



Heavyweight Champion 1962-1964

Sonny Liston 6'2", 218: St. Louis, Missouri Record 50-4-0 39 KO's

How He Won The Title-Defeated Patterson for the title in one of the most destructive heavyweight title fights in history.

Positioning Himself For A Title Fight- Liston dominated the heavyweight division like few fighters in heavyweight history. He became the number one contender in July of 1960 with his victories over Cleveland Williams and Roy Harris. Ring magazine rated him as the #1 contender for over two years. He destroyed the champion Floyd Patterson in one round to gain the title.

Title Defense- Faced Patterson in a rematch and he dominated Floyd once again with a 1st round annihilation. In February of 1964 Liston fought his second defense against #1 contender Cassius Clay(Muhammad Ali) and lost a 7th round TKO.

How Will Liston Be Remembered- Liston is usually one of the few boxers in history that you can tell real quickly if someone knows their boxing history. Knowledgeable fight fans know Liston was one of the best of his time and one of the best of all-time. He threw his second fight with Ali and was still a dangerous fighter even up until his death in 1970. Chuck Wepner who fought some of the best fighters of the era including George Foreman and Muhammad Ali called Liston the best he ever faced. Liston had a remarkable record defeating the best fighters the division had to offer.

Compare His Opponents- *Muhammad Ali* was considered the greatest fighter in the history of the heavyweight division. The question is was Liston at his peak when he faced Ali.

Floyd Patterson was the heavyweight champion and he had no chance against Liston in his two first round knockout losses.

Eddie Machen was a dangerous opponent for a number of years and was the number one contender as far back as 1957 and 1958. He faced Liston in 1960 in Seattle and lost a 12-Decision. Machen was the only fighter to go the distance with Liston in his prime.

Cleveland Williams was one of the most feared fighters in the division in the early 1960s at 6'3" and 210 pounds he had a knockout punch in either hand. Most fighters avoided the heavyweight from Houston because of his power. Liston knocked the "Big Cat" out on two occasions in the 2nd and 3rd rounds.

Zory Folley was a highly ranked fighter from the late 50s and early 60s. He fought Ali for the title in 1967 but was well past his prime at the time. Folley faced Liston in July of 1960 as the #1 contender by Ring Magazine and lost in a 3rd round knockout to Liston.

Nino Valdes faced Liston in August of 1959 as the #2 contender for Patterson's title only to lose to Liston in a 3rd round knockout.

Wayne Bethea lost in a 1st round knockout in 1958 when he was ranked in the top ten.

Mike DeJohn lost to Liston in 1959 in a 6th round knockout. DeJohn was a top ten fighter during a four year period from 1959 to 1962.

Henry Clark faced Liston on his comeback trail in 1968 and was listed as the #9 contender by The Ring Magazine. They fought in the Cow Palace in San Francisco in front of a national TV audience anxious to see Liston face a top ten fighter. Liston's jab was too much for the scrappy Californian and Liston knocked him out in the 7th round.

Leotis Martin was a top ten contender when he became the third fighter ever to defeat Liston in Las Vegas in December of 1969, once again in front of a national television audience. Martin was forced to retire with an eye injury a short time after the victory. It was very untimely for the tough Philadelphian because he had just become the #1 contender by Ring Magazine with his victory over Liston. Sonny dominated the fight early but at the age of 39 he ran out of gas.

Johnny Summerlin reached the top ten of the heavyweight division in 1956 but had lost to a young Sonny Liston in 1954 with only 5 fights to his credit. In Detroit, Summerlin's home town, Liston won an 8 round decision.

Chuck Wepner was the last opponent of Liston right before he died in December of 1970. The fight was stopped in the 9th round because Wepner's face was badly cut. Wepner needed over 120 stitches in his face after the fight. The Bayonne Bleeder would later go on and face Ali for the title in 1975 losing a 15 round decision.

Amos Lincoln was a former contender who was well past his prime when he lost to the aging Liston in a 2nd round knock in 1968.

Links To The Great Fighters of the Past-Liston's only real link to the past was his victory over Nino Valdes in 1959. Valdes had lost to Archie Moore in 1955 and was the #1 contender for Marciano's title until his loss to Moore. How much he had left in 1959 is hard to say but he was still the #2 contender for Patterson's title according to Ring Magazine. Archie Moore showed his great fighting ability when he floored Marciano in their 1955 title bout. The "mongoose" would eventually lose to Marciano with a 9th round knockout.

Best Match Up That Never Came About-I believe a fight with Ingermar Johansson would have been very popular at the time but it never came about. Liston fought Clay immediately after his second fight with Patterson and Johansson soon retired. Even a better and more interesting fight would have been against Ernie Terrell out of Chicago. Two of the top ten jabs in the history of the heavyweight division going against one another.

Was Sonny Liston one of the All-Time Greats- Yes, there can be no doubt as to Liston being one of the greatest fighters to ever lace on a pair of boxing gloves. At 6'2", 218 pounds with an incredible 84" reach and he was not only a powerful fighter but could take a punch. Liston's fists were so large that he needed special gloves to cover his enormous hands. His boxing ability separated him from some of the great punchers the ring has seen because Liston could punch with power and box. His most impressive skills was his left jab. He faced and defeated every top heavyweight in the world from 1959 to 1964 and dominated all but one, Muhammad Ali. His age will always be called into question because he really looked old in his two fights against Ali. His age was uncertain because of the numerous dates given by his wife, mother and himself. He was born as early as 1930 and as late as 1935. Liston was an impressive physical specimen who impressed everyone with his feats of strength he would display during training.

The mystery around Liston was with him even in death as his untimely death was ruled a suicide. He was an enigma.