

# Joe: Still Smokin' in 2005

**'Smokin' Joe' Frazier earned his place in sporting history when he beat Muhammad Ali and became the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world.**

**MIKE ANGOVE recently spent time with the boxing legend.**

**'S** smokin' Joe' Frazier says life "ain't s'posed" to be easy and it's the tough work "whupin'" challenges along the way that makes you a life champion.

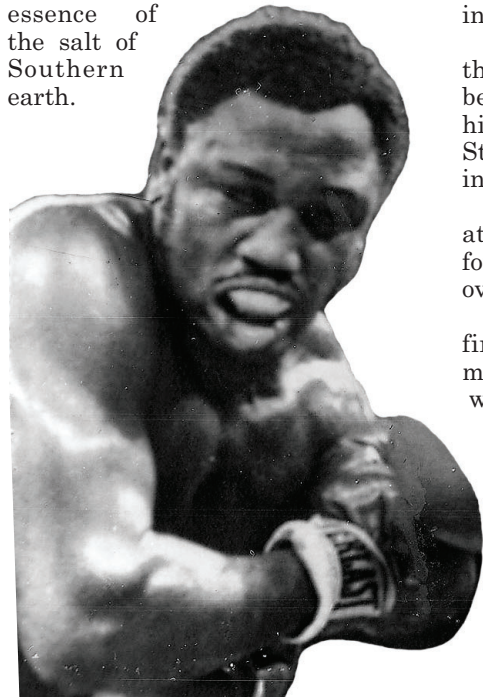
"I never was a quitter," he says in his raspy southern drawl.

"You're gonna come across hardships in life. You either lay down and let it walk over you or you take what life gives you and make somethin' of it."

Generations of sports fans have grown up on the legend of Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, and more than 30 years on video clips of their famous clashes can still silence a room.

These were men of a different ilk. Their epic battles transcended boxing and produced some of the defining moments in sporting history.

The complete antithesis of Ali, Frazier is the essence of the salt of Southern earth.



He prefers actions over words and is keen to impress on people that you can "whup" any challenge in life with hard work and determination.

Frazier is well qualified to speak on taking life's hard knocks as there has almost never been a time he did not do it tough.

Born into extreme poverty in 1944 in Beaufort, South Carolina, Joseph William Frazier was the 11th child of sharecropper Rubin Frazier.

He broke his left arm when he was eight, leaving it crooked and without full range of motion for the rest of his life.

He turned that damaged arm into the legendary left hook that deposited many of the world's best boxer's on their backsides, including "The Greatest", Muhammad Ali.

At 15, Frazier made his way to the toughest boxing town of them all, Philadelphia, where he worked in a slaughter house.

It was here he took up boxing for the first time. Frazier hit sides of beef in the slaughter house as part of his training regime, giving Sylvester Stallone inspiration for his character in *Rocky*.

He was small for a heavyweight at five-foot-eleven and 92 kilos and fought most often against men well over six-feet and 100 kilos.

When he won the United States first heavyweight Olympic gold medal in 1964 he fought the final with a broken thumb.

Frazier turned pro the following year despite being diagnosed with a cataract in his left eye.

Bad eyesight plagued him throughout his career and by the time he fought Ali in 1975 in Manila his vision was 20/50 in his right eye and legally blind at 20/400 in his left.

As if this wasn't enough,

Frazier had problems with high blood pressure and poorly functioning kidneys most of his gruelling 20-year career.

The obstacles came at a time when Frazier was fighting to become "top dog" in heavyweight boxing's most competitive era.

He fought them all: George Foreman, Jimmy Ellis, Jerry Quarry, Buster Mathis, Bob Forster, Joe Bugner, Oscar Bonavena and of course, Ali.

Frazier shocked the world when he became the first man to beat Ali, winning the undisputed heavyweight crown in Madison Square Garden in 1971.

The Ali-Frazier trilogy became one of the most celebrated rivalries in sporting history.

Boxing Hall of Fame commentator 'Colonel' Bob Sheridan says that without Frazier there would have been no Ali.

"Their names will be forever linked. They bought out the absolute best in one another and rewrote sporting history."

Their final fight, the "Thrilla in Manil", ended when Frazier's trainer Eddie Futch wouldn't let him come out for the 15th and final round.

Frazier, who had blood in his mouth and both eyes almost swollen shut, says he would have continued.

Ali's trainer, Angelo Dundee, said he would have stopped the fight himself had Frazier come out for the 15th.

After the fight, Ali said "it was the closest to dying I have ever come."

Both fighters were hospitalised for a month after the fight.

Boxing bible *Ring* magazine later voted the bout "The Fight of the Century".

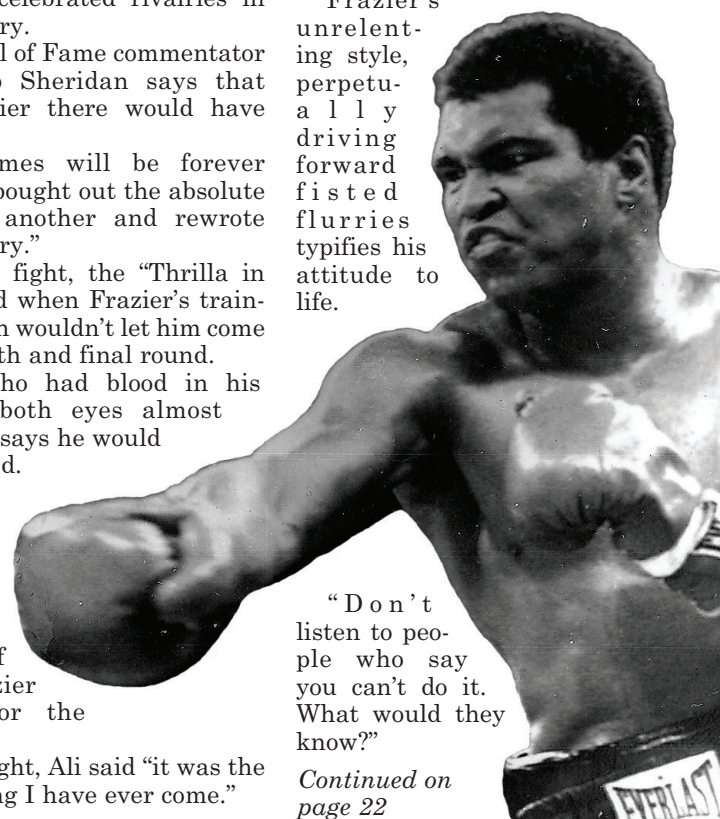
Much has been made of the pair's continuing jibes outside the ring and Joe deftly avoids questions other than to say Ali, who he calls the butterfly, was a great fighter.

Then after a brief pause he smiles and recites a new version of an old Ali rhyme.

"Sting like a butterfly, float like a bee, Joe Frazier's messed me up can't you see."

Age may have blunted the ill feeling between the two but it certainly hasn't diminished.

Frazier's unrelenting style, perpetually driving forward fisted flurries typifies his attitude to life.



"Don't listen to people who say you can't do it. What would they know?"

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