

## If Only We Had The Privilege Of Facing Ali II

Written by Frank Lotierzo  
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Having finally caught the documentary "Facing Ali" for the first time this week, I have to admit that it was much better and far more enlightening than I could've ever hoped for it to be. The film visits with ten former foes of Muhammad Ali: Sir Henry Cooper, George Chuvalo, Ernie Terrell, Joe Frazier, Ken Norton, George Foreman, Ron Lyle, Earnie Shavers, Larry Holmes and Leon Spinks and how facing Ali affected their lives and careers.

A lot of times some fighters come off bitter during these type interviews and settings. They often use the forum more to talk about themselves and state how they really were greater than they were and that they were the rightful winner more so than their opponent who'd actually won the fight between them. Not so in "Facing Ali." All ten of the fighters were genuine and provided terrific insight.

Personally, I found Cooper, Chuvalo, Terrell, Norton, Lyle and Shavers to be most compelling. Then again maybe it's more so because the words of Frazier, Foreman, Spinks and Holmes have been repeated often in most every documentary or film pertaining to Muhammad Ali over the years since he last fought in December of 1981? Regardless, all ten had substantive things in which they added to the film and make it a must see for all fight fans.

Sadly, there can never be "Facing Ali II" where the thoughts and insights of Archie Moore, Sonny Liston, Floyd Patterson, Zora Folley, Jerry Quarry, Oscar Bonavena and Jimmy Young could be heard because they are no longer with us.

Archie Moore was Clay's first trainer as a pro and was never at a loss for words, not to mention that he fought the 20 year-old Clay on his way up. Archie was from the old school and the young Clay hated his discipline and strict regimen. And Moore was also a master at head-games and gamesmanship. How about how he used to send Ali poems and letters while they were both stuck in Zaire and couldn't leave until after Ali fought Foreman? In his letters he'd explain how George was going to punish him and make him pay for all the fundamentals and basics he never thought he'd need to learn as a professional.

How great would it be if we could hear Sonny Liston speak about Ali more than 40 years after their first fight? I know for a fact that Sonny thought Clay was a better puncher than he was given credit for being, or should I say those were his words to his trainer Willie Reddish. I wonder if Sonny would've admitted that he at least threw the rematch between he and Ali? Reddish, when he trained former middleweight contender Curtis Parker said in the gym that had Sonny lived to have been around for the first Frazier vs. Ali bout, he would've lost his last dollar betting on Ali. Willie gave the impression that Sonny didn't think a whole lot of Frazier and that he thought Ali could've done whatever he wanted to with him.

Ironically, Floyd Patterson didn't think Ali was much of a puncher but marveled at how he could fight and be so effective moving backwards. And Floyd was honest in regards to how fast Ali's hands were. Zora Folley would've been interesting to have heard from being he wasn't much of

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a talker and there was no animosity between he and Ali. In fact Ali spoke highly of Folley and gave him a title shot more so on what Zora accomplished in the late fifties and early sixties more so than his ranking when they actually fought in 1967. Ali said it was never his intent to hurt or embarrass Folley in front of his family during their fight.

Many historians believe Cleveland "The Big Cat" Williams, who Ali often referred to as the "Pussycat," may have indeed fought Ali on his greatest night. Not much is known about Cleveland's exact sentiments about Ali. However, he did have a sparring partner who supposedly did a pretty good Ali imitation, and it was reported before their fight that Cleveland couldn't get to him that much in the gym.

Before the fight Williams said, "If he runs, it's going to be a long one. If he fights, then I'm going to knock him out."

After the fight despite many of his fans being upset, Williams reportedly recovered quickly. In his dressing room he stated, "when he hit me with that right in the first round, I just didn't remember a thing." Then he thought about it some more and concluded: "Ah, he just shook me up a little. He caught me before I could get started. I surprised myself. I dropped my left hand when I shouldn't have."

Jerry Quarry never minced words. Jerry also spoke openly about how much he thought of Ali as a fighter. I wonder if Quarry would've relayed the story he passed on to the late Tom Brookshier when they were announcing fights together on CBS Sports? I was told by Brookshier that Quarry told him that Jerry's father walked into the gym and made him strip down and weigh himself four days before his 1972 Vegas rematch with Ali. Jerry told Tom that when the scale registered 205 pounds, his father exploded saying if you're not under 200 when you fight Ali, he's going to kick your ass. Jerry told Tom he started inhaling Ex-Lax and stopped drinking water so he could get under 200 pounds.

Quarry came in at 198 and never looked worse...and announced his retirement shortly afterwards, then came back in 1973. Jerry attributed part of his bad showing against Ali in their rematch due to him being drained and having watched his brother Mike get knocked out in brutal fashion by Bob Foster right before he went out to fight Ali. But he never said that's why he lost to Ali that night. According to Brookshier, Jerry told him that a few days after he lost to Ali, he found a betting stub in his father's jacket pocket indicating that his pop bet \$90,000 on Ali to win the fight. That's the story exactly as it was relayed to me by Mr. Brookshier in 1988. Anyone who knows anything at all about Tom Brookshier knows he's not the type of man to make something like that up. Tom told me he loved Jerry Quarry and said he was one of the most brutally honest men he'd ever met in his life.

Before Ali met Ken Norton in their third fight in 1976 at Yankee Stadium, Quarry did the delayed broadcast for CBS Sports with Tom Brookshier. Jerry and Muhammad became friendly in the years that followed after their 1972 rematch. Quarry went into Ali's dressing room and interviewed him before he entered the ring for the fight. Muhammad knew Quarry liked to imitate his voice inflection, so before the interview Ali suggested that he would be Jerry Quarry the interviewer, and that he'll interview Quarry who will answer the questions as he thought Ali

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would, to which Quarry agreed.

After a minute of going back and forth, Ali assuming the role as Quarry doing the interview said to Jerry who was assuming him, Muhammad, Ken Norton is a positive thinker, you must be afraid of him since you appear to have turned white. Quarry, in the role of Ali, broke up and couldn't keep a straight face and the two started laughing as Ali started with the mock anger face biting his lower lip and throwing harmless punches at Jerry. Boxing fans are deprived not being able to hear Quarry's insight on Muhammad Ali and for that manner Joe Frazier too due to his passing in 1999.

Incidentally, Quarry was the most recent opponent of Ali and Frazier before their first fight. Jerry fought Joe in June of 1969 and Muhammad in October of 1970. He was asked repeatedly before the 1971 fight between Frazier and Ali who would win. Quarry never wavered once and said Frazier was too tough and there was no way Ali could beat Joe. In fact Jerry said Frazier would knock Ali out. He may have been wrong about the stoppage, but he had the winner right, at least for their first meeting.

As for Oscar Bonavena, what a character he was. Oscar boldly predicted after having spent 25 rounds in the ring with Joe Frazier and 15 with Ali, that Muhammad would have his way with Joe before their first fight and considered him the much greater fighter. Oh how wrong Ringo was, at least on the night of March 8th 1971.

As for Jimmy Young, he told me often times that Ali was very cunning and physically harder to move around than Foreman, Lyle and Norton were during their fights with him. Jimmy also conveyed through conversations at Frazier's gym that Ali possessed an unconquerable will.

Unfortunately we'll never get to hear from the above mentioned fighters in totality like we did the fighters who were interviewed and spoke freely and openly in "Facing Ali."

However, seeing and hearing from Henry Cooper, George Chuvalo, Ernie Terrell, Joe Frazier, Ken Norton, George Foreman, Ron Lyle, Earnie Shavers, Leon Spinks and Larry Holmes turned out better than I anticipated. All ten had substantive things to say and left you wanting for more.

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