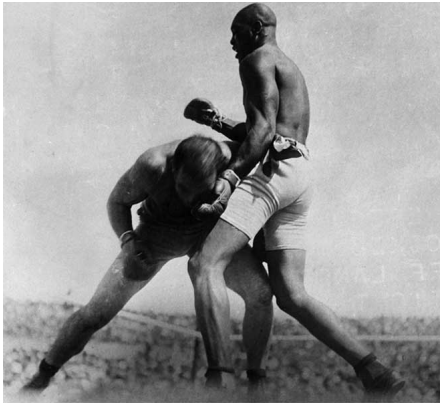


The Super Fights Of The Last 40 Years: Part One

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 28 April 2014 09:55



What constitutes a Super Fight?

Basically, it needs two factors that must accompany it: 1) it has to capture the interest of non-boxing fans and, 2) it has to be between two outstanding/great fighters who are at or near their prime and look unbeatable.

Even more than that it must have the "It" factor. Everyone knows what the "It" factor is and it doesn't have to be explained.

During the gloved era there were probably four Super Fights that had the "It" factor prior to the first Frazier-Ali bout in 1971. Below is a brief capsule of those:

The **first Super Fight** was between **Jack Johnson**, the first black heavyweight champion, and former champ **James Jeffries**, who was coming out of a six year retirement with the sole purpose of dethroning Johnson because he was black. Jeffries was undefeated when he retired and was thought to be the best athlete in the world. When Jeffries accepted the terms of the fight, he said he was responding to "that portion of the white race that's been looking to me to defend its athletic superiority." In a fight that the world was watching, Johnson took Jeffries apart and knocked him out in the 15th round on July 4, 1910.

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The **second Super Fight** was on July 2, 1921, and saw the largest audience in history with an estimated 300,000 to have heard one of the first radio broadcasts of a special event. The heavyweight championship bout between American champion **Jack Dempsey** and French challenger light heavyweight champ, **Georges Carpentier**, was comprehensively covered by the media. The hero in the fight was Carpentier because he was a distinguished pilot in World War I, whereas Dempsey was the Villain because he had been thought of as a slacker for avoiding the military draft even though he was never convicted of the charge. Dempsey-Carpentier was the first million dollar gate in boxing history and was also seen by over 90,000 people live. Carpentier reportedly shook Dempsey in the second round but was eventually overcome by Dempsey's strength and tenacity and was knocked out in the fourth round.

The **third Super Fight** was the rematch between heavyweight champ **Gene Tunney** and former champ **Jack Dempsey** on September 22, 1927. A year earlier Tunney out sped and out-boxed Dempsey over 10 rounds to take the title. The rematch was seen by over 100,000 people live. For seven rounds Tunney was handling Dempsey again, but Jack finally caught up with him and dropped Gene in the seventh round. Referee Dave Barry led Dempsey to a neutral corner and picked up the count. Tunney sprang up at nine, but 14 seconds had elapsed. So the question became, could Tunney have beaten the original nine count? Gene dropped Jack in the eighth round and went on to retain his title via unanimous decision. The fight is known for "the long count" and even today almost 90 years later it's debated about whether or not Tunney could've risen before the count of 10.

The **fourth Super Fight** occurred on June 22, 1938 when heavyweight champion **Joe Louis**, who had been stopped in his previous fight with German champ **Max Schmeling** in a non-title bout two years earlier, knocked Max out in the first round. Louis' sensational knockout of Schmeling was sweet revenge after suffering the first loss of his career to Max, and it prevented Schmeling from taking the heavyweight title back to Germany, something that Adolph Hitler desperately wanted to use for Nazi propaganda and proof of Nazi superiority.

The list below is compiled of fights that had the eyes of the world on them because of one or both fighters' personalities along with the dynamic matchup between them. They were bouts that the general public longed to see and in some cases were years in the making. Also, mostly everyone had an opinion on them as to who would win and was very aware of the circumstance surrounding them. They captured the imagination of more than just boxing fans and definitely

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had the "It" factor accompanying them. These are fights that, if you were to ask ten people on the street who'd win them, the opinions would be split in most cases. And all ten people on the street would know both the fighters you were talking about. In the case Of **Ali-Holmes** and **Tyson-Lewis**

, both Muhammad and Mike were washed up at the time. But Holmes and Lewis needed to beat them to be recognized as the establishment champ and the people's champ. The fights became big because of the stardom that both Ali and Tyson enjoyed at the time.

Below is my first-hand account of the true Super Fights of the last 40 plus years. I briefly touch on the fight and match up, my pre-fight thoughts, the odds and the result.....Yes, all the fighters below participated in other big fights that were either on closed circuit TV or PPV, but they weren't really much of a thought to non-boxing fans. There's been plenty of fights that became classics or historically significant after the bout, but they don't count on this list.

