

Athenaeum Society

October 3rd 2024

Clay vs. Liston

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1963 is coming to an end, and 1964 is on its way. A lot of things happened in 1964 such as Three North Vietnamese torpedo boats attack the US Destroyer Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin. Warren Commission report the assassination of President John F. Kennedy concludes Lee Oswald had acted alone, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is signed into law by President Johnson, Dr. Martin Luther king Jr. receives the Nobel Peace Prize, Elizabeth Taylor marries Richard Burton for the first time, President Johnson declares a war on Poverty Campaign, the most powerful earthquake in U.S. History at a magnitude of 9.2, strikes South Alaska, but the most important thing that really caught my attention that year, took place on February 25th 1964, the Clay vs. Liston fight for the heavyweight championship of the world.

Now prior to this fight , a few years before the fight took place, let me give you some history on these great fighters and all they had accomplished prior to the fight.

Cassius Clay : Cassius Marcellus Clay was born on January 17, 1942 in Louisville Ky. Clay had been training as a amateur boxer at the age of 12. What directed him to obx, was by a police officer in Louisville name Joe E. Martin whoo also was a boxing coach. Officer Martin encountered Cassius Clay getting into it with a thief having taking his

bicycle. Cassius wanted to beat up the thief as he told the police as the police told clay to learn how to box first. At first, Clay did not want to accept Officer Martin's offer. What made Clay accept the offer, was when he looked at this program on TV called, "Tomorrow's Champions", a program where all amateur boxers participated. Clay began to get more interested in boxing, so he began training with trainer name Fred Stoner.

1954 is when now the 12 year old Cassius Clay made his debut in the amateur boxing stage. Clay went on to win 6 Golden Glove Titles in Kentucky, 2 National Glove Titles, a Amateur Athletic union Title, and the light heavyweight gold medal in the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome. During his amateur career, his record was 100 wins and 5 losses.

Clay began his professional career that same year on October 29, 1960. Clay won his first fight over Tunney Hunsaker. He was undefeated with a 19-0 record from 1960-1963. Now during those 3 years of his professional career , he had his way of trash talking to his opponents. His trash talk was inspired by a wrestler name, "Gorgeous George" Wagner. Clay stated in a interview n 1969 that he met Gorgeous George in Vegas in 1961, George told him to that talking trash would earn fans who wanted to see him win or wanted to see him lose, Clay became a big -mouth and bragger.

Charles " Sonney " Liston : Sonny Liston was born in 1930, in Sand Slough, Arkansas. During his childhood, Liston was abused by his father (Tobe Liston) often , which he still has scars are still visible on him today. Liston had a rough childhood, his parents

split up, his mother (Helen Basken) moved to St. Louis to find work in 1946. That following year, Sonny moved with his mother in St.Louis. Sonny did not finish school, were later he began to join gangs and was committed to mugging and robberies. Sonney later on led a gang of thugs in robbing people, and apparently Sonney wore a yellow shirt during the robberies, were the police would call him "The Yellow Bandit". At the age of 20, Sonney started being convicted and was sentenced to 5 years in Missouri State Penitentiary on June 1 1950. While in prison, Sonney did his time, never complained about prison, he was garaunteed three meals a day. So one day in the prison, athletic director Rev. Alois Stevens talked to Sonney on trying out boxing, this was to make Sonney stay out of trouble. Rev. Stevens aided Sonney on getting early parole. Rev. Stevens knew that Sonney Liston had potential in his boxing skills. He organized a sparring session with a professional heavyweight named Thurman Wilson. Wilson only lasted 2 rounds with Liston, he had said he had enough and Liston was going to kill him.

Sonney Liston was released from prison in October 31, 1952. He had a short span of an amateur career. He participated in a Chicago Golden Glove Tournament of Champions on March 6, 1953. He beat Julius Griffin, a New York Golden Glove winner. Liston end up beating 1952 Olympic Heavyweight Champion, Ed Sanders. Liston completed in a lot of championships and was described as one of the strongest fighters. Liston eventually signed contract in September of 1953, were he challenged Don Smith and knocked him out in the first round.

