

Muhammad

Ali

A Beautiful Butterfly

▶ BY NATHAN LEE ADAMUS

Whether it's Cassius Clay, Cassius X, Muhammad Ali or The Greatest, the man will forever be a legend inside and outside the ring. Was he the greatest heavyweight we've ever seen? Maybe. Maybe not. There was Joe Louis and Jack Johnson; George Foreman and Mike Tyson. There was Rocky Marciano and Jack Dempsey; Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis. They were all great, but none were three-time heavyweight champions.

More names will come and go, but none will eclipse Ali. He transcended boxing. He became a statesman, a leader, a celebrity and a visionary. He was compassionate, yet inconsiderate. He was yin and yang; a monster one day and a puppy dog the next. He was never reserved. You never knew what to expect from Ali outside the ropes, and you certainly didn't know what to expect inside them.

Perhaps that's what makes him stand out from the crowd. Other fighters have better records.

Marciano never lost. Foreman won more fights. Louis only lost three. Arguments can be made for all of them, but none of them pranced around the ring one bout, and then rested on the ropes the next. Ali was a box of chocolates with the golden gloves on. "You never knew what you were gonna get." Would he control the action or play defense? Would he weigh-in at 221 pounds or 212? Would he make a bold knockout prediction or play it safe?

Ali confused even those who knew him best, like trainer Angelo Dundee, his four wives and his eight (nine) children. He was an enigma, but he was also an open book. Years from now we will look back on his life and marvel at the mystery. He was a bee with a stinger tipped with zingers, and a fighter who wouldn't fight for the U.S.A. He was a poet and an artist, a showman and a showoff, a lover and a fighter. But those of us who envy and respect him the most will remember him as a beautiful butterfly who floated above the ring in high tops with wings made of gold. **MA**



"The man with no imagination has no wings."

- Muhammad Ali