



George Foreman

Born: January 10, 1949
Marshall, Texas
Height: 6 feet 3 inches (1.91 m)
Reach: 82 inches (208 cm)
Boxing Record: 76-5-0,
68 by KO

Muhammad Ali VS. George Foreman

Rope-a-dope in the Jungle

► BY NATHAN LEE ADAMUS



xxx

Ali vs. Foreman – The Rumble in the Jungle

Date: October 30, 1974
Location: Stade du 20 Mai, Kinshasa, Zaire
Winner: Muhammad Ali by KO at 2:58 in Round 8

Ali: 216 pounds
Foreman: 220 pounds

Referee: Zach Clayton 66-68
Judge: Nourridine Adalla 67-70
Judge: James Taylor 66-69



Ali had a number of huge fights, but when all was said and done, none were as extraordinary as the “The Rumble in the Jungle.” The name says it all. It wasn’t just a fight; it was a political statement; a Broadway show; a promotional volcano; a reemergence of The Greatest. If Ali and Foreman weren’t hall-of-famers before they collided, they were after. They’re legends, whose names will live on in our hearts, on the walls of our man caves and on our children’s dorm room hot dog grillers.

Boxing would never be the same after the “The Rumble in the Jungle.” It changed everything. Don King took fight promotions to a new level. He turned what is now the Congo into the Olympic village. Ali just turned back the clock. Once again he was the boy with the youthful exuberance and the slick tongue. He would pluck at every last nerve one minute, then smile and shake your hand the next. He was unpredictable, and poor “Curious” George was about to get pressed like fresh hamburger.

The Stage Is Set

In mid 1973, Foreman was climbing the ladder while Ali was stuck on the ropes. A loss to Ken Norton in March put a nail in Ali’s tire, and his dreams of regaining his heavyweight title were beginning to lose momentum. Foreman, on the other hand, was soaring. Earlier in January, Howard Cosell was screaming, “Down goes Frazier!” while Foreman was standing over the reigning king of the ring’s crumbled frame.

Ali now had a much better chance of getting

another title shot even with his recent loss to Norton, but nothing was set in stone just yet. He still had a great deal of hurdles to jump in order to prove he was a worthy successor, and one of those obstacles was his nemesis “Smokin’” Joe Frazier.

Ali responded to the Norton loss with a W in their rematch. He was training harder and was once again playing the part of a champion. After Norton, he proceeded to topple Rudi Lubbers and then torched Smokin’ Joe.

Ali was ready, but how was Mr. Foreman doing? Foreman followed up his win over Frazier with a 1st round knockout of Jose Roman and a 2nd round thrashing of Ken Norton. Power certainly wasn’t an issue, but did he have the footwork to last 15 rounds with a revitalized Ali? Only time would tell.

Promotional Props

Even before Foreman vs. Norton was announced, promotional mastermind Don King was busy prepping for the biggest show in boxing history. When the fight was scheduled for March 26, 1974, King sparked a match, telling the world that the winner would touch gloves with Ali in Kinshasa, Zaire.

