

# Legends in Our Time™

Presents

## Muhammad Ali "The Greatest"

by John Carrieri

Welcome to the third edition of 'Legends In Our Time', a series dedicated to celebrating extraordinary individuals during their lifetimes and ours, who have excelled in their fields and left a unique, exceptional and distinctive mark that forever changed their discipline and our lives. Muhammad Ali is certainly such a Legend. He is the only man to win the Heavyweight World Title three times and is considered the greatest boxer of all time. With his charisma, with his principles, and with his actions he transcended the sport to become not only "Sportsman of the Century," but one of the greatest humans of all time.



Young Clay at 12 AP Photo

became Clay's first coach, coaching him through 108 bouts, two National AAU Light-heavyweight titles and Six Kentucky Golden Gloves before he was 18, which led him to the 1960 Olympics in Rome where he won a Gold Medal for the United States.

The young athlete, after returning with the Olympic Gold Medal, signed a deal to start his professional career with the Louisville Sponsoring Group made up of 10 local businessmen. His professional career took off, with Clay winning 19 professional fights. One of those signature fights was with Henry Cooper, the European heavyweight champion in London. Cooper knocked Ali down with a left

Muhammad Ali was born to Cassius and Odessa Clay in Louisville, Kentucky on January 17th, 1942. He was named after his father Cassius Marcellus Clay, Sr., but would later take on a new name - Muhammad Ali.

At the age 12 in October of 1954, young Cassius and a friend rode their bicycles to the Columbia Auditorium that was hosting the Louisville Home Show. Cassius' red and white Schwinn bicycle was stolen while the boys were inside enjoying the show. A tearful Cassius sought help from a policeman named Joe Martin. As he was walking away from Martin, he declared "**When I find out who stole my bike, I'm going to whoop him.**" Joe, who coached a boxing program for youths said if he wanted to 'whoop' someone he better come to the gym and learn how. Martin



Olympic Village, Rome 1960 AP

hook. Although dazed, Ali got up and made it to the bell. As his coach tried to bring him out of the daze, he noticed Ali's gloves were a bit torn and called for replacements, which gave Ali extra time to recuperate. Ali went on to win the fight because Cooper's eye was bleeding so badly the referee stopped the fight in the 5th round. After the fight, Sonny Liston, the reigning champion, had his manager Jack Nilon come up to Clay's camp and say, "I've flown three thousand miles to tell you we're ready." Clay finally had a chance to fulfill his destiny, a shot at the Heavyweight Title.

### I Shook up the World

On February 25th, 1964, Clay, the 8 to 1 underdog challenger took on a purportedly 'invincible' Sonny Liston. In the build up to the fight, Clay became famous for his unrelenting big mouth. People thought he was crazy, but he had his own strategy and it worked. Clay even went to the "big ugly bear's" den (as he liked to call Liston) calling him a coward and a bum through a bullhorn from his bus. Clay went on with his taunts, "**I'm going to haunt you until you fight me.**" The heat between the two escalated even further when Ali approached Liston while playing craps at a casino and started taunting him again. Liston drew a gun, (though it wasn't actually real) which temporarily relieved him of his tormentor, at least for that night.

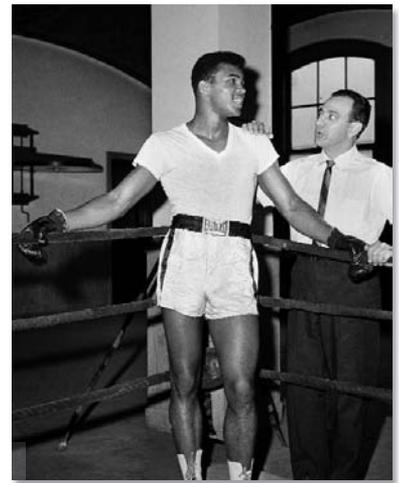
A crazy eyed Clay recited his predictions to the press: "**For those of you who won't be able to see the Clay / Liston Fight. Here's the eighth round exactly as it will happen: Clay comes out to meet Liston, and Liston starts to retreat. If Liston goes back an inch farther, he'll end up in a ringside seat. Clay swings with his left and Clay swings with his right, Look at young Cassius carry the fight. Liston keeps backing, but there's not enough room. It's a matter of time 'til Clay lowers the boom. Now Liston disappears from view, the crowd is getting frantic, but our radar stations have picked him up, he is somewhere over the Atlantic! Liston's still rising, the ref wears a frown.**

**For he can't start counting 'til Sonny comes down. Who would have thought, when they came to the fight, that they'd witness the launching, of a human satellite?"** Ali, the consummate promoter, could talk the talk like no other before or after, he rapped before there was rap. "**If you like to lose your money, then be a fool and bet on Sonny but if you want to have a good day then put it on Clay.**"

The 'Sports Press Gods' didn't give Clay a chance with 43 of 46 predicting Clay would lose. Clay didn't even put his arms up to block like a 'good' fighter should. Instead he swayed his torso back and to the side to avoid punches. They predicted an easy defeat for Liston, which seemed to fuel Clay who thrived on proving them wrong. As the fight progressed Clay began to emerge as the winner but suddenly in the fourth round Clay became mysteriously blinded by a toxic substance. After the round, Angelo Dundee, Clay's manager put his pinky in the corner of his boxer's eye and touched it to his own. Sure enough there was something very caustic in his eye, which Dundee feverishly tried to flood out with water and towels. It turns out that two of Liston's previous opponents also had been subject to this underhanded trick. Dundee, the seasoned coach, made sure the referee didn't stop the fight and sent Clay back in for the next round. Dundee said, "**The last instructions I gave him was - Run!**" Clay kept his distance until his eyes recovered. Liston continued to throw his mighty left hook in vain as he could never seem to connect with the young fighter. Clay took him down with all of the style of his famous phrase, "**Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.**"

"Aint he ugly? He's too ugly to be the world champ. The world champ should be pretty like me."

- Ali



Young Clay with trainer Angelo Dundee. AP Photo - Dan Grossi