

Interview with **Angelo Dundee**
Date: March 23, 1989
Interviewer: James A. DeVinney
Camera Rolls: 2108-2109
Sound Rolls: 251
Team: B

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

Interview with Angelo Dundee, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on March 23, 1989 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #2108]
[sound roll #251]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Team B.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

OK, Jim.

Interviewer:

OK, tell me how you first met Cassius Clay.

00:00:24:00

Angelo Dundee:

Well, it was a very interesting experience. I used to go to Louisville, Kentucky, quite a bit with a lotta my fighters, and I happened to be there with Willie Pastrano. And we were at the Sheraton Hotel and we were sitting in a room, and I'd s-stay in the same room with Willie 'cause he was not exactly the kinda kid that we know—he used to chase chicks like, you know, a fox terrier would chase a dog in heat, so I stayed in the same room with the kid. And the phone rings, we were watching TV, and I pick up the phone and I said, I said, Hello, he says, the voice on the other phone was, Hey, my ca—my name is Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. I'm the, and I won the Golden Glove Championship in Louisville, Kentucky. I won the Golden Gloves in Washington State, I won the Chicago Golden Gloves. This was 1958 mind you. And he said, I wanna win the Olympics in 1960. I say, That's great. I'm glad to hear it. So, I didn't know who he was 'cause I didn't pay too much attention to amateurs, still don't. I'm strictly a professional guy and that's what I do. So, I held my hand over the phone and I told Willie, I said, Hey, some sort of a nut downstairs who wants to talk to us. That was the beginning—up comes Cassius Marcellus Clay with his brother Rudy, and they walk into the room and we proceeded to have some of the finest conversation I've ever had with a human being who was then a student of boxing. He was very—wanted to know how I trained my fighters, what they do, when to eat, when not to eat. A very, very in-depth young man. And he, he knew what direction he wanted to go. His brother, oddly enough, looked like the artist of the two because he had a mannequin, a face he had done in clay, and he had a picture he had painted. The whole family was very artistic 'cause Cassius Senior was a painter. A painter paints signs, paint this, you paint it, I'll do it, you know, that kinda stuff. But we proceeded to talk for three or four hours, and that was the beginning. That was the beginning of a friendship that I nurture to this day 'cause he's one a my best friends. Cassius Marcellus Clay was the nicest thing that ever happened to my life and I think the nicest thing that ever happened to boxing.

00:02:48:00

Interviewer:

Sounds like a wonderful place to stop down. I just wanna make sure—

Camera crew member #1:

Stopping down?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:02:52:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Ready.

00:02:56:00

Interviewer:

OK, after Clay turned pro, he trained for a while with Archie Moore. Well—something I'd like to hear about. Can you tell about the conversation you had with Dick Sadler after you'd taken over as Clay's trainer?

00:03:06:00

Angelo Dundee:

Well, you know, the thing about Archie Moore, I gotta give him his due because what people didn't understand, there was no conflict there. It was just a clash of star quality, 'cause Archie Moore was a star. Archie Moore was a great champion. So, when the kid went up there and he would ask him, Hey I want to fight. He said, You're not ready. So, he'd go, I'm not ready? Jeez, I got so many amateur fights, I'm not ready? Well actually it was a clash of star quality. And then what, what broke it off actually, Archie Moore asked him to sweep the kitchen. That did it. He said, I didn't sweep the kitchen for my mother. Why I gotta sweep the kitchen for Archie Moore? [laughs] So, actually it was a clash in personalities. Where they got together, a Louisville group called me, we got together, no problem. I sat down and explained I'll take my time with the kid, and actually this was in October. And then I told 'em, Well, why don't you let the kid stay home for the holidays, you know? We'll start in January, fresh, bright eyed and bushy-tailed. Well, that was fine with them, with the Louisville group, but then what they said was, No, he wants to come down now. But see, they had come down and interviewed me and I gave 'em my ideas and what I—Bill Faversham came down with Worth Bingham, a couple from the Louisville group, and I explained to 'em my, the way I would move him, nice and easy, nice and slow, well—so he could learn this profession. And then, bang, he wanted to come down right away. Now, Dick Sadler, oddly enough, is a good pal of mine. We, we in boxing have a lot of camaraderie and people don't understand this. Dick's a pal of mine, great, and Dick is beautiful, good man, good boxing man. So, he came up to me, it w-was during a time we're having some fights. He says, he said, You still with that kid? I said, Yeah. He didn't drive you crazy yet? I said, No, we had a great time together. He said, Man, he says, You gotta have the purple heart

with nine clusters if you're hangin' in with that kid because he almost drove me up a wall, he said because he had a, he went on a train ride with him once to Texas and he described the train ride, it was second to none. He's yelling out the, the cars, going through, he says, I'm the champ! and, My name is Cassius Marcellus Clay. I'm the beau—most beautiful fighter in the world today! On and on and on. And, Man, he says, Dick said, You betta shut up, you're going to get us killed. [laughs] But that was, that was, that was the kid, full of pep and ginger. And I didn't curtail that because you don't do that. You just project on it and smooth it out a little bit, and the people liked it.