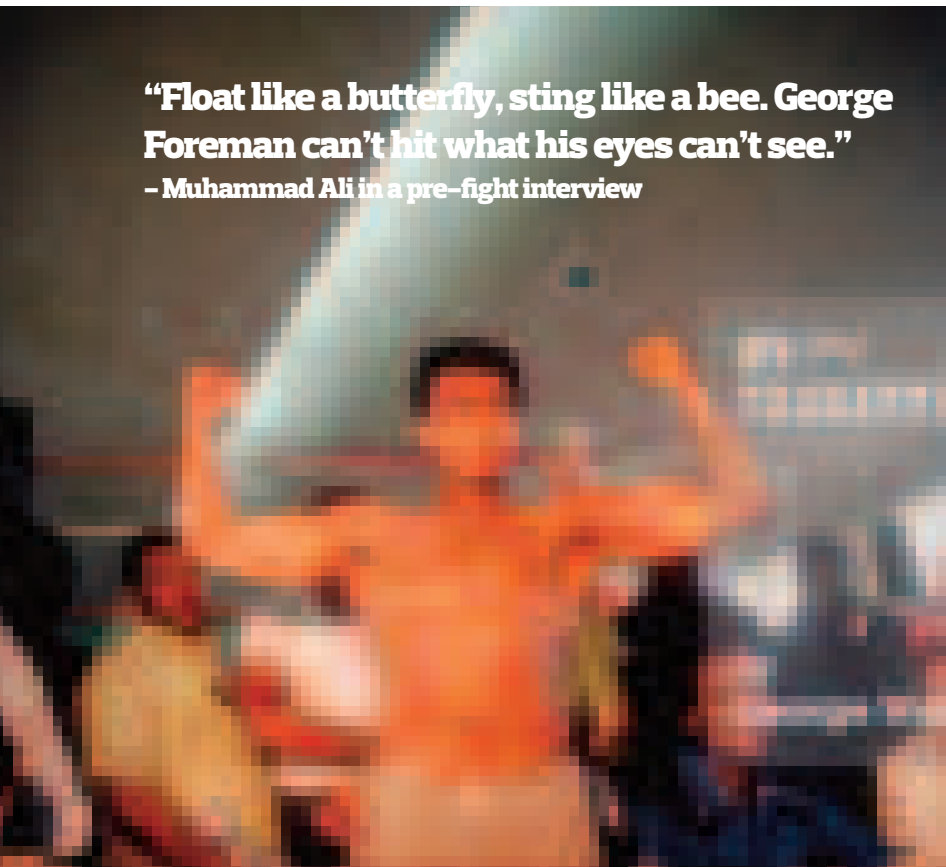
Now the fuse was lit, but the fight needed a name that rivaled King’s earlier installment, the “Thrilla in



■ xxx

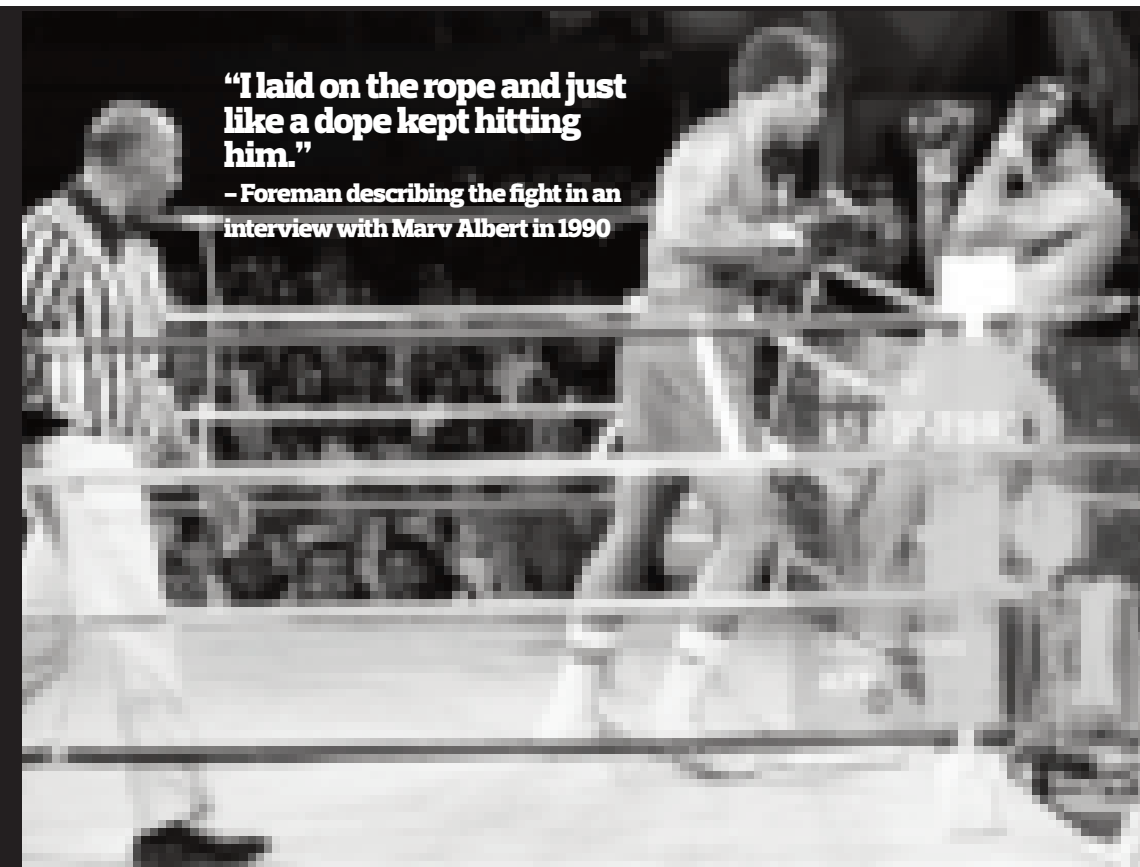
“Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. George Foreman can’t hit what his eyes can’t see.”

