

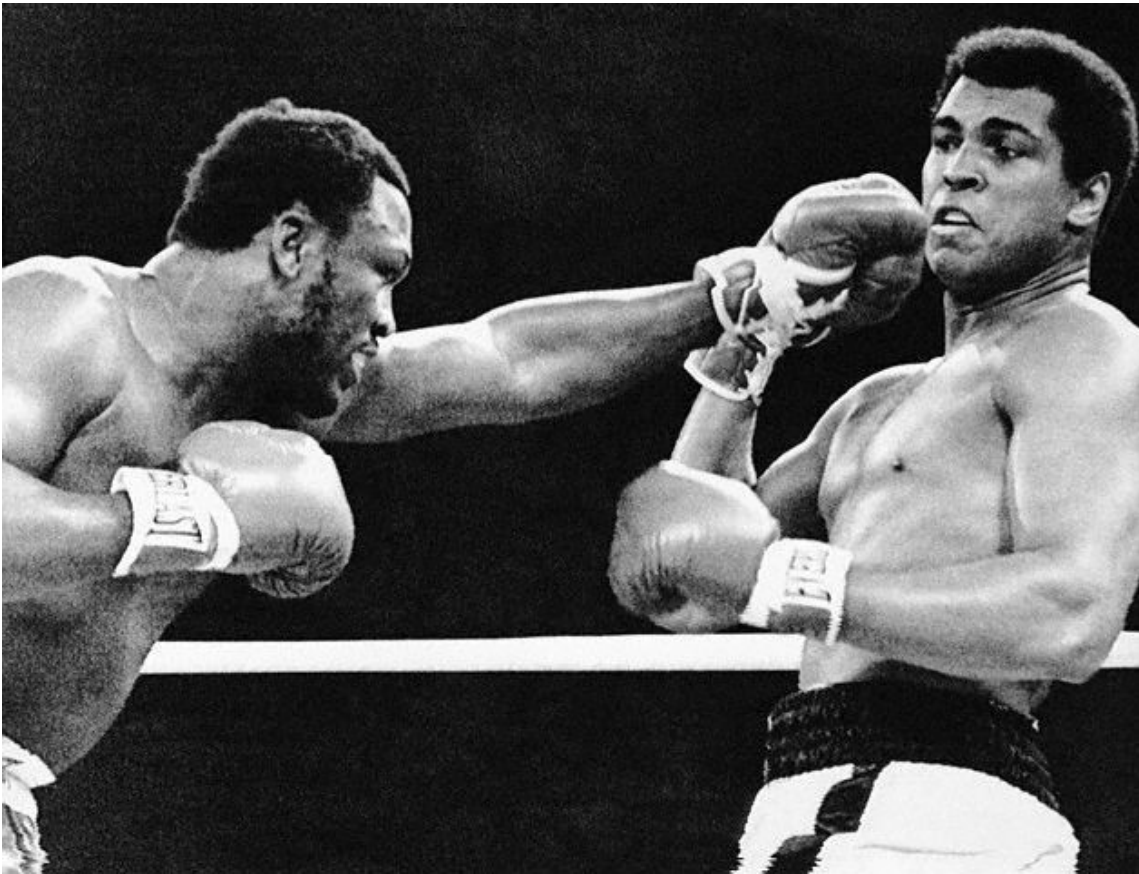
Student Handout 3-Joe Frazier

Joe Frazier might be the most famous “Philadelphia fighter” not to have been born in Philly. And yet the “City of Brotherly Love” seems to consistently claim him as its own. Perhaps Frazier has epitomized the Philadelphia ideal better than any other: he rose from poverty, became a champion, and he is that rare fighter, that rare person, who seems to actually grow greater in a defeat. For it was Smokin’ Joe, who caused Ali to remark, after the stopped bout in Manilla, that it was the closest that he, the champ, had come to death in a boxing match.

Joe Frazier was born in South Carolina; his father, a sharecropper. This adopted-son of the Keystone State turned pro in 1965. A seminal fight against Oscar Bonavena, in which Frazier went down twice in one round, defined his character and his attitude: he got up off the mat and went on to win a ten round unanimous decision.

Frazier held the title of heavyweight champ from 1968 until 1973. During this time span, he faced Muhammad Ali for the first time. Joe dropped Ali for a four count in the fifteenth round with his trademark left hook, which caught Ali on the jaw. At the end of the match, the decision went to Frazier. Ali won the rematch in 1974, and this set-up a media-hyped deciding bout between the two great fighters.

“The Thrilla in Manila” was a duel between two men who had become personally antagonistic of each other. In a sweltering arena, both men fought to the point of exhaustion. In the fourteenth, Joe’s corner stopped the bout because his eyes were so swollen that he could barely see. The fight had taken a toll on both men, mentally and physically. Both men proved, through their struggle against each other, that it is the will of the individual to keep going which most allures us to the sport of boxing. The greatness of their competition sets them apart, not just in the world of sports but in the human arena.



Joe Frazier reaches out with a left as Muhammad Ali pulls back during the first round of their 15-round title fight. Later Frazier suffers a TKO in the 14th round and Ali remains the middleweight champion of the world.

Courtesy Corbis-Bettmann

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