

28 Days of Black Excellence - Muhammad Ali



Muhammad Ali was a heavyweight boxing champion, philanthropist, and a social activist who was considered to be one of the greatest athletes of the 20th century. Ali was born on January 17, 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky, and was given the name Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. As a young boy, Clay was tough because he grew up in a time of segregation and racial discrimination. At 12 years old, he picked up boxing after a thief stole his bike and he wanted to be able to fight. Five years after his first amateur win in 1954, Clay won the National Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions in 1959. Four years after winning the light heavyweight Olympic gold medal in 1960, Clay converted to Islam and called himself Muhammad Ali, and was drafted into the military seven years later. He refused to serve due to his religious beliefs preventing him from fighting. He was arrested for committing a felony and was sentenced to five years in prison. His world title and boxing license were taken away from him, but he fought to appeal his conviction. After missing three years, Ali eventually returned to boxing in 1970 and his conviction was overturned a year later.

By his retirement at 39 years old, Ali had a record of 56 wins, 5 losses, 37 knockouts and he was a three-time heavyweight champion. His most famous quote, “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. The eye can’t hit what the eye can’t see,” arose from his unique fighting style that earned him the title “World’s Greatest”. In 1984, Ali announced that he was suffering from Parkinson’s disease and spinal stenosis. Despite his condition, Ali continued to remain active by raising funds for the Muhammad Ali Parkinson Center, the Special Olympics, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and many more organizations. He also traveled to developing countries to help those in need, earning him the title of the United Nations Messenger of Peace. In 2005, Ali received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and in 2009 he was given the President’s Award from the

NAACP because of his efforts in public service. After battling various diseases, the boxing legend died in 2015.