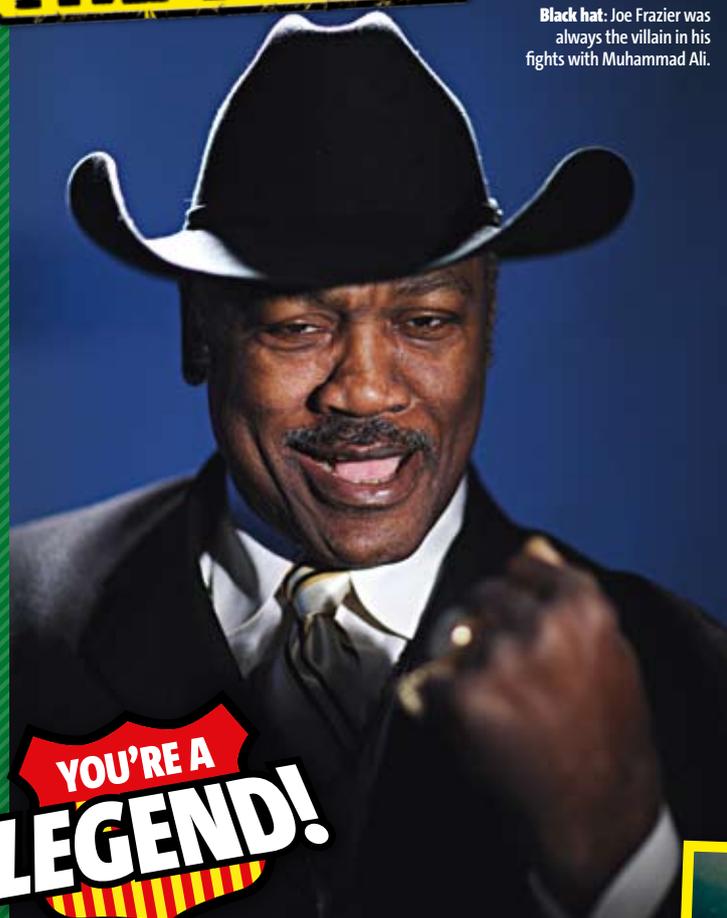


THE OUTER

Black hat: Joe Frazier was always the villain in his fights with Muhammad Ali.



YOU'RE A LEGEND!

Smokin' Gun

JOE FRAZIER will go down as one of the great heavyweights – and at 65, his famous left hook is as lethal as ever

Joe Frazier is one-half, with Muhammad Ali, of one of history's great sporting rivalries. Smokin' Joe held the world heavyweight title from 1968-72 and fought three famous duels with Ali, including the "Thrilla in Manila", a gruelling epic, in which Frazier was famously stopped from fighting the last round because he could no longer see his opponent. His relationship with Ali has often touched hatred and bitterness, but a new documentary called *Thriller in Manila* finally gives Frazier's side. When he talks to *Alpha* from his old gym in Philadelphia, the Smoke seems happy.

How are you?

Oh, man, they're tryin' to get me. How you doin'?

Good. How's Philadelphia?

It's a place I love and they're trying to clean up their act with the kids. If they don't get what they need, you and I out on the street are going to have trouble, and the police are going to have trouble. Cos Mum and Dad didn't do their job.

Do you still get kids training in the gym?

Yeah, I get a whole bunch of kids in the gym. But I want them to stay and get to the point where they are professionally good. But they just leave me holding the bag.

You still training?

Yeah, I'm not owning the gym for the young people, I'm owning it for the old guys. Boxing keeps you young. I can work for an hour, stand 12 rounds without stopping. I'm 65 and the left hook is still there.

Where have all the good heavyweights gone?

I don't know what to say. If I say something about American fighters I get myself in trouble.

Is it true you love music nearly as much as boxing?

I love it. I use it as my trainer. Tom Jones, Lionel Richie, James Brown, Sam Cook. I don't know what they're playing today.

When you were training for fights, that's what you listened to?

That's right. I love that old good blues, man. Music is just the timing of the beat. I knew it before I even knew the fight game. If I didn't sing on Sunday when I went to church, my mother wanted to know why. "What's the matter with you, Mister Man?"

Do you still sing with a group called the Knockouts?

