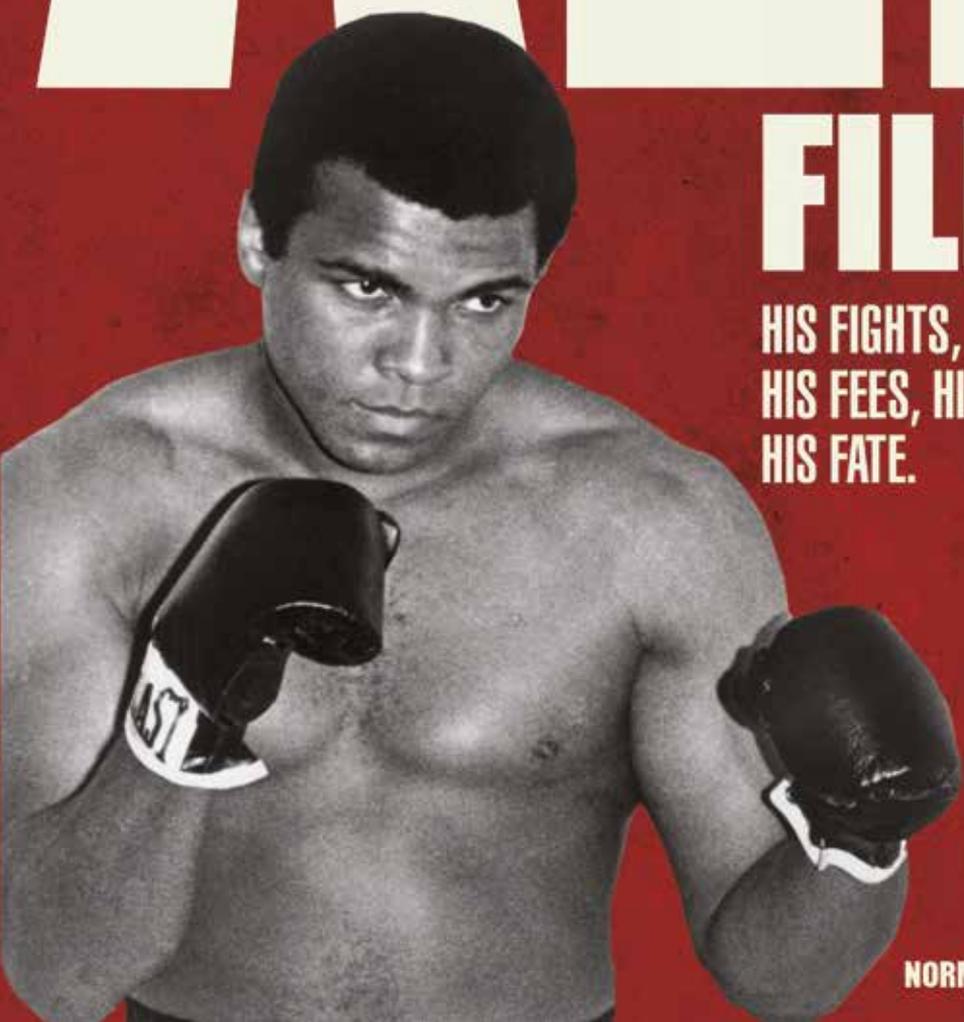


**THE**

**ALI**

**FILES**

**HIS FIGHTS, HIS FOES,  
HIS FEES, HIS FEATS,  
HIS FATE.**



**NORMAN GILLER**

**THE  
ALI  
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# Contents

|                            |        |     |
|----------------------------|--------|-----|
| Author's Acknowledgements  |        | 8   |
| Seconds Out: Norman Giller |        | 9   |
| 1 Tunney Hunsaker          | WPTS6  | 11  |
| 2 Herb Siler               | WRSF4  | 14  |
| 3 Tony Esperti             | WRSF3  | 17  |
| 4 Jim Robinson             | WKO1   | 20  |
| 5 Donnie Fleeman           | WRET6  | 23  |
| 6 LaMar Clark              | WKO2   | 26  |
| 7 Duke Sabedong            | WPTS10 | 29  |
| 8 Alonzo Johnson           | WPTS10 | 32  |
| 9 Alex Miteff              | WRSF6  | 35  |
| 10 Willi Besmanoff         | WRSF7  | 38  |
| 11 Sonny Banks             | WRSF4  | 41  |
| 12 Don Warner              | WRSF4  | 44  |
| 13 George Logan            | WRSF4  | 47  |
| 14 Billy Daniels           | WRSF7  | 50  |
| 15 Alejandro Lavorante     | WRSF5  | 53  |
| 16 Archie Moore            | WRSF4  | 56  |
| 17 Charlie Powell          | WKO3   | 59  |
| 18 Doug Jones              | WPTS10 | 62  |
| 19 Henry Cooper            | WRSF5  | 65  |
| 20 Sonny Liston            | WRET7  | 71  |
| 21 Sonny Liston            | WKO1   | 77  |
| 22 Floyd Patterson         | WRSF12 | 81  |
| 23 George Chuvalo          | WPTS15 | 85  |
| 24 Henry Cooper            | WRSF6  | 88  |
| 25 Brian London            | WKO3   | 92  |
| 26 Karl Mildenerger        | WRSF12 | 95  |
| 27 Cleveland Williams      | WRSF3  | 98  |
| 28 Ernie Terrell           | WPTS15 | 101 |
| 29 Zora Folley             | WKO7   | 105 |
| 30 Jerry Quarry            | WRSF3  | 108 |
| 31 Oscar Bonavena          | WRSF15 | 111 |

