

The Greatest

NONE OF THE DRAMA thrown up by the Atlanta Games of 1996 could match the poignancy of the opening ceremony as **Muhammad Ali** shakily, but proudly, lit the Olympic flame.

Thirty-six years earlier, as a brash and ridiculously talented teenager named **Cassius Clay**, he had won the Olympic light-heavyweight title and launched a career that was to transform him into one of the most celebrated people of the 20th century.

Ali experienced the full gamut of public reaction. He was initially disliked for his cockiness, then hated in some circles for his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War.

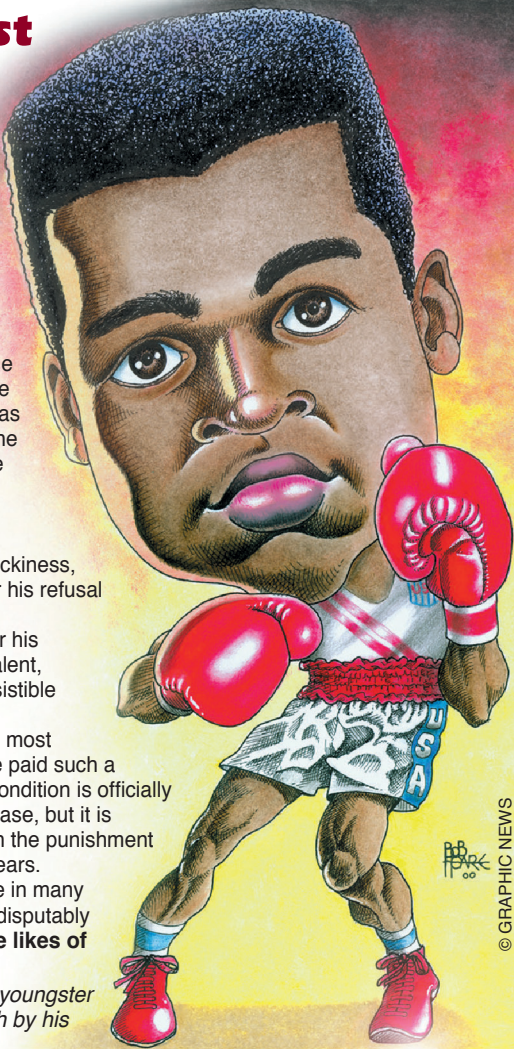
But he eventually won over his detractors with a mixture of talent, courage, humour and an irresistible personality.

He fought on too long – as most boxers tend to – but few have paid such a grievous price. Ali's parlous condition is officially attributed to Parkinson's Disease, but it is difficult not to associate it with the punishment he sustained over so many years.

It is an over-used accolade in many sports, but in this case it is indisputably true. **We shall never see the likes of Muhammad Ali again.**

And Another Thing... As a youngster Ali was refused an autograph by his hero, **Sugar Ray Robinson**.

He vowed never to make the same mistake, and is now believed to have signed his name more than any other person on earth.



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FACT FILE

Born: Louisville, Kentucky, January 17, 1942

Olympic medal: Boxing, light-heavyweight division **Gold**, 1960

