



Muhammad Ali

When Muhammad Ali was born in 1942, he was named Cassius Marcellus Clay Junior. He was born into a family that was comfortable, but not rich. His father was a sign painter, and his mother was a maid. He was African American and lived in Kentucky, USA. Southern states were divided by something called segregation. This meant that black people had to go to different schools, use different shops and weren't allowed in certain areas. These laws were called Jim Crow Laws.

When Cassius was twelve, somebody stole his bike. He tried to report it to the police and told the officer that he would beat up whoever took it. The officer was a boxing coach and offered to train Cassius in the sport. He soon became a superb boxer in his age group. He was quick and agile - skills that he would go on to be famous for when he became a professional. He was able to hit his opponents and then duck out of the way before they hit him back.

As an amateur, he fought in 105 fights. He won 100 of them - a tremendous record. People were soon talking about him being one of the best young fighters in the world. In 1960, he went to the Olympic Games in Rome and won the gold medal. When he returned to the USA, he was a hero and was able to turn professional. This meant that he could earn a living from boxing.

Clay was a heavyweight boxer. This is the classification for the heaviest fighters. Most heavyweight boxers at that time were big and strong but slow. Clay was strong, but quick and agile. One of his most famous sayings was "I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee". He became famous for his trash-talking and for being good with his words.

Even turning professional didn't slow him down. He won most of his fights in the beginning. In 1964, he fought Sonny Liston for the heavyweight title. He hit his opponent so hard that Liston refused to come out in the seventh round, and Clay won the title.

It was in 1964 that Cassius Clay converted his religion to Islam. He took a new name: Muhammad Ali. As a Muslim, he refused to join the US Army. He wasn't allowed to box again until 1967 as a punishment. He said that fighting for the army was against his new religion.



The 1970s were Ali's most famous years. In this decade, he had three of his most famous fights. In 1971, he fought a boxer named Joe Frazier. It was called the Fight Of The Century because both fighters had won all of their matches so far. The fight lasted 15 rounds, and Frazier won on points. It was Ali's first loss as a professional fighter.

In 1974, he fought George Foreman in Zaire, Africa. It was nicknamed the Rumble in the Jungle. Ali won in the eighth round. Then, in 1975, he fought Joe Frazer in the Philippines. This fight was nicknamed the Thriller in Manila, and Ali won after the referee stopped the fight in the fourteenth round.

Ali retired from boxing in 1981 and went on to do a lot of charity work. He passed away in 2016.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Where did Ali fight Joe Frazer?
2. When did Ali retire?
3. How many amateur fights did Ali win?
4. What was Ali's name when he was born?
5. Where did he fight in the Olympic Games?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- S** Why did he take up boxing?
- S** Why wasn't Ali allowed to use certain restaurants growing up?
- V** If something is "tremendous", what does it mean?
- V** What is "trash-talking"?
- I** What evidence is there that Ali wanted to give back to society?