

Muhammad Ali IS Boxing

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Tuesday, 09 July 2013 19:23



Muhammad Ali, aka "The Greatest," was born Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. on January 17, 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky.

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Introduced to the sweet science at age 12, Clay established himself a top amateur by winning six Kentucky Golden Gloves titles, two national Golden Gloves titles, an AAU National Title, and a gold medal in the 1960 Summer Olympics.

Clay made his professional debut the very same year, and was named number one contender to Sonny Liston just four years later. Despite being a heavy underdog, Clay's celebrated wit and witticism was on full display before the 1964 title fight. The audacious young challenger taunted Liston by calling him "the big ugly bear." He told anyone and everyone who would listen to him that he would "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee" in the bout, and that he did. After dominating the fight with his tremendous footwork and blindingly fast hands, Clay was declared winner of the contest when Liston refused to answer the bell for the seventh round. After the fight, Clay famously exclaimed "I must be the Greatest!"

He may have been right.

The two met in a rematch a year later. By then, Clay's conversion to Islam had led him to change his name to the now famous moniker, which became the most popular in the history of the sport, Muhammad Ali. Ali quickly dispatched of Liston in just one round. The picture of Ali standing over the defeated Liston has become one of the sports world's most iconic images.

"Get up!" Ali screamed at Liston. He didn't.

From there, the always-brimming-with-confidence Ali went on to amass perhaps the greatest career in the history of the division. Ali's first title run, which included wins over Floyd Patterson, George Chuvalo, Henry Cooper and Ernie Terrell, lasted until 1967, when Ali's title was stripped after he refused to be drafted into Army service because of his religious beliefs. His boxing license was suspended, and he was sentenced to five years in prison for evasion. In appealing the decision, Ali was thrust into becoming a civil rights activist. Ultimately, the Supreme Court would overturn his conviction and his life inside the ring would return.

By 1970, though, there lay a new claimant to the heavyweight throne, Joe Frazier. The two would become chief rivals. After two tune-up wins against Jerry Quarry and Oscar Bonavena in 1970, Ali was unable to reclaim his heavyweight title from Frazier when the two met in 1971, losing a 15-round unanimous decision.

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Ali went 13-1 until he got his next title shot in 1974, amassing wins over Floyd Patterson (again), Jimmy Ellis, Bob Foster and a revenge match against Joe Frazier, who had since lost the title to a young and menacing George Foreman. Ali's only loss during this time period came against Ken Norton in 1973. The two fought back-to-back bouts that year, winning one each by split decision. Ali would later take the rubber match in 1976 by unanimous decision.

If one had to pinpoint the most defining moment of Ali's impressive ring career, it might have been his knockout of George Foreman in 1974. Ali was the heavy underdog to the 40-0 Foreman, who had blasted out Ali rivals Norton and Frazier within just two rounds each. Ali defeated Foreman in Zaire, Africa by knockout in round number eight, employing what became famously known as Ali's "rope a dope" strategy of luring Foreman in close while having his back up against the ropes. This caused the younger, stronger Foreman to tire himself out by throwing punch after punch.

Ali held the heavyweight crown for four more years. He again defeated Joe Frazier when the latter's corner stopped the fight before the final round in what is widely considered the greatest heavyweight fight of all-time. He also defeated notables Ron Lyle, Jimmy Young and Earnie Shavers before ultimately losing a split decision to Leon Spinks in 1978. Ali avenged the loss a year later by split decision before being outclassed by former sparring partner Larry Holmes in 1980. Ali was 38 years old at the time and was starting to display visual signs of the Parkinson's syndrome that ails him to this day.

Ali's last fight was a ten-round decision loss to Trevor Berbick in 1981. His final ring record stands at 56-5 (37 KOs). Most boxing historians consider him one of the top heavyweight champions ever, most often being placed in either the first or second position. Ring Magazine ranked him number one among all-time heavyweight champions in 1998, while the International Boxing Research Organization ranked him second under the same criteria in 2006.

While the weight of criteria may be debatable, less so is the stature of his resume in the sports' grandest division. There is simply no heavyweight champion in history that defeated as many top contenders and fellow all-time greats as Ali. In that respect, he truly was "The Greatest."

