

## 40 Years Ago: The Fight Frazier Had To Win To Make The Ali Fight Relevant

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 14 February 2010 18:00

---

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA. - Floyd Mayweather has done the math, give or take a tablespoon or two, and that has left him even more baffled than he was before at the demise of his much-anticipated fight with Manny Pacquiao.

In the end that fight didn't happen because, well...who knows, but it sure wasn't the math.

"You got 380 tablespoons of blood in your body," Mayweather said recently. "When they draw blood they draw out one tablespoon. You still got 379 tablespoons left. You lose more than a tablespoon of blood in a fight. You lose more than that from your nose and mouth. I'm not talking about me! I'm talking about them other guys (who get hit more in a fight than Mayweather has been in his 40-fight career).

"I never knew a fighter didn't want to take a \$25 million drug test. If I was all about the money (with a guy who calls himself "Money") like people say I would have taken the (Manny) Pacquiao fight. I just feel we should clean up sports, period. Records are being broken by cheaters.

"This should happen in all sports to separate the good athletes from the great athletes. In boxing if you start good you usually are all the way good or you start to go down with age. You don't start off average in this sport and at 25 suddenly become great. You don't get knocked out at 106 pounds and then come knock out bigger guys. Boxing's not like that.

"I know I'm a clean athlete. They can come whenever and take blood or urine. Any other athlete who's clean should do the same. If you're not on nothing, what's the problem? A tablespoon of blood?"

We may never know the real problem that caused Pacquiao to refuse a guaranteed \$25 million to fight Mayweather and then settle for far less to face Joshua Clottey March 13 in a fight, frankly, that pales in comparison not only to Mayweather-Pacquiao but also to what Mayweather ended up with, which is a long-awaited showdown with 38-year-old welterweight champion Shane Mosley.

That fight came about because Mosley immediately agreed to the random blood testing Mayweather demanded, insisting he welcomed the chance to prove he is not using performance enhancing drugs as he did prior to his rematch with Oscar De La Hoya. Mosley has long insisted he did not know what he was using under the direction of since deposed strength and conditioning coach Darryl Hudson and one can debate that all day and never know the answer, but one thing is clear.

Both fighters will be clean on May 1 and boxing will be the better for it because unlike baseball, track and field, football and a growing list of other sports, two of prize fighting's biggest names have decided they won't wait for the men who run their sport to take a step. They'll do it

## 40 Years Ago: The Fight Frazier Had To Win To Make The Ali Fight Relevant

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 14 February 2010 18:00

---

themselves.

When Muhammad Ali was stripped of his heavyweight title in April of 1967 for refusal to be inducted into the United States army, there was a scramble to find his successor. The WBA held an eight man elimination tournament to determine its champion to fill the void vacated by Ali's absence.

However, not all of the top heavyweights were invited to participate in the tournament, such as former champ Sonny Liston, George Chuvalo and the then undefeated Buster Mathis. Joe Frazier who was Ring Magazine's top contender pulled out and instead fought Mathis who defeated him twice at the 1964 Olympic trials three and a half years earlier. Joe's manager and trainer, Yancey Durham, said Joe didn't have to fight in any tournament to determine Clay's successor (Durham always referred to Muhammad Ali as Cassius Clay), he'll just beat the winner. When Frazier declined the invitation to fight in the WBA's tournament, they turned to another Philadelphia heavyweight, Leotis Martin, who actually launched his own personal campaign trying to gain a fight with Frazier a few years later.

When the tournament was over Jimmy Ellis, who was at one time a stablemate and sparring partner of Ali's, was the winner. Ellis posted a ninth round stoppage over Leotis Martin, won a 12-round unanimous decision over Oscar Bonavena (dropping him twice) and then won a 15-round majority decision over Jerry Quarry in the final to win the tournament and capture the WBA heavyweight title.

A little over a month before Ellis beat Quarry, Frazier knocked out Buster Mathis in the eleventh round to win the New York State Athletic Commission's version of the title in the first main event held at the new Madison Square Garden. Via his victory over Mathis, Frazier also gained recognition as champ by the WBC along with Pennsylvania, Maine, Illinois, Texas and Massachusetts.

After Frazier disposed Mathis, he defeated Manuel Ramos, Oscar Bonavena, Dave Zyglewicz and Jerry Quarry in his attempt to clean out the division. Ellis, on the other hand, only fought once and beat former champ Floyd Patterson via a 15-round decision in Sweden. After fighting Patterson, Ellis suffered a string of injuries that kept him inactive during all of 1969.

