

Spinks and Ali: the odds couple

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS — Beyond the super-hype and theater of tonight's Muhammad Ali-Leon Spinks II extravaganza, there is the beauty of a great betting fight.



Muhammad Ali

The odds have been floating between 2-1 and 3-1 in Ali's favor. But there is a strong feeling among many observers who have seen both fighters train, Spinks is being taken too cheaply by the betting public.

Debate among the "fancy" at hotel bars and around the gym has been lively. Some argue that after his performance when he won the heavyweight championship Feb. 15 and his superior condition right now, Spinks can't lose. Others say Ali is ready to fight this time and wasn't ready seven months ago.

Man to man, Ali and Spinks contrast sharply in several critical areas

and the differences add up to a gambler's delight.

Physical Advantages — Ali is an inch taller and about 20 pounds heavier than Spinks. Ali also has a four-inch longer reach. Being lighter and 11 years younger, the 25-year-old Spinks is quicker and more active.

Experience — Ali has been fighting professionally for 18 years and has a 55-3 record with 37 kayos. Spinks turned pro late after a career in the Marines and has a 7-0-1 record with five kayos.

Physical Condition — Ali, 36, is in the best shape he can get into at

his age. His muscle tone is good and his legs are strong. But his reflexes are going or gone. Spinks is streamlined raw power, not an ounce of fat on him. Spinks holds a large advantage in this area.

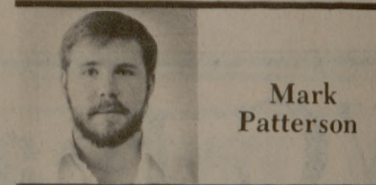
Mental Attitude — Ali appears in a more determined frame of mind than he has for any fight since Joe Frazier three years ago. Spinks says he's fighting to "hold on" to what he's got. Neither man is lacking in confidence.

Style — Ali is most effective when he jabs and throws combinations off the job. He'll try to circle Spinks, one way, then another, try to con-

Leon Spinks



fuse him and hurt him in flurries. Spinks will try to cut off Ali by trapping him in a corner and whaling away to his ribs and head and shoulders when Ali covers up. And, at this stage, Spinks' continual assault is the perfect way to beat Ali.



Mark Patterson

Battle of New Orleans

They've labeled it the Battle of New Orleans and fight fans around the world hope it is just that; a battle. Around the world sports fan will be tuning in the fight and watching perhaps the most well known man in the world at work.

Whether you agree or disagree with the things he says and does, you've got to like Muhammad Ali's style. And if you're a boxing fan, you can't help but thank the man for bringing boxing out of the shadows and raising it to the status level it has achieved through his career.

This is beginning to read like an obituary and rightly it should. Because in all probability the fight tonight will mark the passing of a legend, the end of an era. If the champ (and I use the term out of respect) regains the heavyweight title for the third time, and becomes the only fighter in history to do so, he has hinted that this title would be his last.

How serious can he be about retiring? That's hard to decide. Just thinking back a little over a year ago Ali announced his retirement only to sign for another series of bouts and title defenses. And millions of dollars a fight, who would want to step aside and spectate? But the talk of retiring was before Ali lost his title to the young Leon Spinks in February of this year. It was back when the champ had defeated everyone he had faced and still held the title. And, importantly, before Ali had celebrated his 36th birthday.

And on that fact alone, that Ali is 11 years Spinks' senior, many fight fans and analysts are picking the youngster to defend his title and send Ali to his resting place.

But what took him to the Olympic gold medal in the 1960 games and on to winning the heavyweight title on Feb. 25, 1964, against Sonny Liston on a seventh round knockout might still be the champ tonight. Tonight's contest might be just the stimulus needed to jar Ali into old form. Because for the first time in his fighting career Ali has something to prove to his public.

The last six times he's stepped into the ring to face a challenger, he has been described as old, slow and grossly out of shape. Even his nemesis, Howard Cosell, has begun to put down the champ because of his performances. Yet Ali has successfully defended his title against the likes of Jimmy Young, Ken Norton and Earnie Shavers. So he could hardly blame the champ for so lightly regarding the upstart Spinks (seven previous fights before the Ali match) when they met in Las Vegas. After all, Spinks had not even fought a 15 round fight before the Ali match. The champ had nothing to worry about.

Yet his carefree attitude cost him the title as Spinks relentlessly showered Ali with punches throughout the fight, ultimately winning the crown. That was exactly seven months ago tonight and since that time both fighters have learned a lot about themselves. Especially Ali.

"That man (Spinks) didn't belong in the same ring with me," said Ali reflecting on the last fight. "He just got lucky and caught me off guard."

"I didn't take him seriously. Nobody had heard of him before, and seven pro fights they said. That's what threw me off. I thought it was an easy four million dollars. I didn't have to work, he wasn't going to hurt me. I thought I could get the sucker, he wasn't nothing."

"Nigger was baaaaad. And crazy. He ain't got no sense. He don't care about nothing. And the man was so nothin' everybody expected me to beat him. So bad I didn't have to train for him. I didn't run. I was fat. I was tired. I went into the ring at 227 after I had dinner. I just laid in the ropes. I'm 220 now—pretty. Ain't I pretty? Ain't I ready? They was saying this trash, he's too old, he don't like to work, he can't stand the hard work."

"They forgot they're talking about the greatest of all time. I'm the greatest of all time. Last time Spinks fought an illusion. This time he got to fight Muhammad Ali."

If Ali can regain even a shadow of the fighter he used to be, the contest will be decided from the opening round. There never was a fighter with the skill and talent of Ali when in his prime. And even if that legendary boxer will defeat Spinks.

I think Ali will take the young Spinks and the fight won't go to the ninth round. I hope it doesn't. A decision might prompt a retirement. And that might interrupt some retirement plans.

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Bethea ready for Simpson
Houston defensive end Elvin Bethea said he wants to change nothing in his final meeting with "The Juice."
"The main thing when playing O.J. is to attack him as quickly as possible in the beginning of the game," Bethea said. "You've got to show him it's going to be a tough day. Then sometimes he's not so aggressive."

Previous meetings appear to label Bethea's reasoning as sound. In the five previous meetings Simpson has rushed for 209 yards on 75 carries, a 2.7 average. His best rushing game was 58 yards on 13 carries in 1969, the first year he faced the Oilers. Since then he has gained 26, 29, 57 and 3 yards.
To make things worse, Houston won all five previous meetings with Simpson and the Bills.
Bethea is the only Oiler to play in all five of those games, and he admitted that stopping Simpson has not been easy.
"When we've played him, it's always been a physical game. He never complains. I remember one time Zeke (Moore) twisted Simpson's ankle at the end of a play. O.J. didn't try to get up and fight Zeke. He came back just as hard on the next play," said Bethea.
Bethea, an 11-year veteran, and middle guard Curley Culp have made Houston's defense a formidable force in the NFL. After two games this season, Houston, 1-1, is in its usual place near the statistical top of the NFL defensively. The Oilers have allowed 233 yards per game.

SHEAR CLASS
A group of women sitting on bleachers, some holding hairbrushes. A hand icon with "GIG EM" is in the bottom right corner.

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