

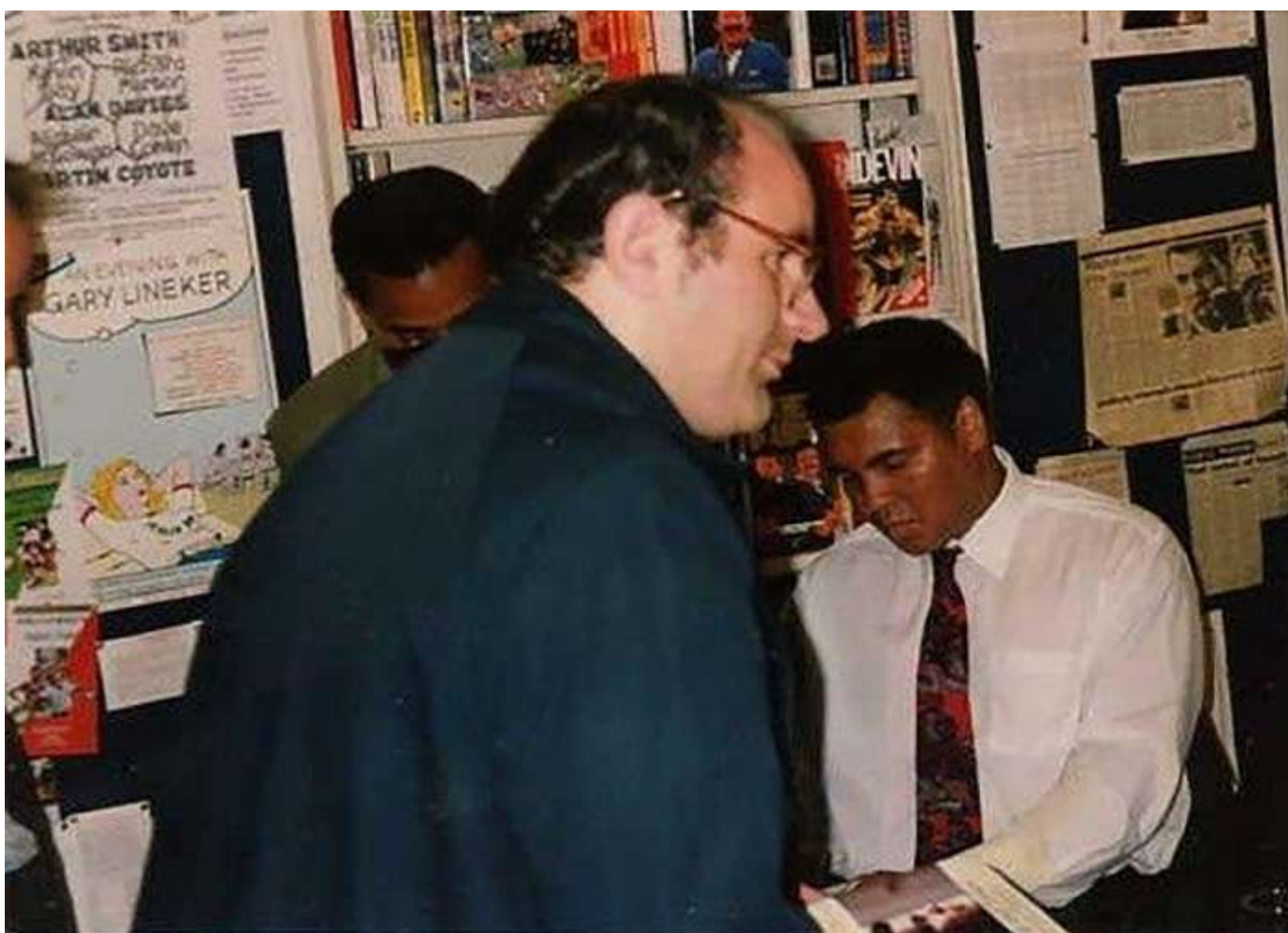
The Latest News

Muhammad Ali Is Back In London — Sort Of



FEATURED NEWS

By Alexander Baron



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The above photograph was taken by the current writer in Central London; I can't remember the exact date in June 1992, but it shouldn't be too hard to pin down as it was taken inside a sports shop (or was it a bookshop?) during what was said to be the only signing he gave. The bloke in the foreground is *TLN* contributor [Mark Taha](#), who unlike me is still a boxing fan. I went right off boxing after seeing [Herol Graham](#) knocked out in a fight he should surely have won, but that's another story.

Muhammad Ali is now 74 years old and not in good shape, although he is in far better shape than two of his great contemporaries: Ken Norton, who died in 2013; and Joe Frazier, against whom he fought 3 titanic battles winning 2 of them; Smokin' Joe died in November 2011.

Earlier this month, an Ali exhibition opened at the world famous O2 in East London: *I Am The Greatest* runs until August 31. There has been talk of him coming in person, but one suspects that

is a decision for his doctors. If you don't understand the significance of Ali, you have to look at the man's politics and his principles.

Born Cassius Marcellus Clay Junior on January 17, 1942 in the American Deep South, after converting to Islam, he changed his name first to Cassius X and then to Muhammad Ali. Having won the heavyweight title in supposedly controversial fashion from defending champion Sonny Liston, he won the rematch and was set to reign for a decade until he was drafted to fight for real, in the Vietnam War.

Like [Elvis Presley](#) before him, he could have donned a soldier's uniform and flown out, in his case to the Far East where undoubtedly he would have been given an easy ride as a fitness instructor or some such, but for Ali, fighting was something he did in the ring and nowhere else. His refusal to enlist in the US Army was a criminal offence, and left him in limbo for four years. It could have seen him sent to gaol; he was actually sentenced to 5 years behind bars but remained free until the Supreme Court [overturned his conviction](#) in 1971, whereupon he resumed his boxing career. Prior to this, momentum against the Vietnam War was gathering, and with the wisdom of a half century of hindsight, it is clear Ali was right while Uncle Sam was wrong.

Although the O2 exhibition runs for six months, there is a dedicated permanent exhibition in his hometown; the [Muhammad Ali Center](#) was opened over ten years ago.

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