By mid 1969 there was some bad blood between Frazier and Ellis, who were clearly the two top active heavyweights in the world. In fact Ellis jumped into the ring and admonished Frazier after Joe stopped Quarry to retain his NYSAC title. At the time Jimmy and Joe had two common opponents that the boxing media used to compare and contrast them, Oscar Bonavena and Jerry Quarry. Ellis had his way with Bonavena more than Joe did, but Frazier was better against Quarry.

When asked after fighting Frazier who would win between the two, Quarry said, "I don't know, that'll be a good one." A week before Frazier and Ellis met, Muhammad Ali was convinced he'd never be allowed to fight again and said he'd give his championship belt to the winner and recognize him as champ, just as Ring Magazine announced they would do.

## 40 Years Ago: The Fight Frazier Had To Win To Make The Ali Fight Relevant

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 14 February 2010 18:00

---

Leading up to the Frazier-Ellis fight, Angelo Dundee who trained Ellis and Ali, repeatedly said Ellis had the perfect style to whip Frazier and there was no way Jimmy would get trapped on the ropes by Joe the way Quarry had been. To which Frazier's trainer Yank Durham responded saying, Quarry didn't have a choice as to being trapped on the ropes or in the corner and neither would Ellis. Durham continued saying maybe Ellis can hold Frazier off for a few rounds, but eventually Frazier's constant pressure will break Ellis's will and wear him down.

On Monday night February 16th 1970, Ellis and Frazier met at Madison Square Garden in New York City to decide who was Muhammad Ali's rightful successor as the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. Frazier was the Las Vegas betting favorite, but due to Dundee's words and interviews, Ellis was picked to win by a majority of press row when they were polled the night of the fight.

Ellis came out at the bell for the first round and carried out Dundee's fight plan to the letter. Jimmy fired one-tuos at Frazier on the way in and kept his feet moving. For the first round Ellis had success turning the slow-starting Frazier in the corners. In round two Ellis carried out the same strategy, but he wasn't hurting Frazier who was starting to get closer. Early in round three Ellis was forced to retreat because Joe was beginning to smoke and get to his body. With a minute left in the round Frazier caught Ellis pulling out with a sweeping left-hook to the jaw that had him stumbling around the ring with Frazier in pursuit, but Ellis held on and survived the round.

However, Ellis had a big problem on his hands because Frazier returned to his corner with a huge grin and smile on his face indicating that he knew that having slowed Ellis in the last round, it would only get worse for Jimmy in the next round. Ellis came out and tried to feign that he wasn't hurt and could fight Joe straight up, which Frazier was more than happy to oblige. But Ellis couldn't hold him off and was trapped in his own corner with Frazier smashing him to the head and body with lefts and rights. Finally, Frazier caught Ellis with a short left-hook on to the chin and Ellis slowly sank to the canvas.

Ellis beat the count and was immediately met at ring center by Frazier who sensed the kill. During their first exchange after Ellis got up, Frazier landed a brutal left hook to Ellis's body and followed that up with another one with all his weight and force to the chin. Ellis crashed to the canvas and looked to be finished. But Jimmy who couldn't be saved by the bell ending round four, summoned great reserve to beat the ten count. Ellis stumbled and missed the top rope on the ring apron to balance himself as he was about to sit on his stool in his corner.

Smartly realizing that one minute in between rounds wasn't enough time to revive Ellis, Dundee stopped the fight, enabling Joe Frazier become the undisputed heavyweight champion - sort of.

There was this guy out there who went by the name of Muhammad Ali who was granted a boxing license by the state of Georgia seven months later. From that moment on, Ali served notice to the boxing world that Frazier wasn't the real champ until he beat him, and the WBA eliminations were merely imitations. Nine months later Frazier smoked light heavyweight champ Bob Foster in two rounds in just four minutes of fighting paving the way for the "Fight Of The Century."

## 40 Years Ago: The Fight Frazier Had To Win To Make The Ali Fight Relevant

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 14 February 2010 18:00

---

However, Frazier had to beat Jimmy Ellis in order to make the upcoming fight with Ali as historically significant as it was. As all informed boxing observers know, Frazier vs. Ali I is without question the most anticipated fight in boxing history.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at [GlovedFist@Gmail.com](mailto:GlovedFist@Gmail.com)