

SPORTS

Hauser lets us know Ali is still great

FROM THE SIDELINES



BY ASHLEY CONKLIN

Twenty-seven years ago, Cassius Clay, now known as Muhammad Ali, "shook up the world" when he beat Sonny Liston for the heavyweight championship of the world.

In his new book, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, Thomas Hauser does some shaking up of his own. The book, written with Ali's cooperation, is the first one that completely delves into the Ali persona from his rise to the heavyweight championship to what he is today.

Although the book is written with Ali's cooperation, it is not a self-promoting gospel espoused by the former champion. Instead, it's an in-depth look at Ali's life presented with interviews from those who knew him best.

But more importantly, Hauser's book looks at how Ali, now supposedly in ill-health, is living day-to-day.

Ali's health, Hauser says, is not as bad as some think. He does have Parkinsonism, or Parkinson's Syndrome, but not the more threatening Parkinson's disease. Although Ali's poor health resulted from boxing, he does not suffer from what is commonly referred to as punch drunkenness, as many other fighters do.

In fact, Ali is really quite healthy. He does have to take medication and his voice is very soft and sometimes difficult to understand. But Ali is "living at 90 percent of what would be normal for him without his physical problem."

Ali continues to travel extensively around the world and actually lives a very hectic life, although it now seems relaxed compared to the days when he was the king of the ring.

Hauser does a terrific job of putting Ali in perspective. Not only does Hauser discuss Ali's

place in history in the ring but more importantly his place out of the ring.

Unlike other celebrities, Ali has never tried to shelter himself from the public where he has probably had a greater following than any other athlete ever put on Earth. Consider that when he fought George Foreman in Zaire in 1974, Ali would go into African villages that had no electricity or running water let alone a television set. Yet little children would swarm to Ali, chanting his name over and over as if he were a god.

God-like may be the best way to describe Ali, which might seem ironic in light of the Islamic beliefs he has held since joining Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslim movement in the '60s.

What impressed me the most about Ali is his religion convictions. Ali didn't use his religion just as a means of not serving in the Vietnam War. His devotion to his religion was actually more important than his boxing career. Unlike some, who use religion merely as a sham, Ali is true to the tenets of his religion.

Ali was more than just a great heavyweight boxer. He was the epitome of the changing times in the '60s and perhaps more important than Martin Luther King Jr. in giving blacks hope for rights and liberties previously denied.

Like other boxers, Ali did last too long in the ring, and it's sad remembering defeats to Larry Holmes and Trevor Berbick — two men who should never have even been allowed in the ring with a champ like Ali.

It's easy to fault him for hanging on too long. But in his day, Ali was truly the greatest. I wish I could have been around then to cover the champ. He was anything but dull and it's hard to imagine having more fun than being around Ali when he was preparing for a fight.

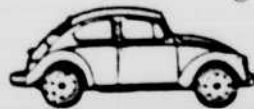
Thankfully, Hauser lets us know that as time goes by, Ali is still Ali. Nothing could be greater than that.



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