– Muhammad Ali in a pre-fight interview



“I laid on the rope and just like a dope kept hitting him.”

– Foreman describing the fight in an interview with Marv Albert in 1990



Manila.” According to Lloyd Price, who worked beside King to promote the event, “The Rumble in the Jungle” wasn’t the original title. “We first were going to call it ‘From Slave Ship to Championship.’ I thought that would have been a tremendous idea because of the event itself and what the intent of it was, to take a lot of African-Americans back to Africa who had never been there.”

The idea was eventually scrapped, for obvious reasons, and changed to “The Rumble in the Jungle.” The phrase was Ali’s, but it was inspired by Drew “Bundini” Brown’s motivational corner chants of “rumble, baby, rumble!”

To add political themes to the mix, King’s promotional team worked hand-in-hand with President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. Mobutu saw the event as the perfect opportunity to promote Zaire’s tourism

industry and increase interest in his beautiful country. King saw Mobutu as an enthusiastic investor. Earlier he had guaranteed Foreman and Ali a record \$5 million for the fight, even though he didn’t have the money to pay them. Mobutu bailed him out, offering to pay the entire \$10 million purse.

Everything was falling into place for the matchup of the century, but there was still one small problem: the time difference. The decision was made to hold the fight in Zaire at 3 a.m. on September 25 so it could be broadcast to 450 locations in the U.S. and Canada at a reasonable time. The fight was later rescheduled for 4 a.m. on October 30th after Foreman suffered an eye injury while sparring.

Despite the late/early starting time, 60,000 fans entered Stade du 20 Mai (20th of May Stadium) on the eve of Halloween to watch Muhammad Ali turn George Foreman into a ghost.

Ali in the Director’s Chair

Once the backdrop was in place, Ali started out on the campaign trail. He was beginning to gain support for his religious and political stance back home, and he saw the people of Zaire as another audience for his message. “I wanted to establish a relationship between

American blacks and Africans,” Ali said years after the fight. “The fight was about racial problems, Vietnam. All of that. ... ‘The Rumble in the Jungle’ was a fight that made the whole country more conscious.”

He treated his trip to Zaire like a vacation, mingling with the people, inviting the media to his training sessions and gallivanting around with new girlfriend Veronica Porche while his wife was back home in Chicago. The citizens of Zaire followed him around like he was the second coming of Christ. He may have been taking the fight seriously, but to the unbiased observer, it sure didn’t look that way.

When he wasn’t in the gym training or interacting with people, he was busy putting Foreman on blast. He called him “The Mummy” due to his awkward lumbering stance. He had the people of Zaire screaming “Ali bomaye!” which translates to “Ali, kill him!” in English. He ripped into the younger fighter whenever he had a chance. “I’ve seen George Foreman shadow boxing, and the shadow won,” he joked.

In one pre-fight press conference, Ali said, “I’m trying to make this my last fight...I’m gonna shock the whole world.” Then he proceeded to trash Foreman with a cluster of backhanded compliments while comparing the current champ to his idol Sonny Liston.