Liston later on for the next 3 years was becoming a good boxer until on May 5th, 1956, a policeman confronted Liston and a friend about a cab parked near Liston's home. Liston beat up the policeman by breaking his knees and gashing his face, and took his gun, supposedly the police was making racial comments.

Liston somehow got parole and did 6 out of the 9 months in jail. He was not prohibited from boxing. Liston became the no. 1 contender in 1960, but he was not eligible for a title shot because of his criminal record. At that time Floyd Patterson was the champion and he wanted to fight Liston, but a lot of promoters and fighters saying Liston should not be allowed to fight for the title. 2 years later on September 25th 1962, Patterson kept forcing for a title match against Liston and it finally became a match, Liston beats Patterson to win the heavyweight title.

Just giving you a brief history on both of these fighters, now lets talk about the fight between Clay and Liston. Now prior to the fight, a few months earlier, Clay had become the No. 1 contender and was wanting a shot at the heavyweight Title against Liston. With Clay's trash talking, he really didn't need promoters to promote the fight, he did it in his own way with all that trash talk, while Liston is just a laid back kind of guy.

While Clay is training for the fight, one of the sports interviewers interviewed Clay and here is what was said:

Interviewer: Clay, how do you feel?

Clay: I'm feeling great I'm ready to go to war right now. If I see that bum on the streets, I'll beat him before the fight. I'll beat him like I'm his daddy.

Interviewer: I saw Sonney Liston a few days ago,

Clay: Ain't he ugly? .. he's too ugly to be the world's champ. The world's champ should be pretty like me!

Interviewer: He told me to bet my life that you will get knocked down in 3

Clay: Well if you want to loose your money, bet on Sonney

Now Cassius Clay is a poet in his own mind here's what he tells the audience :

“ Clay comes out to meet Liston, and Liston starts to retreat

If Liston goes back an inch farther, he'll end up in a ringside seat.

Clay swings with his left, Clay swings with his right

Look at young Cassius carry the fight

Liston keeps backing, but not enough room

It's a matter of time, until Clay lowers the boom”

This fight became official on November 6th , 1963. Both fighters started training while the training took place in Miami Florida. Clay distracted Liston at his training sessions, while talking noise. The most funniest thing happened, Clay had got a bus and had his friends with him as one night he showed up at Liston's house with a megaphone

talking trash. Liston came outside with a big stick in his pajamas and his nightgown on trying to get Clay away from his house. The night of the signing for the fight, Clay and Liston were in a press conference commenting on the fight that's going to take place on February 25th 1964. Liston said he would knock Clay out in 2 rounds. But when the microphone came to Clay here's what was said:

Clay: Sonny may be great , but he will leave in eight.

If he want to go to heaven , ill get him in seven.

He'll be in a worser fix, if I cut it to six.

If he keeps talking jive , he'll go in five.

If he make me sore , he'll go like Moore.

If he keeps talking about me, I'll get him in three

If that don't do, he'll fall in two

If he run, he'll go in one

And if he don't want to fight, he should keep himself home that night.

Im pretty as a girl.

Liston: If somebody don't put a mouthpiece in his mouth , im going to really kill him"

The fight was taken place in Miami Beach, where a lot of people from Miami did not like Clay's trash talk and hoping he loses. A lot of people were betting that Liston would beat him in 2, some say 3, or 5. The night of the fight,

Clay and Liston went head to head. Liston threw a few strong punches at Clay, but Clay had that defense. Clay kept coming back with those powerful jabs to Liston's head, but by the time for the eight round the referee and trainers looked at Sonny's eye and stopped the fight , Clay became the World Heavyweight Champion for the first time. He famous quote was " I shook up the World, I shook up the world!"I don't have a mark or bruise on my face, I'm so pretty!"

The interview after the fight Clay said if he wanted a rematch , he will accept. Both Liston and Clay fought again the following year in 1965, and Clay, which he changed his name to Muhammad Ali won the rematch.