More importantly, though, Muhammad Ali had without a doubt "The Greatest" cultural impact of any boxer in the history of our sport. He is boxing's Babe Ruth, Michael Jordan and Jim Brown,

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yet he somehow eclipses them all, in that his reach has stretched beyond the barriers of mere sport or marketing. He is something more akin, really, to Elvis or The Beatles, in that the music he made with his life, both inside the ring and out, will live on for as long as our historians choose to remember things.

I was not alive when Muhammad Ali was at his best inside the ring. I grew up watching Evander Holyfield, Mike Tyson and Lennox Lewis. By the time those men ruled the heavyweight division, Ali was long retired.

Like many, though, I do know Muhammad Ali in my own way. I know him from what my dad told me about him since when he first started teaching me about boxing. I know him from the hours and hours of tapes I've seen of his fights, or the days spent reading biographies and poems about his life. I know him from the stories told to me by other fighters or younger fight fans or just strangers on the street. I know him because, for many, Muhammad Ali isn't just a part of boxing, he is boxing.

Maybe that's why he's "The Greatest."

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

Nice copy! You floated like a butterfly and strung like a bee. You reminded me of a writing GOAT Ali! Sweet science key boarding tapping at it best. Holla!

Bernie Campbell says:

Lets face it Liston threw the fight! Ali fed off of Roone Arledge and Howard Cosell's propaganda! He got some gifts in fights because who he was! Norton won all 3 of those fights! There was a thief in the house with the Jimmy Young fight! Ali was not a peoples champ! He appealed to a select audience! Not like Dempsey, not like Louis! His politics were absurd dictated by the tutelage of that Wacko Elija Mohammed! Ali didn't like to mix it up! He wouldn't challenge his or an opponents power! Through the media and the power of television, he had everybody psyched out! George Foreman read the papers too much! If he could do it again in another time and another place, Clay would have hit the canvas early! I bet the United States Chapter of the VFW would concur on my views

tlig says:

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Foreman would have won a rematch. Probably why they never fought a second time.

Grimm says:

I was seven years old when Ali took Foreman out, and I got hooked on both boxing and The Greatest.

I was about 17-18 when my lifestyle was going the wrong way, fast. After hospitalization due to alcohol overdose, I returned home. Next to my bed lay the book "The Greatest". I had just read it, and it had made an impact - to the point where I started thinking that my way of life was no way to reach the highest personal heights. Then and there I stopped drinking, doubled my training effort, and a year later I sparred 16 rounds with two guys that alternated rounds.

At 33, I met Ali at a club around Piccadilly Circus, London. He was there to promote EA Sports Knockout Kings. Nigel Benn, Fraudley, Lennox Lewis et al was also there, but - when Ali, a shell of his former self, entered the room it was like electricity in the air. Suddenly a chant started, and soon everybody was chanting "Ali! Ali! Ali!" It was awesome, and I could only imagine how it would have been to experience the man in person during the glory days. Finally, I found myself in a sofa next the The Greatest. He had a hard time keeping awake, and I had to stop myself from simply give him a hug, like a beloved grandpa.

As stated in the article, Ali was - and is - on a completely different level than any other athlete, let alone any other boxer. He transcended the sport. And I believe he managed that not because of his skills - even though they were as immense as important - but because of the price he had to pay. Integrity. Principles. Honour. He had the virtues that counts in the hearts of people, no matter the darker sides of his persona.

brownsugar says:

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An Awesome post... for the most Awesome Athlete.
You've done it again Grim.

Carmine Cas says:

Great article Kelsey

kidcanvas says:

I count myself blessed to have lived as a kid then a young man through it all. the anticipation of an Ali fight after it was announced was torture but so freaking exciting ,better yet the lead up to it when he was just hilarious... bless him ..

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;33386]An Awesome post... for the most Awesome Athlete.
You've done it again Grim.[/QUOTE]

Brown is correct. I'll have my thoughts up on the great man later this evening.

@Grimm. You need to go back to that iconic picture you had up originally. I LOVE that photo. They say a picture says a thousand words? That picture says ten thousand words. Trust me, that's an all-time great photo.

SouthPaul says:

I'll have to join in on the Grimm accolades ... Love them kinda' stories. Well done, sir...