“He jumps rope like Sonny Liston. He fights like Sonny Liston. He walks around with a stare and a sad face like Sonny Liston. He’s awkward and slow and hits hard like Sonny Liston.”

Foreman paid his words no mind. He was too busy training, spending the majority of his Zaire trip in isolation and staying as far away from the media as possible. When he did leave the training facility, he did so with his trusty German shepherds by his side.

Things were looking rosy for Foreman. He was in good spirits and Ali appeared distracted. Then eight days before the fight, a misplaced elbow by sparring partner Bill McMurray opened a huge cut above Foreman’s right eye. The injury set him back, but luckily the date was pushed out a month to give him time to recover. The bad news is it also gave Ali another month to remind the world that Foreman was a bum.

Recommended Resources

- “When We Were Kings” – Leon Gast’s Academy Award-winning documentary
- “Don King: Only in America” – HBO movie
- *The Fight* by Norman Mailer

FAST FACTS

George Foreman was once Sonny Liston’s sparring partner.

xx xx

Damaged Set

Hours before the fight, Ali's trainer Angelo Dundee and public relations booster Bobby Goodman entered the soccer stadium to prepare for the fight. They took a few steps toward the ring then stopped in disbelief. The ring had caved in due to the brutal heat and humidity and was in need of immediate repair. A makeshift crew was assembled with Dundee and Goodman running the show.

"[To fix the ropes] we took off the clamps, pulled the ropes through the turnbuckles, lined everything up, and cut off the slack," Goodman said in *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* by Tom Hauser. "Angelo and I were sweating our butts off, cutting the ropes with a double-edged razor blade because nobody could find a knife."

The two even tried to convince Foreman's cornermen Archie Moore and Dick Sadler to join them in the reconstruction efforts, but they declined due to the extreme heat. Even without their help, Dundee and Goodman managed to breathe life into the deflated ring and have it in decent shape for introductions.

Let's Get Ready To...

With ominous rain clouds hovering above and trumpets blaring, Ali strutted into the ring in a white robe that resembled an African blanket. Familiar cheers of "Ali, bomaye!" echoed through the stadium. Then it was time to wait.

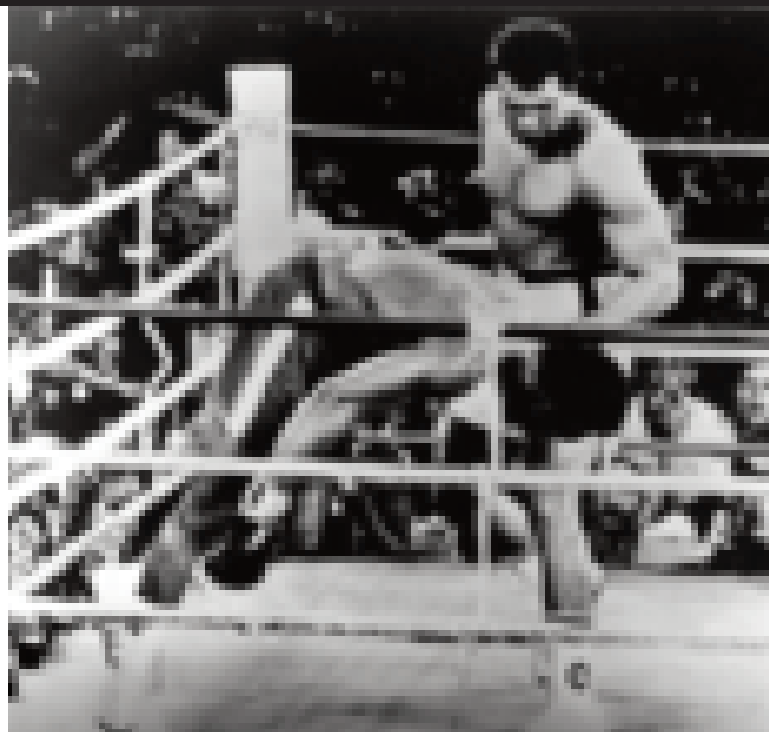
For 10 minutes, Ali jogged around the ring wondering if Foreman had cold feet. Finally Foreman emerged in a red robe with "World's Champion" sewn on the back. Foreman's cornerman Archie Moore later admitted that the delay was intentional. They thought keeping Ali in suspense would make him nervous. The ploy failed.