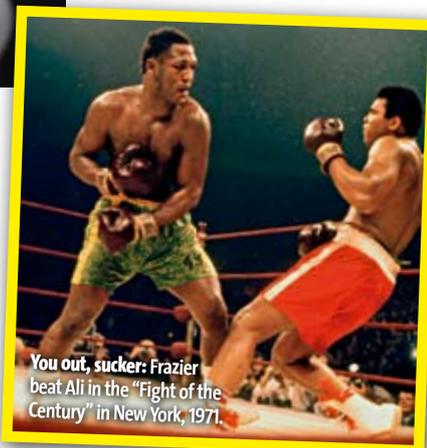
Yeah, still got them. If we're getting a little tired or low, we get together and play. We rehearse about once a month and now we're going to do some road shows, maybe once a week at night.

Have you seen the new movie?

No, but everyone who has seen it has liked it, so I've got to join right in there with them.

Do you still think about how the Manila fight ended?

The other guy got the decision, OK? I think I won the fight, but the corner stopped it. You don't question the corner man and he could see one of my eyes were closed and I could hardly see out of my other eye. But he didn't know Muhammad was so tired as well.



You out, sucker: Frazier beat Ali in the "Fight of the Century" in New York, 1971.

Do you still feel angry about it?

No! I beat him up two or three times. I never get angry. If that's the way he is (Ali insulted Frazier repeatedly before fights), that's his style, I accept it. But the good man above marks it down. And a lot of things he said, for a religious guy, you shouldn't be able to say.

He was mean to you, wasn't he?

I just paid no attention. In the ring is where it's time to fight. I don't walk around with no chip on my shoulder for nobody.

Was fighting Ali personal?

It was business and it was personal.

Would you talk to him now?

Sure. But if I go places and he's there, he'll go out the back door or I'll come in the side door. His team don't want me to see him, cos they're afraid I'll say something wrong. But I'll never say anything dirty. He's safe (laughs). He's

lucky there ain't no bell; if there was a bell ringing he'd be in trouble.

You must have been thrilled to beat him in the "Fight of the Century".

Oh, yeah. My trainer said to me, "You go out there, you win this fight, your way will be paid for life." There you go – we're still talking about it 30 years

LEGENDARY STATUS

Born: January 12, 1944

Fame: Best known for his rivalry with Muhammad Ali and their three bouts: the Fight of the Century, Ali-Frazier II and the Thrilla in Manila.

Record: 37 fights, 32 wins (27 by knockout), four losses, one draw. Former world heavyweight champion and 1964 Olympic gold medallist.

Notoriety: His inability to forgive and forget Muhammad Ali for the things he said about him in the press before their fights.

later. People want to see the guy who knocked Ali down. And I only weighed 199 (pounds – 90kg). I wasn't a big guy. But I was a heavyweight. When I came out of my mama I was a big baby, so I was always a heavyweight.

What was your toughest fight?

Oh, man, I fought some hard guys. You want to talk about George (Foreman), that was a big, hard fight – he came in and took over

(Foreman put Frazier down six times in two rounds).

Do you ever talk to Foreman?

I talk to George once or twice a year. He's a good guy.

How would you go against modern fighters, like Mike Tyson and Lennox Lewis?

I'd do somethin' else! That's the way it would be, OK? But all the guys I fought, no matter their size, I took them out.

You held down a job at the start of your career, didn't you?

There's nothing wrong with it – I even went bootlegging with my father. I used to go to the liquor still and cook liquor for my dad. Keep it quiet.

They aren't going to arrest you now.

I don't know, they might go back and find some of those old stills around. But it was great growing up with my dad. He was a great guy.

Did you really hit joints of beef when you trained?

Like Sylvester Stallone (in *Rocky*)? Yeah, but Stallone never worked in no slaughterhouse. Stallone copied Joe Frazier's slaughterhouse. I'm the guy who worked out in the gym to music. It's my story. I ran the park, ran the streets and up those steps. I used to do that after three miles of roadwork.

How's your eyesight these days?

I can see so good I could hit a mosquito going 100mph. I had an operation on my left eye a couple of years back. That's why doctors and I get along good.

How did you fight the toughest guys on the planet partially blind?

They didn't go the distance. I just took 'em out quick. Bye, you gotta go.

Do you remember fighting in Australia?

Sure, I've been there before (his next fight after the Thrilla in Manila was a 1975 TKO victory against Jimmy Ellis in Melbourne). Some of the older guys will remember it.

Good to speak to you, Joe.

Thanks, man. Boogie boogie!