

Heavyweight history at the Garden

Written by Robert Cassidy Jr.

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It still remains to be seen where Wladimir Klitschko ends up in the pantheon of great heavyweight champions. The two-time heavyweight king is at last making a symbolic step toward joining the division's all-time greats when he defends his IBF title Saturday night at Madison Square Garden.

The Garden is over a century old and has resided at four locations and heavyweight legends like John L. Sullivan, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Muhammad Ali and Evander Holyfield have graced the Garden ring. The venue, once known as the Mecca of Boxing, earned the moniker because New York was once the center of the boxing world. But the Garden remains an attractive place to fight – at least sentimentally – to all fighters. In all, there have been 28 heavyweight title fights at the Garden, The first occurred in 1916 and the most recent was James Toney's No Contest against John Ruiz in 2005.

Here is a look at some classic heavyweight showdowns at the Garden:

John L. Sullivan KO 3 Charley Mitchell, 5/14/1883: Sullivan is knocked down for the first time but gets up with a vengeance in this non-title bout. Police halt the fight, rescuing Mitchell from a further beating.

James J. Corbett, 2/16/1892: In an exhibition, heavyweight champ Corbett conquers three men in the same night, Bill Spilling, Bob Caffrey and Joe Lannon.

Jess Willard ND-W10 Frank Moran, 3/25/1916: The Garden's first heavyweight title bout.

Jack Dempsey KO 12 Bill Brennan, 12/14/20: A lethargic Dempsey rallies to retain the title in his only Garden appearance as champion.

Joe Louis W 15 Jersey Joe Walcott, 12/5/47: Louis rises from two knockdowns to retain the title via split decision. Convinced he has lost, Louis exits the ring before the decision is announced.

Rocky Marciano KO 6 Carmine Vingo, 12/30/49: It was only Marciano's second Garden appearance. Vingo was down for 2 counts of nine and was finally counted out in the sixth. Marciano has called this the toughest fight of his career.

Rocky Marciano KO 8 Joe Louis, 10/26/51: Marciano is on the way up, Louis on the way down. The heavyweight torch is officially passed. Five fights later Marciano was a champion. Louis would never fight again.

Muhammad Ali W10 Doug Jones, 3/13/63: In one of his first major steps en route to the title, Ali (then still known as Cassius Clay) wins a narrow decision over Jones, a perennial light heavyweight and heavyweight contender. It was named Fight of the Year by Ring magazine.

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Joe Frazier TKO 11 Buster Mathis, 3/4/68: This is the Grand Opening of the current Garden. On the same card, Nino Benvenuti decisions Emile Griffith.

Joe Frazier TKO 7 Jerry Quarry, 6/23/69: A thrilling bout for as long as it lasts. Quarry decides to hook with the best left-hooker in history. It's nonstop until referee Arthur Mercante decides on Quarry's behalf that discretion is the better part of valor. It was named Fight of the Year by Ring magazine.

Joe Frazier W 15 Muhammad Ali, 3/8/71: This matchup of unbeaten legends set the standard for all heavyweight fights. Not before or since has the boxing world witness a fight that exceeded the hype. And the hype was excessive. It was named Fight of the Year by Ring magazine, but it remains "The Fight of the Century."

Muhammad Ali W 15 Earnie Shavers, 9/29/77: Ali's last Garden fight.

Larry Holmes KO 12 Mike Weaver, 6/22/79: Holmes rallies for dramatic kayo. On the undercard, Duran decisions Carlos Palomino.

Mike Tyson W10 Mitch Green, 5/20/86: Tyson never fights at the Garden as champion but appeared there twice and once at the Felt Forum. In this bout, Green becomes only the second man to last the distance with Iron Mike. Although, his prefight bravado is abandoned once the bell rings.

Riddick Bowe KO 1 Michael Dokes, 2/6/93: In a homecoming fight, Bowe gets a gimme defense against faded former champ Dokes.

Evander Holyfield D 12 Lennox Lewis, 3/13/99: Fitting that the last big heavyweight title fight of the century takes place at MSG. Holyfield predicts a third-round knockout but settles for a disputed draw. Most observers felt Lewis earned the decision.