Within the first 40 seconds of the fight, it was clear that Foreman was getting no love from the fans in Zaire. Every punch Ali threw drew screams from the crowd.

Ali controlled the action for the first two minutes, but with less than 50 seconds left in the round, Foreman clawed back, barricading Ali in the ropes and hitting him repeatedly with right hooks to the head and body. Ali tried to retreat, but Foreman tracked after him, launching a flurry of hard punches and a couple of uppercuts to the chin and body.

In the second round, Ali let Foreman move him into the corners, a strategy he often used against harder hitters. By keeping his opponent close, he could decrease the striking distance, thereby reducing the speed and power of each blow. Ali was letting Foreman punch himself out in the early rounds while the ropes were absorbing most of the damage.

The technique was later nicknamed the "rope a dope"



"You been hearing about how bad I am since you were a little kid with mess in your pants! Tonight, I'm gonna whip you till you cry like a baby."

- Ali to Foreman during pre-fight instructions



Ali and Foreman were each guaranteed a record \$5 million for the fight.

The pre-fight concert featured a number of big musical acts including B.B. King, Celia Cruz, The Spinners and soul brother James Brown.

by publicist John Condon. According to Dundee, the tactic stemmed from a conversation between Ali and sports photographer George Kalinsky. While posing for a photo against the ropes, Ali pretended he was getting hit. Kalinsky suggested Ali act out the photo in the ring, saying, "Why don't you try something like that? Sort of a dope on the ropes, letting Foreman swing away but, like in the picture, hit nothing but air."

The problem with the rope a dope was it was usually only effective for a few rounds. Ali tried it against Frazier and Norton, but abandoned the strategy after both fighters realized they were being duped. Foreman never caught on.

In the 3rd round, Ali modified the technique. Instead of just laying on the ropes, he would lean back on them to create space, and then spring forward while throwing a series of rapid punches.

For five more rounds, Ali played patty-cake with Foreman. When he did move off the ropes, he made sure he only threw calculated punches. In the 4th, he gently tapped Foreman until George dropped his gloves, then he decked him with a right hook. At the end of the 5th, he played possum until 30 seconds were left in the round, then he sprung into action, lighting up Foreman like a Christmas tree.

He continued letting George attack, countering with powerful punches. Foreman was relentless but wasn't making any progress. When Dundee yelled at Ali to get off the ropes, he ignored his trainer.

By the 7th, Foreman was dog-tired. He kept advancing, but now he looked like Frankenstein lumbering through quicksand. He was swinging wildly like he was in a daze, and his legs seemed to have a mind of their own.

Thirty seconds into Round 8, the infomercial pitchman let loose with a left hook that missed Ali by a foot. Foreman plummeted into the ropes, nearly falling out of the ring. It was clear his equilibrium was off.

Ali continued to play dead like a tiger shark on its back, and Foreman couldn't resist, throwing punch after punch while Ali barely moved. Soon there would be blood in the water, but it wouldn't be Ali's. With 15 seconds left, Foreman launched yet another punch that missed its mark. Ali slid to the right and started hurling punches. Instead of backing away, Foreman moved toward Ali, and then bam! Ali pulled a deadly left hook out of his holster and followed it with a quick right. Foreman didn't even know what hit him. His knees buckled and he lurched forward in an attempt to regain his footing before rolling to the canvas. Ten seconds later, referee Zach Clayton called it.

Ali was once again heavyweight champion of the world, and the first people he reminded were his critics. "I told you, all of my critics, I told you all that I was the greatest of all times when I beat Sonny Liston. I told you today, I'm still the greatest of all times," Ali shouted into a camera during his post-fight interview. He was boxing's king for the second time and would go on to successfully defend his title against his next 10 opponents. **MA**

