

When Muhammad Ali Visits Boxing Illustrated

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During a recent visit to the City of Montreal, Muhammad Ali accepted Boxing Illustrated's invitation to a press conference held in his honour. He was also here to promote Black Community Week and speak about the advancement of black people all over the world.

In a low key affair which lasted 2 ½ hours, attended by members of the media and a small group of selected guests, Muhammad answered questions mainly about boxing but concerning his presence and involvement with the Black community as well.

BOXING ILLUSTRATED also took the opportunity to present Muhammad with an oil portrait done by a Montreal artist, in connection with Boxing Illustrated's Ali-Forman Special Album commemorating the Super Showdown. Here with all the photos of the event.



A portrait of George Forman, by the same artist, is being present to the Champ.

Reading about Muhammad Ali in magazines or newspapers, listening to him on television or radio. I had always had the uncomfortable impression that here was a man used his oratorical talents and any

other gimmick readily available not only to give us a good show but also, to promote as any publicity guy would do, whatever idea, movement or project he was championing at the time.

In other words, it had always seemed to me that the description the Louisville Lip suited him to perfection.

But recently, in Montreal, at a press conference, I had the opportunity to see and him speak- to meet him in the flesh. And I must say I was deeply impressed by the genuine sincerity that seemed to exude from the man, from his words, from his very attitude and gestures – from his straight-forward answers and his direct (if sometimes amused) look at who-ever put a question to him.

Here, I felt was an honest man. Honest, not in that popular meaning that will apply the term to anyone who will not rob his fellow human beings, but in that deeper much more profound sense, the inclination of the mind and intellect which make a person sincere and truthful and will give creditable character to all this person does or says.

The media, I reflected, however they had tried, certainly had not given us a clear image of this man. Could this not be due to the fact that most of the time, if not practically all the time, they had dwelled on Ali the boxer and not enough on Ali the man, the human being who is certainly not the demi-god he has been made into and who knows suffering like anyone of us.

When he speaks of George Foreman and the Battle in Zaire, he is Ali the Boxer. Then you get the impression he is playing to the crowd, giving them the performance they are expecting from him.

With a sharp thrust of his out stretched arm and hand- as through he was wielding a sword, that of the executioner- Ali is crisp and loud when he says that People will be shocked at how easy I beat Forman.....

In his own way, you feel that Ali regardless of what he says has admiration for this man who will very soon put his boxing talents to the greatest test they surly have ever been and no doubt will be put to.....

But get him to talk about his 40 million black brothers in the United States, about his other 900 million Muslims brothers in the world.....

Am I deluding myself or isn't there a cloud of sadness, the realization of a grim reality, that suddenly made his eyes seem a little darker. Isn't there a definite toning down in his voice. There is no joking now. He is all earnestness when he speaks out.

There is hope when Ali the Man speaks of the Country that will one day be inhabited by his Black Brothers. There's a separation coming, he states, looking straight into the eyes of the person who raised the subject – and under the powerful intensesness of that look you cannot be convinced with him that when he is saying will come to be....

But then when he chants that 'There is a Mexico for Mexicans, a Canada for Canadians, and a France for Frenchmen, and an Italy for Italians'..... isn't there a certain longing, certain sadness, even certain despair in his voice. Muhammad also knows suffering.

He may stand out in any group. He is tall. He is powerful. Women say he is good-looking. But over all above all of this, as I was listening to him at this press conference, I got the impression that here was a man who knew very deep feelings, who lived his life with intense sincerity...but who could get across to his listeners much better as a Boxer than as a Man.

Why was this! Through some failure or some shortcoming of his own! Because people were in fact more interested in him as the great athlete he is than in what he likes to call 'our cause'! Or because he has himself, and for such a long time, drawn attention to himself as a boxer, 'The Greats in the world', he would say, and nothing else!

Probably through a combination of all of these, no doubt. Yet, the fact remains that the picture given of Ali is one of a man who struts around the world, as on gigantic stage all his own, playing a game the meaning of he is alone to understand.....

But there, as I saw him and listened to him, I was sure that some sort of communion had established itself between him, Ali the Man, and myself as never before: I could understand him. Suddenly I remembered many of the things I knew about him (like his refusal to serve in the armed forces – Some thing which had really angered me at the time) and I could see that, at all times, this man had acted out of a sincerity that had its roots firmly set in his heart, mind and intelligence....

I felt sorry that all people could not get to meet him face to face: there is much more to learn about the most interesting side of this great boxer, his human side, than one could ever suspect. Unless he is a better actor than I am now given him credit for...

At any rate, I had always been a fan of Ali the Boxer- although my best are not on him yet for the fight in Zaire- but now I think I am a great fan of Ali the man.