Joe Frazier vs. Muhammad Ali (March 8, 1971): This is the gold standard to which all Super Fights are measured. If you weren't alive for Frazier-Ali I, (yes, it was billed Frazier vs. Ali because Joe was the recognized champ) you have no concept of just how big it really was. Both fighters had a legitimate claim to the title and were undefeated. Ali, 29, never lost it in the ring and Frazier, 27, beat every note-worthy heavyweight in the world except Ali. There hasn't been anything like it or close to it since and there's no fight on the horizon that could be made to even come close to the build up and ballyhoo that surrounded it. It was one of the rare Super Fights in which the realization exceeded the expectation. It was rightly named the "

Fight Of The Century

" when it was announced on December 30, 1970. Frazier 26-0 (23) and Ali 31-0 (25) were polar opposites in and out of the ring and on the eve of March 8th it was impossible to envision either one of them losing. Yet you knew on March 9th one of them would be a defeated fighter. The styles of Frazier and Ali couldn't have been more different and one's strength was the others' weakness and vice-versa. Frazier was a great catch n' kill swarmer who applied unrelenting pressure - Ali was a beautiful boxer who utilized the whole ring and possessed the fastest hands and feet in heavyweight history. It'll take you a long time to think of another fight that featured two such highly skilled great fighters who were at or near their prime like it was the case with Frazier and Ali in March of 1971. It's not the slightest bit of a reach to proclaim that Frazier-Ali I was the most anticipated sporting event of all time. Both Frazier and Ali were guaranteed a record purse of 2.5 million dollars apiece.

ODDS: On the day of the fight Frazier was a 6-5 favorite.

Pre-fight Thoughts: I thought Ali took Frazier too lightly going into their first fight and favored

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Frazier to win. It was obvious in all of his interviews that Ali didn't understand Frazier's style and had no idea that Joe could execute it so well that it would make his time in the ring with him almost a living hell. It was also easy to glean that Frazier prepared for the bout as if his life depended on winning it - compared to Ali viewing it as a big party, reasoning that Frazier was just another tool he would use to cap off his return to the top of the boxing world. When I read in the Philadelphia Daily News a week before the fight that Ali's wife, Belinda, told Muhammad's trainer **Angelo Dundee** that she didn't want to go to the fight because Muhammad was going to lose because he underestimated how great Frazier was convinced me that I was right and Frazier was going to win.

Result: Ali got off to a quick start and looked to get Joe out of there in the first five rounds, but he lacked the tools needed for the execution. In addition to that Frazier was forcing the tempo of the fight and forcing Ali to fight him off on the inside with his bell-to-bell effective pressure. After 10 rounds it was a toss up and not yet decided. Then Frazier's pressure and body punching started to pay big dividends as Ali only won one round, the 14th, of the last five. In the 11th round Frazier had Ali out on his feet and falling all over the place like a drunken sailor, but he couldn't finish him. Frazier landed the signature punch of the bout when he dropped Ali 24 seconds into the 15th round with one of the hardest and most viscous left-hooks thrown by a heavyweight. Ali was up at the count of four but if there was any doubt as to who was the better fighter that night, it was wiped away with Joe's hook. Frazier fought the fight of his life and won it conclusively via a 15 round unanimous decision (8-6-1, 9-6 and 11-4) to retain the undisputed heavyweight title. The AP scored the fight 9-5-1 Frazier but the UPI had it a draw 7-7-1. Ali was also great on this night and fought one of the best fights of his career even though he lost. But on this night Joe Frazier refused to be denied and could've defeated or lived with almost any heavyweight in history.....At the post fight press conference, which Ali did not attend, Joe got off the best line of the night. When asked if he was surprised when Ali went down in the 15th round, he retorted "I was surprised when he got up."

Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier II (January 28, 1974) Heading into this fight Ali and Frazier had unfinished business between them. Yes, Frazier won their first fight but Ali with his overwhelming bravado and personality convinced many that Joe wasn't really the winner nor was he the greater fighter. Neither Ali 43-2 (31) or Frazier 30-1 (25) held the title when they fought the second time but Ali was the #1 ranked contender and Frazier was the #2 contender. It was an elimination bout between the two best heavyweights in the world to see who would face the new champ, George Foreman, who beat Frazier for the title a year earlier. Ali maintained at that time that he beat Frazier the first time they fought and that irked Frazier because he felt Muhammad robbed him out of the props he was due after beating him. Joe was out to finish what he started the first time and was looking to become the first fighter to stop Ali. Even though both fighters would be an underdog versus Foreman, the world was still captivated as to what would happen when the two rivals clashed again. A week before the fight Muhammad and Joe got into a fight/wrestling match on the ABC's Wide World of Sports while watching and commentating on the tape of their first fight. Ali called Joe ignorant for suggesting

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he went to the hospital after the fight. When in reality Ali went to get his swollen jaw ex-rayed, but Frazier went to the hospital for over a week 10 days after the fight due to exhaustion. The studio brawl was for real on Frazier's part and it further stimulated interest in the bout, not that it needed it.

