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It took twenty years before the fistic magnitude of Muhammad Ali's eighth round title winning knockout of George Foreman emerged fully. Historically, culturally, and iconically, the moment referee Zack Clayton reached the ten count of a fight that took place in the dead of night in Zaire, another element of the Ali legend was cemented. But for the picture to be complete, it still had to be evaluated in terms of its boxing value. And in 1974, it wasn't known exactly where Foreman stood on that front. In 1994, when at age 45 he knocked out Michael Moorer to claim both the WBA and IBF heavyweight titles, the enormity of Ali's accomplishment finally came completely to light.

Back in the fall of 1974 reigning heavyweight champion George Foreman 40-0 (37) really believed he couldn't be beat as he readied himself for his October 30th showdown with former champ Muhammad Ali. Foreman won the title from "Smokin" Joe Frazier 29-0 (25) in two rounds roughly twenty-two months after Frazier had defeated Ali in the "Fight Of The Century." Foreman not only defeated Frazier - he put him down six times in just four and a half minutes of fighting. Remember, Ali had to fight Frazier twice before he could claim victory over him. In his second title defense Foreman destroyed the then second ranked contender, Ken Norton, in just two rounds. And as it was the case with Frazier, Ali had to fight Norton twice before he could claim victory over him.

The 25 year-old Foreman who faced Ali in the "Rumble In The Jungle" was a man-child, who due to his overload of natural punching power and physical strength never bothered to learn boxing's basics. George and his head trainer, Dick Saddler, were convinced no fighter — including Muhammad Ali— could stand up to his punch. At that time Foreman coined the names "Deep Sleep" for his left hand and "Instant Death' for his right hand as he was certain Ali would be a sure victim to either punch.

It's been thirty-five years (October 30, 1974) since Ali rumbled in the jungle and by virtue of his eighth round stoppage of Foreman became the second fighter in heavyweight history to lose and regain the title at age 32. And it wasn't until after Ali defeated Foreman that history began to consider him one of the greatest of the greats. As for Foreman, he began to question his punch and stamina, and with the exception of an exhibition where he boxed five different opponents one after the other, he went into seclusion for 15 months.

Foreman finally emerged in January of 1976 with a new trainer, Gil Clancy, and a new style. Under Clancy, Foreman won five straight bouts and then lost a unanimous decision to the then third ranked contender Jimmy Young. George retired in the dressing room immediately after the fight with a career record of 45-2 (42). Ten years later after preaching the Bible and marrying couples at his church in Houston, George Foreman returned to the ring. George wanted to re-write history and change the false perception in some boxing circles that he quit against Ali and lacked the heart of an all-time great heavyweight champ. Not to mention he was nearly broke.

At first Foreman was mocked and his comeback was considered nothing more than a pipe-dream. That all changed on the night of January 15th 1990, when Foreman destroyed 6'6," hard-punching Gerry Cooney in two rounds. A little over a year later Foreman challenged undisputed and undefeated heavyweight champ Evander Holyfield. Holyfield was making his first defense of the title since stopping former champ Buster Douglas in the third round to win it six months earlier, and was a huge favorite to retain it versus Foreman. And to the surprise of many Foreman shook Evander a few times early in their bout and was competitive for most of it. The fight went the distance and Holyfield won a non-controversial 12-round unanimous decision to retain the title.

Three years later Foreman the HBO commentator talked his way into another title fight when he admonished Michael Moorer's performance during his title winning effort against Evander Holyfield in April of 1994. Foreman remarked during the fight that there was something physically wrong with Evander Holyfield, yet Moorer still had his hands full and fought as if becoming heavyweight champion of the world didn't mean much to him. Afterward Moorer took exception to Foreman's words and said he was nothing but a big fake and a phony. A war of words through the media escalated between Moorer and Foreman, resulting in Moorer agreeing to make his first title defense against the 45-year old Foreman.

On November 5th 1994, after losing every round, Foreman knocked Moorer out at 2:03 of the tenth round to win the WBA and IBF heavyweight titles. Exactly twenty years and six days after losing his title and cloak of invincibility to Muhammad Ali in Kinshasa, Zaire, he got it back.

During Foreman's second career 1987-97, he was never knocked off his feet, compiled a record of 31-3 and became the oldest man to ever win the heavyweight title at 45, just two months shy of turning 46. George proved beyond all doubt during his comeback that he certainly didn't lack heart and was as physically and mentally tough as any heavyweight in history.

Looking back over the last 35 years, Ali's upset victory over George Foreman seems like an even greater feat for the then 32-year old ex-champ now than it did then. Ali didn't just out-box Foreman early that morning in Zaire, he out-toughed him and as a result of that it took Foreman years to recover mentally.

For Muhammad Ali it took him beating George Foreman to receive the well deserved accolades he now gets for being the great fighter he's viewed as being through the prism of history. And for George Foreman, losing to Muhammad Ali provided him the want and desire to come back and make history twenty years later and prove he too is among the greatest of the great all-time heavyweight champs.

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