00:05:38:00

Interviewer:

OK. When did you first realize that Cassius Clay might've had some associations with the Muslims?

Angelo Dundee:

Oh, I knew that two weeks before the fight.

Interviewer:

OK. That's an example—

00:05:51:00

Angelo Dundee:

I knew about Muhammad's association with the Muslims about two weeks before the fight. I didn't know anything about, you know, in fact, Cassius Marcellus Clay—they came to me, the promoter, Jim McDonald, and my brother was associated with the, with the promotion *and he came to me, he said, Angelo, unless Cassius Marcellus Clay refutes the reports out of Chicago that he's not a Muslim, I'm gonna cancel the fight. So, I said, Well, jeez, I'll talk to the kid. And I said, Better still, I said, you go talk to the kid. And I made him go off into another s—area and speak to the fighter. So, Cassius came back and I'm sitting in the office and he says, Ang, I don't think gonna have a fight. Said, Why? He said, Well, 'cause they want me to say I'm not a Muslim, and I am a Muslim.* Well, whatever you wanna do, you do, Muhammad. I mean, it's up to you, Cassius then, you know, because, what the heck, *what's in a name? The thing with me was the individual. But the, the tough, tough thing about it really was that it was such a pretty name. We had nurtured it and played it up, you know, Cassius Marcellus Clay, and we used to rhyme on it. It was a beautiful name. And then he changed it to Muhammad Ali. People resented that. You know, why? Why? A lotta people wouldn't call him. But what's in a name? To me, he was still the same individual, same guy, and I actually, I didn't know what a Muslim was, really. Because I thought it was a piece of cloth* and I, I, I, I mean that with all my heart. What the heck's the difference what a guy religion is? That doesn't project to me what an individual is. What the heck? I

was, I hoped later on, I said this, I hope I was as good a Catholic as Muhammad was a Muslim.

00:07:46:00

Interviewer:

Was it hard to—for you to get used to calling him Muhammad Ali?

00:07:49:00

Angelo Dundee:

It was easy. No problem. In fact, the funniest bit was with, with Rudy. Rudy came back to the gym, this is later on, and he says, Angelo, I got great news for ya, 'cause I was very close to the brother, and he says, I said, What's that? He said, I got a new name, he says. What's that? He says, Rahnan, R-A-H-N-A-N. Rahnan Ali, 'cause Elijah had given him the name. I said, That's OK. I'll call you Rocky. He said, No, you ain't. [laughs] So, this was the, the, the little taste I got of it, but I didn't give a damn. What's the difference? And I didn't go around the mulberry bush and call him champ. What's that? That's bologna. I was still dealin' with the same individual, same guy, great fighter. I mean, he proved it that night with Sonny Liston. So, what the heck's in a name to me? Nothing.

00:08:39:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's stop down, we'll—

[cut]

00:08:44:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:08:46:00

Interviewer:

[clears throat] I wanna go back to just before the Sonny Liston fight again and pick up that whole business about Cassius Clay becoming a Muslim. We're curious in how the, how the press reacted when they found out or they suspected.

Angelo Dundee:

Well, they kept, you know, diggin', diggin', and I—

Interviewer:

Talk about the press.

00:09:01:00

Angelo Dundee:

Yeah. The, the press kept digging, and I just played it cool. I said, I don't know. I don't know anything about it, really. And this happened where the guy went to Chicago, Chicago, came back. Well, I don't bird dog my fighters. I never do that. I believed that socializing with your fighter and getting too up close with your fighter, you negate your influence with your fighter. I don't believe in that bologna. Kid wants to go out, take a ride, let him take a ride. See, there's only room for one star in my profession. He was the star. So, I kept it that way. I kept it loose as a goose. Always had a great sense of humor with the kid. But you gotta remember one thing, he was the most available superstar of our era 'cause the, the media got to talk to him one-on-one. I pushed that because they want to hear what the star has to say. No one hears what Dundee wants to say, the assistant trainer, the seconds, the doctor, the lawyer, the Indian Chief. They spoke to him. That was very important.

00:10:04:00

Interviewer:

Did the press change after they found out he became he Muslim?

00:10:06:00

Angelo Dundee:

Well, some, some anti, some plus, whatever. If you, if you dealt in the physical individual, the fighter, why change?

00:10:16:00

Interviewer:

OK. All right, we must be close to the end of that roll.

Camera crew member #1:

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer:

Let's just change the roll.

00:10:19:00

Camera crew member #1:

Roll, rollout.

