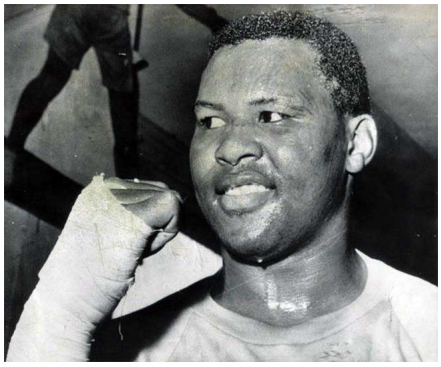

The 5’11”-200lbs. Spencer began his professional journey on May 3,1960 with a third round knockout over Frankie Rowe. He racked up five more wins before losing a four round decision to Shirley Pembleton. Not the stuff that legends are made of. Nevertheless Thad would reel off twelve straight victories. Among his victims were Jeff Davis and Jimmy Fletcher. In 1964 Thad scored straight kayo including a fifth round stoppage of former world title challenger Tim McNeeley. Then disaster struck. On December 14th Thad was halted in nine rounds by Amos “Big Train” Lincoln.

In 1965 Thad came back strongly avenging a 1963 loss to Chuck Leslie and outpointing Billy Daniels and Roger Rischer. In a rematch with Lincoln, Thad was outscored over ten rounds. After opening 1966 by again outpionting Leslie and Daniels he traveled to England producing a two round kayo over Jack Bodell and a points win over Brian London. Just as Thad was gaining momentum he was upset in seven by spoiler Bill McMurray. Undaunted Thad closed out the year with the biggest win of his career, a ten round verdict over Doug Jones. Thad had finally hit the big time.

Thad’s star would shine its brightest in 1967. He derailed his former nemesis Amos Lincoln in eight rounds and thus gained entry into the WBA’s eight-man elimination tournament. On August 5th at the Houston Astrodome Spencer convincingly took apart ex-champion Ernie Terrell. Thad’s impressive performance made him the odds on favorite to become the new titleholder. Enter Jerry Quarry. On February 3,1968 Thad met Quarry in Oakland. Jerry had struggled to win a disputed decision over ex-heavyweight king Floyd Patterson in his tournament opener. Many felt Thad would move past Quarry and into the finals. As usual in his sensational and erratic career Jerry did the unexpected. Quarry gave Thad a one-side beating that was mercifully stopped in the twelfth and final round. The star had now fallen. How far it would fall in such a short period of time amazed the boxing experts. Thad turned in one more credible performance. In his next fight Thad took a jaunt to England to meet Leotis Martin.

Leotis had lost to the eventual tournament winner Jimmy Ellis the same day the Thad had whipped Terrell. On May 28,1968 Spencer and Martin hooked up in what many say was one of the best heavyweight fights on British soil. When the smoke had cleared Leotis had emerged as a ninth round kayo victor.

Almost six months after the Martin loss Thad was invited back to England to meet their “Golden Boy” Billy Walker. When Thad entered the ring it was unbelievable. His once chiseled body was covered with flab. His reflexes and his timing were hideous. Walker was at best a glorified club fighter but he belted Thad all over the ring until it was stopped in round six. From top contender to also ran in less than a year. The downward spiral to oblivion had begun. Six months later Thad traveled to Fresno and was halted in one round by the touted Mac Foster. He tried a comeback in 1970 drawing with Charlie Reno and losing a ten round duke to Tony Doyle. In 1971 he dropped decisions to Ron Stander and Doyle again.

After his victory over Terrell in 1967 that had made him on the threshold of the heavyweight championship, Thad failed to win the next nine starts. Eight losses and a draw. Five times he was knocked out. The last by Jose Luis Garcia in two rounds in 1970. How could a fighter’s fortunes change so dramatically? Such was the tragic demise of Sad Thad Spencer.

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