|    |                                 |        |     |
|----|---------------------------------|--------|-----|
| 32 | Joe Frazier                     | LPTS15 | 114 |
| 33 | Jimmy Ellis                     | WRSF12 | 118 |
| 34 | Buster Mathis                   | WPTS12 | 121 |
| 35 | Jurgen Blin                     | WKO7   | 124 |
| 36 | Mac Foster                      | WPTS15 | 127 |
| 37 | George Chuvalo                  | WPTS12 | 130 |
| 38 | Jerry Quarry                    | WRSF7  | 133 |
| 39 | Alvin 'Blue' Lewis              | WRSF11 | 136 |
| 40 | Floyd Patterson                 | WRSF7  | 139 |
| 41 | Bob Foster                      | WKO8   | 142 |
| 42 | Joe Bugner                      | WPTS12 | 145 |
| 43 | Ken Norton                      | LPTS12 | 148 |
| 44 | Ken Norton                      | WPTS12 | 151 |
| 45 | Rudi Lubbers                    | WPTS12 | 154 |
| 46 | Joe Frazier                     | WPTS12 | 157 |
| 47 | George Foreman                  | WKO8   | 160 |
| 48 | Chuck Wepner                    | WRSF15 | 164 |
| 49 | Ron Lyle                        | WRSF11 | 167 |
| 50 | Joe Bugner                      | WPTS15 | 170 |
| 51 | Joe Frazier                     | WRD14  | 173 |
| 52 | Jean-Pierre Coopman             | WKO5   | 179 |
| 53 | Jimmy Young                     | WPTS15 | 182 |
| 54 | Richard Dunn                    | WRSF5  | 185 |
| 55 | Ken Norton                      | WPTS15 | 190 |
| 56 | Alfredo Evangelista             | WPTS15 | 193 |
| 57 | Earnie Shavers                  | WPTS15 | 196 |
| 58 | Leon Spinks                     | LPTS15 | 199 |
| 59 | Leon Spinks                     | WPTS15 | 202 |
| 60 | Larry Holmes                    | LRET10 | 206 |
| 61 | Trevor Berbick                  | LPTS10 | 209 |
|    | Ali Facts                       |        | 212 |
|    | The Final Round                 |        | 217 |
|    | Previous books by Norman Giller |        | 223 |

## Seconds Out: Norman Giller

**T**HIS book is for all Aliphiles. It is more than 30 years since Muhammad Ali last threw a punch, yet he remains unquestionably the best-known sportsman of all time. There is a generation growing up who only know the legend of Ali, never saw him fight and yet are in awe of him and his fantastic fistic feats. Here in *The Ali Files*, I will give the facts behind the fable.

I was lucky enough to work as a publicist with Ali on some of his European fights, and got to know him as a friend as well as a fighter. In my corner to help me tell the story of The Greatest I have gathered many eyewitnesses of the Ali career – opponents, referees, his trainers, sparring partners, celebrity fans and ringside reporters, who were there as observers of his astonishing adventures in and out of the ring.

As a reporter for the trade paper *Boxing News* in the late 1950s I was aware before most people outside the United States that in Louisville, Kentucky, the descendant of a slave – Cassius Marcellus Clay – was emerging as an exceptional amateur boxer. He won the gold medal in the 1960 Rome Olympics to launch a career that saw him transcend the world of boxing to become, arguably, the most famous and feted man on the planet – and also with some, the most reviled of sportsmen.

The Muhammad Ali I got to know was a softly-spoken, modest gentleman, who became an actor of Olivier class if a microphone or camera came into range. He would switch to the public Ali, loudly, brashly selling seats and making life easy for headline-hunting, deadline-chasing newspapermen and interviewers. He was a born

## THE ALI FILES

publicist, yet away from the camera was quiet and respectful, and with a mind hungry for knowledge.

