

MATCH REPORT

Sonny Liston Vs Cassius Clay

February 25th 1964

What a match! History has been made. The critics are confounded.

The first surprise to many was how much taller Clay is than Liston. They had not realised. Liston also weighed in at several pounds over his prime boxing weight, making Clay look leaner in comparison.

Liston charged Clay at the opening bell however Clay is fast and moves lightly. He slipped most of Liston's heavy punches easily. This made Liston look lumbering and awkward and gave Clay the confidence to start punching. His left jab hit successive targets. Some say this was the worst round of Liston's whole fighting career.

By round three it looked as if Clay has taken control of the fight. At 30 seconds he hit Liston's right eye, opening up a cut that eventually needed 8 stitches to close. This is the first time in his career Liston has been cut.

In the third round, Clay began to take control of the fight. At about 30 seconds into the round, he hit Liston with several combinations, causing a bruise under Liston's right eye and a cut under his left, which eventually required eight stitches to close. It was the first time in his career that Liston had been cut. Clay seemed exhausted by the end of the round and Liston landed some punishing hits to Clay's body. However at the end of the round Clay shouted, 'you big sucka, I got you now'.¹

In the net break between rounds Clay complained that his eye was burning. His trainer put his little finger in Clay's eye and reported feeling something burning. Was Clay spiked with some substance?

Clay could only see an outline of Liston in the net round. But he circled and avoided Liston constantly, and survived the round.

By the sixth round his sight had cleared. He had the strength to land punches repeatedly on Liston. By the 7th round Liston indicated he was finished with the fight by spitting out his mouth guard. Well, this is what some think. Others think Liston spat it out in disgust, when he realised Clay was the better fighter.

Clay was the first to notice Liston's mouth guard. He danced to the middle of the ring with his arms raised, dancing the jig! This has been named the "Ali Shuffle". Liston did indeed fail to stand up and fight for the seventh round, and Clay was declared the winner by technical knockout.

In this history-defining moment, Clay called out to the sportswriters, "Eat your words!.... I'm the greatest!..... I shook up the world!" The Louisville Lip certainly did that.

¹ ref Wikipedia, note 23]. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ali_vs._Sonny_Liston