

## SPORTING LEGENDS: SUGAR RAY ROBINSON

**SPORT: BOXING**

**COMPETITIVE ERA: 1940 - 1965**

Walker Smith Jr. (May 3, 1921 - April 12, 1989), better known in the boxing world as *Sugar Ray Robinson*, was a boxer who was a native of Detroit, Michigan.



Robinson is the holder of many boxing records, including the one for the most times being a champion in a division, when he won the world Middleweight division title 5 times. He also won the world Welterweight title once.

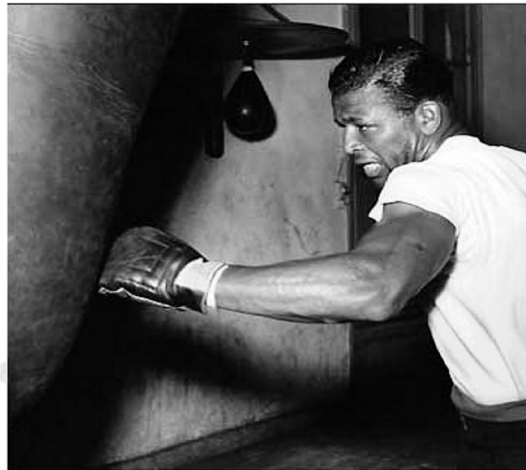
Robinson is regarded by many boxing fans and critics as the best boxer of all time. His supporters argue that while Muhammad Ali did more for the sport on a social scale, Robinson had a better style. Ali has said without hesitation many times that he feels that Robinson is the greatest fighter of all time, Ali simply considers himself to be the greatest Heavyweight Champion.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Robinson appeared several times on the cover of Ring Magazine, and he joined the Army for some time.

Robinson made his debut in 1940, knocking out Joe Eschevarria in 2 rounds. He built a record of 40 wins and 0 losses before facing Jake LaMotta, in a 10 round bout. The bout, which was portrayed in the Hollywood movie *Raging Bull* (which was based on LaMotta's life), was the second of six fights between these opponents, and LaMotta dropped Robinson, eventually beating him by decision.

Robinson had won their first bout and would go on to win the next four. Between his debut fight and the second LaMotta bout, Robinson had also beaten former world champions Sammy Angott, Fritzie Zivic and Marty Servo.

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Robinson trained at an extremely high intensity during his younger days.

The LaMotta loss occurred on February of 1943, and later that year, he faced LaMotta again, beating him on points, and three time world champion Henry Armstrong, also a points victim to Robinson.

After his first career loss, he made 28 fights before challenging for his first world title, winning 27 and drawing one, versus Jose Basora of Puerto Rico. Then, on December 20, 1946, he and Tommy Bell were matched in New York, New York, for the vacant world's Welterweight title. Robinson became a world champion by beating Bell by a 15 round decision.

In 1947, he toured the United States, boxing 10 times in different locations from Miami to Los Angeles, but only one of them was a world title defense. In 1948, he fought five more times, but once again, with only one defense. However, among the fighters he defeated in non title bouts was another former world champion, Cuba's Kid Gavilan.

In 1949, he boxed 16 times, including 12 sanctioned bouts (in which he went 11-0-1) and four exhibition fights. His only defense that year was against Gavilan, who was once again beaten on points, this time over the championship distance of 15 rounds. The only boxer to come out of the ring without a defeat after fighting Robinson that year was Henry Brimm, who boxed him to a 10 round draw in Buffalo.

In 1950, Robinson made 19 fights, including 3 defending his title. Among the boxers he defeated that time were Basora and Carl Olson, a world Middleweight champion whom Robinson would meet and beat four times during his career. The Basora rematch set a record that would stand for a very long time: It was the fastest knockout ever in a world title fight, lasting only 50 seconds. That record stood for 38 years.

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Robinson's career consisted of an incredible 200 fights.

In 1951, four events that became very important in his life happened: among his 12 bouts that year, three fights marked his career, and he began a tour of Europe. On February 14, he and LaMotta met for the sixth time, in a fight that would become known as boxing's version of *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre*.

This bout was also portrayed in *The Raging Bull*, and Robinson conquered the world's Middleweight title for the first time, with a 13 round technical knockout win. After that, he embarked on his European tour, which would take him to Paris, Zürich, Antwerp, Liège, Berlin, Turin and London among other places. During his fight in Berlin, versus Gerhard Hecht, he was declared a loser after hitting his opponent on the kidneys, but this was later changed and the fight declared a no-contest. And in London, he lost the world Middleweight title to Randy Turpin.

