

SPORTING LEGENDS: ROCKY MARCIANO

SPORT: BOXING

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1947 - 1960

Rocco Francis Marchegiano (September 1, 1923 - August 31, 1969), better known as Rocky Marciano, was a boxer who holds the distinction of being the only heavyweight champion to retire undefeated and was commonly known as the "Brockton Blockbuster."

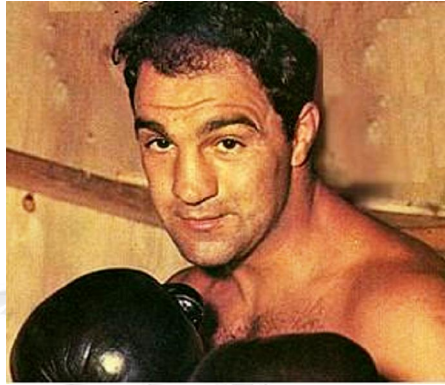


On March 17, 1947, Rocky finally stepped into the ring as a professional competitor for the first time. That night, he beat Lee Epperson by a knockout in three rounds. He won all his first sixteen bouts by knockout, all but one before the fourth round, and nine before the first round was over. On May 23, 1949, Don Mogard became the first boxer to last the distance with *The Rock*, but Rocky won by decision.

He won three more by knockout, and then he met Ted Lowry, who, according to many scribes and witnesses, probably managed to take three or four of the ten rounds away from Rocky. Nevertheless, Rocky kept his winning streak alive by beating Lowry by decision. Four more knockout wins followed, and then another hard-fought ten-round decision victory, over his future world title challenger Roland LaStarza. He won three more knockouts in a row before a rematch with Lowry. Marciano again won, by unanimous decision.

After that, he won four more by knockout and, after a win in six over Red Applegate, he was showcased on national TV for the first time, when he knocked out Rex Layne in six rounds on July 12, 1951. One more win, and he was again on national TV, this time against Joe Louis.

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Marciano's 49-fight pro winning streak has still yet to be beaten in modern times.

In Louis' last career bout, Marciano won by a knockout in the eighth round. Louis had always been a hero to Rocky. He said one of his fondest memories as a youth was listening to Louis's bouts on the radio. He felt so bad having to kyo his idol that he broke down and wept in his dressing room after the fight. Marciano later told a reporter, "If I had fought Joe ten years ago, he could have beat me with his eyes closed".

After that series of wins, Marciano was ranked as a Heavyweight. After four more wins, including victories over Lee Savold and Harry Matthews, Marciano faced world Heavyweight champion Jersey Joe Walcott in Philadelphia on September 23, 1952. After being dropped in round one, Marciano got up and knocked Walcott out in the thirteenth round, becoming the World's Heavyweight Champion. A rematch was fought one year later and, in Marciano's first title defense, he retained the title with a first-round knockout of Walcott.

Next, it was LaStarza's turn to challenge Marciano, and after building a small lead on the judges' scorecards all the way to the middle rounds, LaStarza was knocked out in eleven by the champion. Then came former world Heavyweight champion Ezzard Charles, who Marciano beat by a decision in their first bout.

Ezzard Charles was the only man to ever last fifteen rounds against Marciano and the champ later praised him as one of the toughest men he ever fought in his life. After having his nose split in round six of the rematch, Marciano retained the title with an eighth-round knockout win.

Then Marciano met British and European champion Don Cocknell, beat him in nine rounds, and in his last bout, Marciano got up off the canvas in round two to retain his title by a knockout in nine against the equally-legendary Light-Heavyweight Champion of the World, Archie Moore.

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Marciano's devastating right-hand lead was the downfall of many opponents.

Marciano managed his money well after his retirement, and he lived a comfortable life for the rest of his days. He hosted a weekly boxing show on TV, and lived in a mansion. Rumors that one of his trainers, Al Weill, had connections to the mafia surfaced later and, according to the rumors, Rocky hated the fact Weill 'was connected'.

Marciano was known for being very kind and generous with friends and charitable causes. He never forgot his poor background and maintained a fierce pride in his Italian ancestry. Marciano became a trouble shooting referee in professional wrestling after his boxing retirement.

In 1969, Rocky was a passenger in a small private plane going to Des Moines, Iowa. It was at night and bad weather set in. The pilot tried to set the plane down at a small airfield outside Newton, Iowa, but hit a tree two miles short of the runway. Rocky Marciano, another passenger, and the pilot, were all killed.

Rocky had a record of 49-0 with 43 knockout wins. He was only knocked down to the canvas twice - for a total of seven seconds of counting - in his entire professional career. On both occasions he returned to KO his opponent. Only Gene Tunney was knocked down fewer times (once - in the famous Long Count Fight).

Marciano, like rivals Louis, Walcott, and Moore, is a member of the International Boxing Hall Of Fame. Other awards which Marciano won included the Hickok Belt for top professional athlete of the year 1952.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Rocky Marciano was a true sporting legend.

His undefeated pro record of 49 heavyweight fights remains unbeaten to this day, and is unlikely to be beaten for a very long time, if ever.

He was an inspiration, not only to Italian-Americans, but also to boxing fans all around the world.

He could dish out the heavy shots, but he was also incredibly durable as well.

In his younger days, his endurance seemed endless, and kept moving forward at every opportunity. This tactic wore down his opponents both mentally and physically.

A gentleman outside the ring as well, it is unfortunate that Marciano's life was cruelly cut short by that fateful plane trip in 1969.

Nonetheless, his achievements are still remembered to this day, and that means he will never be forgotten.



Rocky Marciano could hit hard, achieving a total of 43 KOs during his pro career.