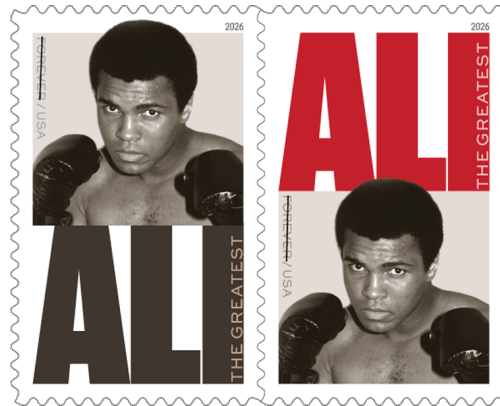


“I should be a postage stamp because that’s the only way I’ll ever get licked.”



Muhammad Ali ([/ɑːˈliː/ ah-LEE](#);^[3] born **Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr.**; January 17, 1942 – June 3, 2016) was an American [professional boxer](#) and activist.^[a] A global cultural icon, widely known by the nickname "**the Greatest**", he is often regarded as the greatest [heavyweight](#) boxer of all time. He held the [Ring](#) magazine heavyweight title from 1964 to 1970, was the undisputed champion from 1974 to 1978, and was the [WBA](#) and *Ring* heavyweight champion from 1978 to 1979. In 1999, he was named [Sportsman of the Century](#) by *Sports Illustrated* and the [Sports Personality of the Century](#) by the BBC.

Born in [Louisville, Kentucky](#), he began training as an amateur boxer at age 12. At 18, he won a gold medal in the [light heavyweight](#) division at the [1960 Summer Olympics](#) and turned professional later that year. He joined the [Nation of Islam](#) in the early 1960s, but later disavowed it in the mid-1970s. He won the world heavyweight championship, defeating [Sonny Liston](#) in [a major upset](#) on February 25, 1964, at age 22. During that year, he denounced his birth name as a "[slave name](#)" and formally changed his name to Muhammad Ali. In 1967, Ali refused to be drafted into the military, owing to [his religious beliefs](#) and ethical [opposition to the Vietnam War](#), and was found guilty of [draft evasion](#) and stripped of his boxing titles. He stayed out of prison while [appealing the decision](#) to the [Supreme Court](#), where his conviction was overturned in 1971. He did not fight for nearly four years and lost a period of peak performance as an athlete. Ali's actions as a [conscientious objector](#) to the Vietnam War made him an icon for the larger [counterculture of the 1960s](#) generation, and he became a prominent, high-profile figure of racial pride for [African Americans](#) during the [civil rights movement](#) and throughout his career.

Ali fought in several highly publicized boxing matches, including fights with Liston, [Joe Frazier](#) (including the [Fight of the Century](#), to that point the biggest boxing event and the [Thrilla in Manila](#)), and [George Foreman](#) in [The Rumble in the Jungle](#). At a time when many boxers let their managers do the talking, Ali became

renowned for his provocative and outlandish persona. He was famous for [trash talking](#), often [free-styled](#) with rhyme schemes and [spoken word](#) poetry, and is identified as a pioneer in [hip-hop](#). He often predicted in which round he would knock out his opponent. As a boxer, Ali was known for his unorthodox movement, footwork, head movement, and [rope-a-dope](#) technique, among others.

Outside boxing, Ali performed as a [spoken word](#) artist, releasing two studio albums: *I Am the Greatest!* (1963) and *The Adventures of Ali and His Gang vs. Mr. Tooth Decay* (1976). Both albums received [Grammy Award](#) nominations. He also featured as an actor and writer, releasing two autobiographies. Ali retired from boxing in 1981 and focused on religion, philanthropy, and activism. In 1984, he made public his diagnosis of [Parkinson's syndrome](#), which some reports attributed to boxing-related injuries, though he and his specialist physicians disputed this. He remained an active public figure, but in his later years made fewer public appearances as his condition worsened, and was cared for by his family.