Three months later, he beat Turpin in a New York rematch to recover the title, on a tenth round knockout. That would be the last fight for him that year. Then in 1952, he met Olson again, knocking him out once again, and then he retained his title with a three round knockout of Rocky Graziano, another former world champ.

In his last fight that year, he challenged world Light Heavyweight champion Joey Maxim for the title at Yankee Stadium, and, in a day where the outside heat and the ring's lights combined to have a 140 degree heat inside the ring, Robinson built a points lead, but collapsed at the end of round 13 and failed to answer the bell for the next round, suffering his only knockout defeat ever. After the fight, he was diagnosed with heat exhaustion at a local hospital.

After that bout, he retired, but in 1954, he came back, and made one fight. In 1955, he won five fights and lost one, before challenging Olson for Olson's world Middleweight title, and Robinson won the title for the third time, with a knockout in two rounds.

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Robinson deserves to be considered as one of boxing's greatest.

In 1956, he had two fights, including a fourth fight with Olson, where Robinson risked his title and won again, by a knockout in four. In 1957, he lost to Gene Fullmer while defending his title, but he won the title for a record fourth time by knocking out Fullmer in five rounds in the rematch. Boxing critics have referred to the punch with which Robinson knocked out Fullmer in their rematch as *The Perfect Punch*. He made two exhibition bouts, and then lost his title to Carmen Basilio to end the year.

In 1958, he made only one fight, recovering the title once again and breaking his own record, by beating Basilio on points at Chicago, Illinois. In Robinson's only bout in 1959, he beat Bob Young in Boston by a 10 round decision, but in 1960, he lost the title for the last time, to Paul Pender, also in Boston. He tried to break his own record and win the world Middleweight title a sixth time in a rematch with Pender, but lost on points once again.

Then, on December 3, he and Fullmer met once again, with Fullmer once again as king of the Middleweights, in another Robinson attempt to break his own record. But the fight ended in a 15 round draw, and Fullmer retained the title. One more attempt to break his own record came in 1961 in Las Vegas, with a fourth bout versus Fullmer, who beat him on points the last time they met inside the ring.

The rest of the 1960s were spent fighting 10 round bouts, including a win versus future world champion Denny Moyer and a 10 round decision loss to former world champion and fellow hall of famer Joey Giardello. He toured Europe once again, and visited cities like Rome and Wien on his second European boxing tour.

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The magical fists of Sugar Ray Robinson earned him 179 victories.

In 1965, Robinson had 14 bouts, going 8-5 with one no contest during that span. After his last bout, a ten round loss at the hands of Joey Archer, he announced his retirement for good.

Robinson suffered from diabetes mellitus and was an insulin user. During a period of his life, he, like fellow boxing legend Joe Louis, had a problem with drug addiction. He was also a very good friend of Frank Sinatra and had close ties to The Rat Pack.

Legend has it that one time during the '70s, Robinson walked into a gym in Miami and he was impressed by a young boxer he saw there. That boxer's name is Alexis Arguello. Legend also has it that one day, a young aspiring boxer walked into Robinson's restaurant in Harlem and asked for an autograph. When the young child asked for an autograph, Robinson supposedly denied it, and the kid was so frustrated according to the legend, and he swore never to deny anyone an autograph if he ever became a champion. That young kid was Cassius Clay.

Robinson retired from the ring with a record of 179 wins, 19 losses, 6 draws and 2 no contests in 206 professional bouts, with 109 knockout wins, ranking him among the most prolific knockout winners of all time according to The Ring Magazine, which, as a matter of a fact, named him number eleven in the list of all time greatest punchers in boxing history in 2003.

He died in Los Angeles at the age of 68 and was interred in the Inglewood Park Cemetery, Inglewood, California.

He is a member of the International Boxing Hall Of Fame.

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### Scott Burton's Final Thought

One thing that strikes me about Sugar Ray is the fact that this guy had a total of 200 fights!

That's an unbelievable statistic, especially when you consider that most of today's boxing stars struggle to register more than 50 professional fights.

Of course, life was very different back in the 1940's and 50's.

Sugar Ray sometimes rattled off 3 pro fights in a month and was back hungry for more the very next month. He dominated most of his fights, but it must've taken incredible powers of recovery to keep coming back like that.

From what archive footage I've seen, he looked like a super-fit athlete in his prime who had a ruthless desire to win.

On many occasions he managed to fight off more than just his opponents, but also racist prejudices also. All in all, Sugar Ray Robinson was a true sporting legend, and will be remembered for many years to come.



**Sugar Ray Robinson knew how to dish out the punishment!**