



J.P. Concert Review



## Tribute to the Sports Legends

When the legendary Howard Cosell passed away a few years back it sadly left the sports writers and announcers fraternity with a little less integrity. The flamboyant Cosell will always be remembered as much more than just the most colourful broadcaster of our time but also for two other very rare qualities and ones that often got him into more hot water than a Salada tea bag. He told it like it was! No one, not even the closest of his colleagues were immune to his criticism. Never the less, his brutal sense of honesty and fair play earned him a tremendous amount of respect among his peers.

My earliest recollection of Cosell goes back to the early 60's when he and former Heavyweight Champ Rocky Marciano, were covering the first Floyd Patterson-Sonny Liston fight on ABC. I really admired the unflinching manner in which he stood up to the menacing Sonny Liston. On this particular occasion the cantankerous Liston, then the undisputed World Heavy weight boxing champ was a confirmed hater of the press and had refused all interviews. Cosell refusing to be stifled, staunchly reminded the most feared man on earth at that time, that he had an obligation to both his fans and ABC. The snarly Liston cast one of the most frightening stares I've ever seen. I thought Cosell was going to crap his Fruit of the Looms. But he stood his ground and then suddenly big Liston breaks into a grin. From that moment on, he co-operated with Cosell.



Cosell is probably best remembered as one of the very few members of the media who stood up for Muhammad Ali during those tumultuous days when the greatest had refused Uncle Sam's invitation to join the armed forces while most of America viewed Ali as a traitor and the press vilified him, Cosell swam against the title wave of criticism and defended him.

At he time, Ali had refused Uncle Sam's invitation to enter the military as thus was stripped of his title. Cosell's stubborn loyalty towards the draft dodging Ali angered America's red-necks and good old boys to such an extent, that Cosell was branded a "Nigger loving Jew!" he was bombarded with all kinds of hate mail and death threats. Yet under extreme pressure the intrepid Cosell stubbornly refused to falter.

Ali of course, the great fighter he was, waged and won his biggest battle of his life and that was in the courts, where he kayoed the American government. While Ali went on to re-claim his title on two more occasions, Cosell emerged from Ali incident a larger than life figure.



His outspoken and caustic style earned him the reputation as "the man who told it like it was!" He possessed that rare noble sense of honour which compelled him to fight for the underdog. When Curt Flood challenged the rule which bound a player to one team unless traded or sold, it was Cosell who defended Flood's dispute with the Major League owners. Years earlier when many journalists were denouncing the Major League's first black player Jackie Robinson, it was humble Howie Cosell who was in Robinson's Corner.

The acid tongued sportscaster and his out-spoken nature often drew the fire of many. No one, or anything, was sacred of his criticism, He openly condemned the big cheeses at ABC for bringing former coaches and jocks into the broadcast booth. : I never sacrifice truth in the name of friendship", he used to say. Even his Monday Night Football partners, Frank Gifford and Dandy Don Merrideth, could not escape his verbal wrath. He openly complained that both were too dull. He withdrew from Monday Night Football in 1983, after 13 years. In a rebuking explanation as to why, Cosell said the game had become a stagnant bore!

In 1982 while covering the one-sided brutal beating in which Heavyweight Champion Larry Holmes carved up Randall (Tex) Cobb like a Christmas turkey, a repulsed Howard Cosell threw in the towel and promised he'd never again cover a pro fight. Calling it sleazy and full of hypocrisy, Cosell demanded that boxing be either reformed or abolished, Whether you like him or not, he brought an unpretentious and refreshing honesty to a profession that long had been afflicted by shills and yes-men. His ostentatious and controversial style made Humble Howard one of the most recognizable faces of our time. In a profession short on characters and fair play, his honesty and integrity will truly be missed.



The flamboyant and always controversial New Yorker died at the age of 77 of a heart ambolises.

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