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## 'Rumble in the Jungle' Turns 40

by Mike Richman



Referee Zack Clayton counts out George Foreman in round 8 of a title bout with Muhammad Ali, in Kinshasa, Zaire, Oct. 30, 1974.

Forty years ago, on October 30, 1974, two American heavyweights slugged it out in Zaire - today's Democratic Republic of Congo — in a historic boxing match.

"The Rumble in the Jungle," as the fight was advertised in the U.S. and abroad, matched former heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali against the reigning champ, George Foreman. Ali knocked Foreman out to regain the crown, which he had lost seven years earlier when the U.S. government accused him of draft-dodging and boxing officials revoked his license.

Ali had traveled a long road to reach this point. After a three-and-a-half-year exile from boxing, he was reinstated in 1970. But he lost a heavyweight title fight in 1971 to Joe Frazier, who later succumbed to Foreman.

American sportswriter Jerry Izenberg said the impact of Ali's victory in Zaire may be the greatest ever for a heavyweight bout. Ali's legacy as a fighter, he said, would have been different had he lost.

"It was a fairy tale," Izenberg said. "This guy was chasing a golden fleece and when he finally got within inches of it, someone else held the golden fleece. Frazier was out. It was fits and starts. It was like a morality play."

Ali made news not only by winning the fight, but also in the days leading up to it. Training in Zaire, he tried to endear himself to the country's people. He jogged with fans and spoke to the crowds, and he painted Foreman as the bad guy.



Street scene in downtown Kinshasa, Zaire, is photographed prior the the Muhammad Ali vs. George Foreman title bout scheduled in 1974.

### 'Ali Bomaye'

Zaire was a Belgian colony before gaining independence in 1960. Knowing that Zaireans disliked Belgians, Ali told the media that the Texas-born Foreman was actually Belgian. Fans started chanting "Ali Bomaye," or "Ali, kill him!"

"So Ali got off the plane, puts his hands in the air and he yells, 'I hereby declare George a Belgian,'" Izenberg said.

"Well, the place went nuts," he added. "Beyond that, then that chant started, and they asked the interpreter what that meant and he said it meant 'Ali, kill him.' For the rest of the time that he was there, he was leading those chants all over town and all over the compound that we lived in."

As he had done with other fighters, Ali taunted Foreman, using his wit and penchant for creative word choice.

"I said last night, I had a dream," he said. "When I got to Africa, I had one hell of a rumble. I had to beat Tarzan's behind first for claiming to be the king of the jungle. For this fight, I've wrestled with alligators, I've tussled with a whale. I'd handcuff lightning and put thunder in jail."

"You know I'm bad," Ali continued. "I have murdered a rock. I injured a stone, and I hospitalized a brick. I'm so bad I made medicine sick. I'm so fast, man, I can run through a hurricane and don't get wet. When George Foreman meets me, he'll pay his debt. I can drown a drink of water and kill a dead tree. Wait 'til you see Muhammad Ali."

Despite Ali's ploys, Foreman appeared invincible by the time of the fight. Only 25 and armed with a devastating array of punches, he had knocked out Joe Frazier and another feared heavyweight, Ken Norton, in the second round.

The 32-year-old Ali, on the other hand, was not the fighter who captivated the boxing world in the 1960s. His legs weren't as strong, and he didn't bob and weave like he once did.

But Ali thought Foreman had a stamina problem that he would try to exploit. He also took a tip from legendary boxing trainer Cus D'Amato.

Ali's long-time business manager, Gene Kilroy, recalled that advice: "Cus D'Amato told him [that] to fight George, 'You must throw your first punch with devastating tenacity,' which he did. 'The bully never knows who he offends, but everyone he ever offends, they never forget.'"



FILE - An Oct. 30, 1974 file photo shows Challenger Muhammad Ali watching as defending world champion George Foreman goes down to the canvas in the eighth round of their WBA/WBC championship match in Kinshasa, Zaire.

### Most lucrative purse

Ali and Foreman would be fighting for a purse of \$10 million, the largest ever at the time. Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko, eager for the publicity the fight would generate for his country, had put up the money. The promoter was Don King, soon to be a very popular name on the professional boxing circuit.

On October 30, 1974, about 60,000 people gathered at 20th of May Stadium to watch the 15-round bout. It began at 4 a.m. local time to accommodate prime-time viewing in the U.S.

The two fighters slugged it out early on. But in the second round, Ali began leaning against the ropes and taking punch after punch from Foreman, a tactic he would use throughout the match. Ali hoped his strategy, dubbed "rope-a-dope," would force Foreman to punch his way into exhaustion.

As the fight went on, Foreman looked arm weary and threw one wild punch after another. Kilroy remembered that, at that point, Ali sensed he had the champion right where he wanted him: "Round five, round six, uh, oh, and he told George in the ring that night, 'You're out of gas. You don't hit hard.'"

Finally, in the eighth round, to the thunderous roar of the crowd, Ali delivered a short right, then a left, then a jarring right to the jaw of Foreman. The wicked combination sent Foreman crumpling face down in the ring. He could not beat the eight count - and Ali was a champion again.

And by regaining the crown that eluded him for so many years, Muhammad Ali took a giant leap toward boxing immortality.

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<http://www.voanews.com/content/li-regained-title-in-historic-fight-40-years-ago/2503311.html>