[cut]

[camera roll #2109]

00:10:22:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

OK [inaudible] sit.

00:10:28:00

Interviewer:

[laughs] OK, I want you to recall that fight between Muhammad Ali and Floyd Patterson. Now, what, what happened that night?

00:10:37:00

Angelo Dundee:

*Well, it was, it was a good-guy bad-guy situation where Patterson was a well-loved individual and he's fighting Muhammad Ali. And Floyd had the—always had this thing about saying Cassius, Cassius, Cassius, you know. And it gets to be a rub after a while; his name was Muhammad Ali. I'm Angelo Dundee. I was Angelo Mirena, so what's the big deal? So, I didn't see any reason for anybody to be calling him Cassius Clay. Guy, guy's God-given right to be called what he wants to be called. So, **the fight with Patterson, my kid was doing a number on him, saying, What's my name?** [laughs] **Pop. What's my name? Pop.***

You know, so I, I felt sorry for Floyd because Muhammad did a number on him, but not with vengeance 'cause Muhammad don't dislike anybody. Muhammad likes everybody. He got no axe to grind with anybody. I mean, to this day he's that way and he was that way from the beginning. And I've never, never had an argument with Cassius Clay or Muhammad Ali. We always had a great time together. It was a fun trip. And this guy, when he fought Patterson, he just sorta resented not being called by his proper name. He's only saying, my name's Muhammad Ali, so call me Muhammad Ali. It ain't tough. In fact, it's shorter, right? Cassius Marcellus Clay, little longer.

00:12:00:00

Interviewer:

[laughs] Well, now Ali says that Patterson eventually did answer Muhammad Ali. Is that—

00:12:04:00

Angelo Dundee:

Well, that's nice. Floyd's a nice guy, so I'm happy Floyd finally dissolved that bologna 'cause all it was, was a bunch of bologna to me. Call the man what he wants to be called, long as you don't call him late for breakfast.

00:12:17:00

Interviewer:

[laughs] OK. In April of 1967, Ali refused to be drafted into the Army. And what did Ali's stand on Vietnam cost him as a fighter?

00:12:26:00

Angelo Dundee:

Well, I mean, he lost three and a half years. We probably never did get to see the best of Ali 'cause Ali, before he departed, was right at the brink of the—he was great anyhow, but to me his full potential was going to be resolved then. So, the three and a half year layoff didn't do him any good because he wasn't a kid that woulda kept running, kept training. I mean, although, every time he came to Miami Beach he used to work out, you know, and he asked me, kiddingly, he says, You mind if I come to the gym? I says, Please. 'Cause Jimmy Ellis was training for a fight and I actually made him spar with Jimmy Ellis, not as a sparring partner, he assisted him. But I remunerated him for him assisting us. In fact, he was here with his family and I took care of the hotel 'cause it was a pleasure, because Jimmy was in action and Jimmy was fighting. But Muhammad was that kinda guy. And to this day, you know, Muhammad comes down here and he trains and he sweats. He loves to sweat. And—

00:13:28:00

Interviewer:

You mentioned now what, what happened to him as a fighter, that he lost three and half years that were very, very important. What about the man Muhammad Ali? Did, did—

00:13:35:00

Angelo Dundee:

Muhammad Ali was the same that left three and a half years before. He had no axe to grind with anybody. He wasn't mad at anybody. He's too big a man to get that way, and to this day, if he doesn't have anything nice to say about a guy, he'd say nothing. He don't have an axe to grind with anybody. Muhammad is a great individual, in and out of the ring. Forget about it. He—

00:13:58:00

Interviewer:

Tell me what's so special about him.

00:14:00:00

Angelo Dundee:

He was just great, he, professional—no, a great human being. He act—I actually had a guy was robbin' him and I made him aware of it. I said, Willie's a heck of a thief. He said, Isn't he? So, he'd find a plus about a guy. He was the kind of guy, if he didn't have anything good to say, he wouldn't say nothing. Muhammad taught me, he taught me patience. Well you see, there's no time for gettin' mad at anybody. You get glad. You don't get mad. You evaluate and you go further. He just never got, felt that he, he was done outta anything. He was happy to be back because being in boxing, he had fun. He would never admit it that he loved boxing, but he had fun with boxing.

00:14:49:00

Interviewer:

Tell me what you'd like to tell me about Muhammad Ali, anything that I haven't asked.

00:14:52:00

Angelo Dundee:

Muhammad Ali was the greatest thing that ever happened to boxing. He changed the whole concept [phone rings]—

00:14:57:00

Camera crew member #2:

Stop down.

[cut]

[wild sound]

[cut]

00:14:59:00

Angelo Dundee:

You can always repeat honesty, never bullshit.

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK?

Camera crew member #1:

K.