ODDS: On the day of the fight Ali was a 7-5 favorite.

Pre-fight Thoughts: Ali fought 13 times between his first and second fights with Frazier. Joe only fought four times in the more than two and a half years that passed between fight I and II. Ali fought every contender in the division except George Foreman, who turned him down, compared to Frazier only fighting two top contenders in Foreman and Jerry Quarry. For this bout Ali had the needed urgency that drove Frazier in their first meeting and it was impossible not to see how that would go a long way in deciding the outcome. In addition to that it was hard to envision that Frazier could be quite as great in the rematch as he was the first time they fought. That, and because Ali was so much busier during the interim between fights I thought that would be the difference in the ring and favored him to win a decision.

Result: Ali was three pounds lighter than he was the first time and used his legs and circled the ring more, especially during the first half of the bout. Muhammad fought one of the better fights of his post exile career and won a 12 round unanimous decision (8-4, 7-4-1 and 6-5-1). The AP had it 8-4 Ali and the UPI saw it 7-4-1 Ali. It was a was a very close fight and Ali's margin of victory over Frazier wasn't as wide as Frazier's over him in their first fight. Ali hurt Joe with a right hand in the second round, but referee Tony Perez thought he heard the bell and stepped between them as Ali was looking to finish Frazier. Thus Frazier regained his footing and fought better as the fight progressed. Joe's best rounds were the seventh and the eighth when he worked Ali over to the head and body while he had him pinned against the ropes and in the corners. They traded rounds between nine and twelve, but this time Muhammad was a step ahead of Joe and didn't trip over Frazier's left hook as much this time as he did during their 1971 fight. This was a better and quicker paced fight than most remember and by today's standards it would be an instant classic.

George Foreman vs. Muhammad Ali (October 30, 1974) When George Foreman held the title he was perceived as being as invincible as any heavyweight champion in history. This was Ali's second shot at the title after being stripped of it on April 27, 1967 for his refusal to be inducted into the US army. He lost in his first bid three and a half years earlier to Frazier. Foreman 40-0 (37) was seen as a destroyer based on him demolishing the only two fighters who ever defeated Ali 44-2 (31), Joe Frazier, and Ken Norton seven months earlier. Foreman, before the fight was considered by many as the hardest puncher in history and if he could knock out Ali, he very well

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might've gone down as the greatest heavyweight champ ever. Former greats Jack Dempsey and Joe Louis both picked Foreman to win by kayo but admitted that if Ali scored the upset, he'd have to be considered one of the all-time greats. Both fighters were guaranteed five million dollars apiece which was the most ever paid to any fighter in history at the time.

ODDS: On the day of the fight Foreman was a 3-1 favorite.

Pre-fight Thoughts: This was one time that I coped out and wouldn't commit to picking a winner. The only thing I said when pressed on who I thought was gonna win was, "I don't know if Ali is going to win, but I'm certain that if he does lose, he will not be punched around the ring and manhandled by Foreman the way Frazier and Norton were." For some reason I got the sense that Ali knew something that no one else knew and that he had a much better chance to beat George than what most everyone thought. But even at that I couldn't outright pick him to win, it's just that I wasn't completely convinced that he was going to lose.

Result: This is probably the crowning jewel of Muhammad Ali's career, which he has often said himself. From the first round on it was apparent that Ali's ring strength was equal to or better than Foreman's as he tied him up and shut George down. Foreman was never more sure of himself before a fight and went after Ali as if he were handcuffed and just didn't believe Ali could make him do anything he didn't want to. Once Ali realized he could handle George's power, especially to the body, he rested in the corners and against the ropes (the birth of the rope-a-dope) and allowed Foreman to punch himself out. After eight rounds George was slowing down and his punches lost a lot of their thunder. Late in the round Ali unleashed a barrage of lefts and rights to the jaw that dropped Foreman and he was counted out with seconds left in the round. Ali would go down as an eighth round knockout winner and only the second man in history to regain the undisputed heavyweight title.

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Coxs Corner says:

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Good read. Important to note that not every historically significant fight or classic after the fact was a Super Fight going in. Ali-Frazier fights certainly all qualify. Look forward to the next part of the series and seeing the super bouts in the lower weight classes.