Sadly, he got caught up in the poison of politics and what some would describe as the blind bigotry of religion. But, 50 years on from taking the world title from the 'big, bad bear' Sonny Liston, Ali was a contented man as he battled ill health with the same bravery and resilience he used to show in the ring when he was justifiably known as, simply, 'The Greatest'.

I have chosen Ali as the subject for the 99th book with which I have stupefied the great reading public because he is the most dynamic personality I have met in my 55-plus years scratching a living as a sportswriter. I have been lucky to have been in the company of many of the finest sports champions of post-war times, and Ali stands head and shoulders above them all as the most interesting and entertaining.

Millions of words have been written about the ringmaster but few books have given total concentration to each of his 61 professional contests. On the following pages I intend to give an accurate account of each of those fights that turned him into a sporting legend. And to give the book a fascinating twist I reveal what has happened to each of Ali's opponents since they took on The Greatest. You will be surprised, often shocked, by some of the revelations.

In the 1990s I worked with leading television sports producer Neil Duncanson on a TV series commissioned by C4. It was called *Crown of Thorns* and was a history of world heavyweight champions, from John L. Sullivan through to the then title-holder Evander Holyfield. We had just got the Muhammad Ali interviews and data into our file when the series was cancelled following a death in the ring. The project survived only in book form. Now, as a special tribute to The Greatest, I can share with you the facts and figures we could not reveal to the viewers. Here, fight by fight, are *The Ali Files*.

Seconds out...come out writing.



## **Tunney Hunsaker (USA)**

**Venue: Freedom Hall, Louisville**

**29 October 1960**

**Clay 192lb, Hunsaker 186lb**

**Clay WPTS6**

**(Clay purse: \$2,000)**

**C**ASSIUS MARCELLUS CLAY, grandson of a slave, was ‘owned’ by a syndicate of 11 wealthy Kentucky businessmen when he climbed into the ring for his professional debut. Waiting in the opposite corner, experienced but limited Tunney Hunsaker, a 30-year-old journeyman who, away from boxing, was a West Virginian police chief.

Clay was covered in blood at the end of his first fight in the paid ranks – his opponent’s blood. Outclassed Hunsaker, pounded for six one-sided rounds by the fleet-footed Cassius, was bleeding profusely from his nose and a cut over his left eye. The 6,180 spectators sensed they were in on the start of something special as their local hero showed off with quick combination punches that continually rocked Hunsaker back on his heels.

Judge Sid Baer scored the fight 30-24 in Clay’s favour, judge Walter Beck had it 30-23, and referee Paul Matchuny marked it as a runaway 30-19 for the Kentucky kid. At the suggestion of Clay, proceeds from the fight went to the local Kosair hospital

## THE ALI FILES

for disabled children. Just 55 days earlier he had written his name into Olympic history by winning the gold medal in the light-heavyweight division in the Rome Games. They were the Olympics that Ali pleaded to miss!

He was petrified of flying, and asked the selectors to leave him out of the team after he had won back-to-back national Golden Gloves titles and the Olympic trials. The 18-year-old Clay, born in Louisville, Kentucky, on 17 January 1942, was finally persuaded to get aboard the Rome-bound plane, but only on the understanding he could wear a parachute. Here was early evidence that the brash young man who talked such a good fight was – in Monty Python lingo – ‘something completely different’.

Once on terra firma, Clay proved himself a larger than life character in the Olympic Village and he shook hands with so many fellow competitors before and after his contests that he was nicknamed ‘The Mayor’.

Clay was in huge demand by professional promoters after an amateur career in which he won 100 of 108 bouts. He was already showing signs of bitterness after being refused service in a whites-only restaurant, and he claimed he threw his Olympic gold medal into the Ohio River in protest. Many years later his faithful photographer Howard Bingham, who knew him better than anybody, told me, ‘That was nonsense. The champ made it up just to show his disgust at his treatment. The truth is he lost his medal and he was given a replacement after lighting the flame at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.’

The syndicate of millionaire moguls – the Louisville Sponsoring Group – paid Clay an up-front \$18,000 to box under their banner, and dictated that he should join the training camp run by former world light-heavyweight boxing master Archie Moore. But Cassius did not feel comfortable under Moore’s tutelage – particularly when he ordered him to sweep the gym floor – and he took off for Miami, where he asked hugely experienced trainer Angelo Dundee to look after him. It was the start of a 21-year partnership.

## TUNNEY HUNSAKER

**CLAY AFTER-FIGHT QUOTE**, 'That was the heaviest I've ever been in the ring, so I wasn't quite as fast as usual, but I was still too quick for Hunsaker. He could not live with me. I took one good body shot that made me catch my breath, but it was the only time he connected with any punch of note. I found it comfortable going six rounds, and am happy to step up to ten rounds as soon as the promoters want it. There's a lot for me to learn, but I'm confident I'll be in a challenging position for the world title before I'm 21.'

