



# This Morning

with  
= Kenneth Denlinger =

## Vintage Ali Prepares For Confident Bugner

*"Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, End my career with the true Ali"*

Muhammad Ali

There will be no Rope-A-Dope in Malaysia Tuesday morning, the heavyweight champ promises, no Mirage, Russian Tank, Malaysian Waltz or whatever else has popped into his nimble mind and out of his ever-open mouth in the past. Just vintage Ali.

The one athlete who literally can span the sporting world to perform—and make it snap to attention when he does—is taking this title defense seriously. That is welcome news, and indirect praise for his opponent, Joe Bugner.

Bugner can fight a little, as they say, in much the same way the Golden State Warriors showed the Bullets they can play basketball a little and Lou Graham showed he can play golf a little. Bugner can win if Ali again plays clown instead of boxer.

Especially, Bugner can win if Ali's legs act their age, 33, in the morning heat of Kuala Lumpur, \$2.5 million and \$500,000 respectively being enough to coax both men to come out fighting at 10 a.m. to make the traditional 10 p.m. Monday show time in America.

Bugner and the millions who would close their blinds if anyone but Ali was fighting in their backyard are convinced that the champ is not serious about his announced retirement, even if he reiterates it again for the closed-circuit folks before the fight.

"I think it is either to put me off psychologically or to increase my work to knock me out," Bugner said, choosing to ignore a third possibility—ticket sales might be lagging. "He wants me to apply the pressure, to get tired. Then he comes on strong. But it doesn't work with me. I know he's giving me a lot of bull."

Bugner can swing some bull himself. He is one of the few Ali opponents who offers even a mildly lively line now and then. Of his prefight condition, the 25-year-old European champ said: "Fine except for my broken left hand and bad left knee."



Apparently, Ali has been uncommonly dedicated, even allowing one of his sparring partners, Levi Forte, to fire away at his stomach and rib cage at such a pace that one news service reporter wondered if it might be too much punishment too soon.

"He recovers right away," said Dr. Ferdie Pacheco, Ali's physician since 1963. "He could do it again tomorrow. He's an amazing athlete. There's almost no limit to how far he can push himself."

This, according to the report, came moments after Dr. Pacheco said: "My God, he's going to get a fractured rib one of these days. He may know he's the heavyweight champion but his ribs don't know it."

After 15 rounds that probably were not three minutes each, Ali blurted "I can actually go 15 more rounds right now. Joe Bugner is a joke. If I had Joe Bugner today, I'd

kill him. I predict he won't go the limit. I predict I shall win every round. It's impossible for him to answer the bell for the 15th round." (Earlier in the week Ali was saying: "I guarantee by round seven he will fall.")

Bugner's final preparations have been less intense, mostly confined to skipping rope, shadow boxing and throwing punches at two gloves that resemble catcher's mitts worn by manager Andy Smith.

Naturally, while the fighters were training, the gloves were being safely locked in a jail and all the rules were being established, the hustlers were busy planning how best to convince Ali to unretire.

The most serious reason seems to be a match with Joe Frazier set for Manila in October, about the time Ali says he is scheduled to begin filming his life story. Of course, the movie is to be called "The Greatest," and the last thing he wants is for Bugner to write an unhappy ending.