frazier's knowledge, along with Dettloff's gift for the written word, makes for a compelling, easy-to-read boxing lesson.

I only wish that Frazier had offered more tales of his own experiences in the gym. There is no mention of his inventive training methods as an up-and-coming fighter nor will you find any personal anecdotes about his preparation for some of his great ring wars. Anyone who is looking for those types of stories will need to pick up Frazier's autobiography.

It is not surprising however, that "Box Like the Pros" only focuses on preparing a fighter for the ring. Frazier's ring style was humble but all-business. There is no reason that the knowledge that he passes along would be any different.