

Joe Frazier, Tragic Hero

'Don't you know I'm God?' taunted Muhammad Ali, in the first of the epic trilogy of heavyweight prizefights with Joe Frazier that defined the early 1970s. Ali even took to accompanying each word – *Don't – you – know – I'm – God?* – with a swing of his fists, unleashing another flurry of his lightning-fast punches. Frazier, undaunted, singularly unaffected by Ali's sophomoric doggerel and sophisticated psy-ops, kept boring in on his opponent, a steady, bobbing, weaving machine, and spat back through his bloodied mouthpiece: "Well, God, you gonna get whupped tonight!"

And very near the end of that first encounter between them, on March 8, 1971 – the Madison Square Garden spectacular between two undefeated heavyweight champions, billed, without hyperbole, as the Fight of the Century – Frazier made good on his promise.

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