In December of 1969 Charles "Sonny" Liston, the former heavyweight champion of the world, was in the midst of a remarkable comeback. Following his disastrous kayo losses to Cassius Clay (aka Muhammad Ali), Sonny was written off by the experts. While Ali dominated the heavyweight scene, Sonny took some time off. When Sonny did embark on a comeback he went to Europe and reeled off a series of wins against some non threatening pugilists. He returned to the U.S. with little fanfare and continued his low-key comeback with victories over the likes of Roger Rischter, Amos Lincoln, Billy Joiner, etc.

While Sonny's comeback moved at a snail's pace, the heavyweight picture was changing dramatically. When Ali refused induction into the Armed Forces he was stripped of his title and forced into idleness. It seemed likely that Ali would never box again. A series of elimination bouts produced two championship claimants, Jimmy Ellis and Joe Frazier. With Ali out of the way, Sonny felt confident that he could take either Ellis or Frazier. It was now time for Sonny to make his move.

Sonny's first serious test on his comeback campaign would come against young Henry Clark. At first some experts thought Sonny made a mistake in choosing Clark. In his previous comeback bouts, Sonny still seemed to carry his vaunted power, but he also looked slow and ponderous. Clark was not a big puncher, but he was a boxer and a mover in the Ali style, a style that had proven in the past to trouble Sonny. The actual fight was comparable to a man against a boy. Only Clark's gameness made it competitive. The referee finally raised Sonny's hand in round seven. Liston was now right back in the thick of the heavyweight picture. Sonny said he wanted to fight Jerry Quarry and then either Ellis or Frazier.

The next step for Sonny would be against veteran contender Leotis Martin. Martin had lost to Ellis in the first round of the WBA elimination tournament. Martin also lost to Henry Clark. He seemed like a "safe" opponent. A victory for Sonny might get him a shot at the winner of the Ellis Frazier unification bout that was scheduled for February of 1970.

The bout started slowly with Liston forcing the action behind his long punishing left jab. At times Martin was able to jab with him, but Sonny was in control. In round four, Sonny finally connected with a long sweeping left hook that floored Martin. Leotis survived the round and actually began picking up the pace in round five. After six rounds Sonny was well out in front, but Martin was very much alive and there were six rounds to go. In the seventh Sonny seemed to age in front of everyone's eyes. Martin was beginning to out-jab Sonny, while also landing effective counter shots. In the eighth round Liston became unglued. Martin bloodied and cut Liston's nose and the blood poured into Sonny's mouth impairing his breathing. In round nine Liston seemed to just be trying to box his way to the final bell in hopes that his early lead would get him the decision. Martin had other plans. Leotis was now punishing Liston with wicked jabs to his gory face.

Sonny's jab was more of a flicking jab. As Liston pawed out with a series of jabs, Martin timed

the last one perfectly and came over the top with a crunching overhand right. The punch literally froze Sonny in his tracks. Leotis immediately connected with a powerful left hook to the chin and another right as Sonny fell face first to the canvas. He was OUT COLD! In a matter of seconds the aura and myth of Sonny Liston was shattered.

The announcer Howard Cosell called it a "crushing and compelling knockout."