00:15:11:00

Interviewer:

Tell me.

00:15:12:00

Angelo Dundee:

Muhammad Ali's probably the greatest thing that ever happened to boxing. It was a thrill for me to be involved with him from the beginning. It was so interesting. So good. You know, there's a, a young man, the, the greatest time I had with Muhammad was from '60 to '64, a development nurturing talent, fighting certain guys, preparing, licking adversity. It was such a big kick. But see, what I nurtured was making him available. The media always could have him. We used to attack press conferences because, let me tell ya, without the media, without that camera, without that radio, we're dead city. You guys wanna talk to us, God love you. He did the greatest thing for boxing of all time because he was the most available superstar of our era. You guys got to talk to the man. You wanna speak to Muhammad, bang, talk to him. Put him in another room. And this is what's something that I feel good about, because be—prior to that, you couldn't talk to a fighter. You had to go through the press guy, the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, the sister-in-law, the brother-in-law, the seconds, the trainers, then you got to talk to the fighter. That's not right. You gotta speak to the star. The star was Muhammad Ali. And I was just happy to be there on the sidelines helping him.

00:16:32:00

Interviewer:

Weren't you afraid that when he'd go out and tell everybody he was the greatest and go on like that, that he would turn people off?

00:16:36:00

Angelo Dundee:

Well, that was wonderful. Isn't it? Wouldn't it a been terrible if he'd a been a, a closed-mouth guy and you wouldn't get to enjoy this guy? Fifty percent would love him, fifty percent would hate him. At least—when we used to go down the aisle to a fight, they were booing the heck out him, he said, Well, we know there's people here. That was great. [laughs] I loved it.

00:16:56:00

Interviewer:

All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Dundee.

[cut]

00:17:00:00

Camera crew member # :

Mark it.

[slate]

00:17:05:00

Interviewer:

OK. Tell us.

00:17:07:00

Angelo Dundee:

I've got two quick ones for ya. You'll like this because they were funny 'cause they, we laugh at that today, Herbert Muhammad, who became Muhammad's manager, and Muhammad in fact. There was a guy up in the gym all—everyday used to come there. His name was Sam. And he was very friendly with Muhammad, and he'd come to the gym. So, after he announced that he was a Muslim, this is two weeks before the fight, Sam would come up there and sit there and I'd sit beside Sam, and, and I'm talkin' to Sam, I say, Gee, ain't it a shame? Cassius Marcellus Clay, what a great name. See, the people not, not gonna accept it because we made it such a beautiful name. You know, Muhammad Ali ain't a bad name. So, I'm going on and on every day with Sam. So, finally, coupla young kids with dark suits come up one day and they walk up to Sam. [laughs] Says, Captain Sam, he was a Muslim. [laughs] I didn't know it. Now, the other funny one is that we're in the gym training and Pat Putnam, who is now with *Sports Illustrated*, was from the *Miami Herald*, so he was sitting in the gym. So, I had seen Malcolm X's picture in the LA papers. So, up comes Malcolm X. [laughs] So, he's sittin', just walkin' around. So, I told Rahnan, I said, Rudy, do me a favor. Tell that guy to get outta here. We're gonna get bad press. [laughs] So, he said to me, You tell him. No way, Jose. [laughs] I didn't say nothin'. But Malcolm was up in the gym 'cause he had came down and he was visiting with the kid. But Sam, he's now a minister by the way, Sam, [laughs] I didn't know this.

00:18:44:00

Interviewer:

[laughs] What about, di-did he ever confide in you—

Angelo Dundee:

No.

Interviewer:

—why, why he was opposed to the war in Vietnam?

00:18:50:00

Angelo Dundee:

I am a very lucky individual. I learned early in life you don't mess around with a fighter's personal life or his religion. You gotta lose on both counts 'cause everybody believes their religion's the best religion. And you don't ever wanna get into a guy's house, 'cause you hear him argue with his wife and then you, this happened to me in New York City. Now, it's a true story, '49. Young kind come up to me, I was working with him, he says, Ang, he said, Boy that wife of mine, she's, ooh, God. I say, Well, you know how women are. So, end of story, I wound up losin' the fighter and I lost the friendship of his wife 'cause he went back and told his wife, Even Angelo believes I'm right. [laughs]

00:19:29:00

Interviewer:

So, Clay never—

00:19:31:00

Angelo Dundee:

I never—

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Angelo Dundee:

—got involved. It was none of my business. All I worried about was the professional end of the business. I worked with a great fighter, probably the greatest heavyweight I'll ever see in my lifetime. And it was a joy working with Muhammad Ali, it was a fun trip.

00:19:47:00

Interviewer:

OK. Thank you very much.

Camera crew member # :

K.

Interviewer:

Let's stop down.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:19:52:00

Copyright 2021 Washington University Libraries