

Joe Louis

Joseph Louis Barrow was born on a farm near Lafayette, Alabama on May 13, 1914 to the sharecroppers Munroe and Lillie Barrow. He was the seventh of eight children. Joe's father was committed to a mental hospital shortly after he was born and his mother married another sharecropper.

In 1924 Joe's stepfather moved the family to Detroit in search of work. Joe did poorly in the Detroit school system due to a lack of decent schooling while living in the south. He lost interest in school and sought other activities to occupy his time. Joe was fascinated with boxing and boxers and he began hanging around the local gyms. He quit school at the age of 17 and began training to become a boxer. Joe lost his first amateur bout in 1931, but over the next three years he accumulated an impressive string of victories. He won an Amateur National Light Heavyweight title in 1934 and decided to become a professional.

Joe's first manager's were John Roxborough and Julian Black and his trainer was Jack Blackburn, a former lightweight boxer. Blackburn taught Joe his flatfooted shuffle which he used throughout the rest of his career. Joe dropped Barrow from his name at the request of his managers and henceforth was known as Joe Louis.

Joe fought his first professional fight on July 4, 1934 and one year later he knocked out former heavyweight champion [Primo Carnera](#). Joe sustained his first professional loss against the Heavyweight champion [Max Schmeling](#) in 1936.

Joe became the heavyweight champion of the world on June 22, 1937 when he knocked out [James J. Braddock](#) in 8 rounds and in a rematch with [Max Schmeling](#), Joe knocked him out in the first round. Joe held the title for 12 years, the longest in the history of the heavyweight division. During his reign, Joe beat six former or future heavyweight champions.

Joe joined the Army in 1942 and fought in over 100 exhibition matches. He resumed his career in 1946 after leaving the service and in 1947 beat [Jersey Joe Walcott](#) in a split decision contest.

Joe retired in 1949 as the undefeated heavyweight champion, however on September 27, 1950 he attempted a comeback against [Ezzard Charles](#) and lost in a 15 round decision. In Joe's last fight on October 26, 1951 he was knocked out in eight rounds by future heavyweight champion [Rocky Marciano](#).

Joe's professional career spanned 14 years. He won 68 of 71 bouts, 54 by knockouts. He successfully defended his title 25 times.

Joe was one of the greatest boxers that ever lived, but throughout his life he mismanaged his financial affairs. Through a combination of high living, handing out money freely, and crooked managers, Joe was broke when he retired. He tried his hand unsuccessfully at several enterprises including a fast food chain and near the end of his life he worked as a greeter for Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas.

Joe Louis died on April 12, 1981 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Sources:

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

[Encyclopedia Africana](#)

International Boxing Hall of Fame