

## Why Frazier Would've Had His Way With Holmes: Part One

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Without question "Smokin" Joe Frazier and the "Easton Assassin" Larry Holmes are two of the all-time top-10 great heavyweight champs in boxing history. Due to their style contrast, Frazier (1968-71) versus Holmes (1979-82) is one of the more fascinating bouts to ponder the outcome of. Frazier was the ultimate "swarmer" and Holmes is no doubt one of the greatest "boxers" the heavyweight division has ever seen. In a head-to-head prime-for-prime confrontation between Joe and Larry it's easy to see how ones' strength is the others' weakness and vice-versa.

In the ring their approach to fighting and boxing couldn't be more opposite. Holmes was a boxer who was at his best fighting outside utilizing the ring, as opposed to Frazier who was an attacking pressure fighter who imposed himself on his opponent with the intent of taking away their space and shrinking the ring. No doubt if Holmes had his choice he'd like the infield of Yankee Stadium roped off as the ring if he were fighting Frazier. Given the same choice, Frazier would've chosen the Dome-Of-Silence that Agent 86 used to confer with the Chief in "Get Smart," for the ring. In 1974 Frazier and Holmes did share the same ring when Holmes worked with Frazier to help him prepare for his rematch with Muhammad Ali.

When debating how a Frazier-Holmes bout would've turned out, most of those whose opinion I value believe Holmes held the stylistic advantage, but this is something I totally disagree with. If you watched Frazier closely and fully understand what he was doing when he fought, there's only one conclusion. No other heavyweight understood how to fight boxers and movers better than Joe did. He didn't allow them to move or use the ring. His style forced the boxer to rush his punches as they tried to fight him off instead of allowing them to box him. Nothing troubles a boxer like unrelenting pressure, and Joe Frazier had no equal when it came to applying it.

### Frazier Would Neutralize Holmes' Strengths

It's a widely known fact that there aren't many heavyweight greats Larry Holmes doesn't match up with from a style vantage point. Having said that the name heading the short list of those who would've been a problem for him stylistically is Joe Frazier. Joe had the perfect style and mind set to be a nightmare for Holmes. Frazier's short stature, standing just over 5'11" would've worked to his advantage just as it did in his three bouts with Muhammad Ali. In 23 title bouts between 1978-86, Holmes fought only one fighter under six feet tall, Ossie Ocasio, who only had 13 fights at the time when they fought.

Joe's style of coming in low would make it harder for Holmes to find him with his jab than most realize. Larry didn't like to punch down, he'd prefer tall fighters like Boncrusher Smith or Gerry Cooney. They provided a big target without much head movement while they pursued him at a pace in which he could pick his spots and score almost at will. Forced to punch down at Frazier would've reduced Holmes accuracy. If his jab wasn't finding the target with its normal regularity, he'd be more measured coming over with the right hand, thus reducing the effectiveness of both punches. Once Holmes sensed Frazier was making him miss with the jab more so than it was just him being a little off with it, he wouldn't throw it with the same impunity. Which would

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translate into less resistance for Frazier to get to where he needs to be fighting Holmes, inside.

Holmes never faced an opponent who was an exceptional body puncher or one that applied constant pressure. Check his record, such a fighter doesn't exist. Gerry Cooney could rip to the body, but he was too big to get under Holmes' jab to get to it. Ken Norton was 34 and on the decline when he fought Holmes, yet still gave him the toughest fight of his career. He's also the only fighter who pressed Holmes with any regularity, but he was 6'3" and leaned back more than he got low. Even a prime Norton didn't bring nearly the same heat as Frazier, nor was he the puncher to the head or body.

Joe Frazier was the best heavyweight I ever saw pressure an opponent while cutting off the ring and staying in front of him as he got closer something that is missed by so many and would play a huge role had they fought. The only fighter Larry met who really attempted to cut off the ring on him was Leon Spinks. If you think Holmes would've beat Frazier, maybe you'd point to his stoppage of Spinks. Even that's a slippery slope because Leon was taking it to Holmes pretty good until he got careless and rushed in recklessly wide open for Holmes right hand.

If there was one thing Frazier could do in his sleep as a fighter it was shut down a boxer. He never led to the head and always started to the body and worked his way up. His right to the chin wasn't anything special, but it was to the body, and Holmes had plenty of body for Frazier to work over. Frazier was a debilitating body puncher and wouldn't need 10 rounds to wear Holmes down. The first time Joe had Larry cornered and unloaded on either side of his body with left and right hooks, it would slowly become a more frequent pattern as the fight progressed. Holmes left jab kept most of his opponents from getting to his body. How good he really took it downstairs is something no one really knows since he never really had to.

Frazier would've pressured Holmes every minute of every round for 15 rounds if necessary. Larry couldn't fight him off too many rounds before he'd need to come up for air. When he stopped to try and catch a breather, Frazier would've had him right where he wanted. For Holmes to keep from having his body beat on by Frazier, he'd have to keep moving. Either way, Frazier's forcing him to expend his strength and stamina would pay dividends for him later in the fight. Eventually, Holmes' guard would start to come down some to protect his body, leaving his chin exposed, paving the way for Frazier to come under and over with his big left hook.

Without the stamina to make Frazier use up half the round to track him down, Holmes would be fighting in spurts. By having to fight Frazier inside, Holmes' jab and right hand would be taken out of commission, leaving him no choice but to trade hooks and uppercuts trying to keep Frazier off, which is Frazier's fight. Although Holmes had a terrific right uppercut, throwing it leaves the right side of his chin open for Frazier's left hook. On top of that, with Joe right on top of him the punch would be smothered to where he'd never get anything on it.

It's no coincidence the closest Muhammad Ali ever came to being stopped in his career were in the 11th and 15th rounds of his first fight with Joe Frazier. In the 11th round Ali was trapped in a corner and forced to trade hooks with Frazier trying to get out. That left him open and Frazier ripped him with a double left hook to the body and followed that up with one to the head, buckling his legs and having him on the verge of going down. In the 15th round with Frazier

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bearing down on him, Ali rushed a lead left hook followed by a right uppercut trying to keep Frazier off him. Throwing the right uppercut left Ali's chin open and Frazier came over the top with a massive left hook that dropped Ali as if his legs were cut out from underneath him.

Had they fought, Frazier would've forced Holmes to throw uppercuts and hooks like he did Ali, leaving him open for the left hook. The only way Holmes could've kept from trading with Frazier inside was to keep him from getting there—something nobody not named Foreman could pull off. Like Ali, Holmes didn't have a big enough punch in his arsenal to do that.

Styles make fights. If there is one fighter with the right style to beat Larry Holmes, it's Joe Frazier. Larry's left jab was one of the most effective punches we've seen in the heavyweight division. But one must understand the style mesh between these two. Frazier would've forced Holmes back faster than he wanted to go back, making him rush his jab and right hand, throwing them more with the intent to keep Joe occupied and off of him instead of to score or do damage. With Holmes being forced to rush his punches, his chances of stopping Frazier are slim. Frazier had a terrific chin. Only George Foreman really hurt him and stopped him. Maybe Holmes shakes him early, but he didn't have the power to stop Frazier. Frazier's body attack would drain Holmes' energy and power, and it wouldn't be something he could shake.

Part Two will look at how Frazier's fights with Ali give an indicator as to how a Frazier-Holmes bout would've unfolded.

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