**EYEWITNESS - TUNNEY HUNSAKER**, 'Clay is incredibly good for an 18-year-old, and I'll be amazed if he doesn't go all the way. You don't win an Olympic gold medal unless you have something special. He didn't hurt me, but he's like lightning and I couldn't stop all the leather coming my way. There are still some amateurish things about him and he's living dangerously holding his hands so low. But I look forward to watching his progress and can always say I was first to fight him as a pro.'

**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO TUNNEY HUNSAKER?** Two years after fighting Clay, Hunsaker was rushed to hospital with a brain injury following a knockout defeat. He was in a coma for nine days and never fully recovered. He passed on in 2005 aged 74, suffering from Alzheimer's. A Sunday school teacher and the youngest ever local police chief at 27, he was much admired in his home state and there is a Tunney Hunsaker Bridge named in his honour in West Virginia.



## **Herb Siler (USA)**

**Venue: Miami Beach  
27 December 1960  
Clay 193lb, Siler 191lb  
Clay WRSF4  
(Clay purse: \$200)**

**T**HIS was Clay's first contest with Angelo Dundee in his corner, and he did everything to order on a bill topped by Dundee's future world light-heavyweight champion Willie Pastrano. He sparred dozens of rounds with Pastrano and learned the art of not getting hit from one of the finest ever exponents of defensive boxing.

Herb Siler, the fighter selected as Clay's second opponent, was as much a novice at professional boxing as the Olympic champion. Seven years older, he had come late into the fight game and was having his third contest when he climbed into the ring to face the hottest young prospect in the world.

Born in Alabama, Siler was based in Miami and he was less than pleased when the posters for the fight went up showing him billed as Herb Silver.

By the time the scheduled eight round fight was halfway through he was so dazed and disoriented that he hardly knew his own name.

## HERB SILER

Nicknamed 'Bowlegs' because of his cowboy-style stance, Siler tried to take the fight to Clay but found himself hitting thin air as the Louisville fighter revealed the flashy footwork that would become such an important part of his armoury.

Siler was out of his depth, and continually had his head knocked back by Clay's fast fists and it was quickly obvious the fight would not go the distance. A series of left jabs and then a follow-through right cross had Siler hanging on in the third round, and the bell saved him from further punishment as an over-enthusiastic Clay went all out for a stoppage. Nobody could question Siler's bravery and determination, but he was up against a phenomenally talented opponent who oozed confidence and class.

As the one-way traffic continued, the referee came to Siler's rescue in the fourth round after a fusillade of combination punches from long range had sent him reeling against the ropes.

Clay showered quickly so that he could be at ringside to watch his new friend and guru Pastrano, who in the top-of-the-bill contest lost a world title eliminator on points to Jesse Bowdry. It was a huge form shock and taught the young Clay that nothing could ever be taken for granted in boxing.

**CLAY AFTER-FIGHT QUOTE**, 'I was astonished that Willie got beaten. Having sparred with him, I was convinced he would be too clever for Bowdry. I have learned lots of defensive tricks from him. He is a master. It was a real eye-opener for me when he lost, and now I know that professional boxing is going to take every ounce of my concentration if I'm gonna meet my goals. Siler gave me no trouble at all, but he's had less ring experience than me so I just did what was expected of me. It was great having Angelo Dundee in my corner. He is such a wise man, who knows all the tricks of the trade - the king of trainers, and I'm going to become the king of heavyweights.'

**EYEWITNESS - ANGELO DUNDEE**, 'Cassius and I are getting on famously. He sure can jaw, but he is an intelligent young man

## THE ALI FILES

who also knows when it's right to listen. We have got each other's respect. He is a quick learner and we will soon iron out the few faults he has brought with him from the amateurs. His feet are as fast as his fists, and we need to get him to plant his feet for when he throws his big bombs.

'Yes, he can be cocky, arrogant even, but it's no use being a shrinking violet in this business. He could do with a few more pounds on that great frame of his, and we are working on that. I've been around the fight trade for a few years now and I have not seen a better heavyweight prospect. My job is to make sure he reaches his potential. He has the talent, he has the hunger and he has the ammunition. Watch this space.'

**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HERB SILER?** After retiring from the ring following a 27-fight career in which he won 15 contests, Siler's life went into a nosedive. He was sent to prison for seven years on a manslaughter charge in 1972 after shooting a girlfriend. Blaming alcoholism for his problems, he found God while he was locked up and became a sober, devout Christian. He was running his own construction business when he died in 1985 aged 66. His grandson, Brandon Siler, was a top NFL linebacker.