

The World's Most Famous Arena Honors The World's Most Famous Boxer

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New York City announced the renaming of West 33rd Street to "Muhammad Ali Way". The temporarily renamed street runs along Madison Square Garden, which hosted many of Muhammed Ali's fights.

New York City renamed a street that runs along Madison Square Garden "Muhammed Ali Way". The late boxing great headlined a number of fights at the venue, which was formerly known as the "Mecca of Boxing". Ali passed away last week at the age of 74 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease.

Muhammad Ali saw great success at The Garden, despite once claiming that Madison Square Garden was, "too small for me". Many of Ali's early fights occurred at Madison Square Garden, earning a number of victories there as he amassed an impressive record of 19-0 with 15 wins by knockout by the end of 1963. Ali fought at The Garden eight times, including his 1971 epic, "Fight of the Century", against Joe Frazier.

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the temporary renaming of West 33rd Street, saying, "Today we are paying tribute to the man in the heart of this city. He deserves this naming honor and more."



While famous for his boxing greatness and unmatched self-promotion, Ali's recognition also comes from his civil rights activism that made him one of the 20th century's most memorable figures. His public appeal for the equal treatment of all humans touched boxing and non-boxing fans, and his refusal to be inscripted into the armed forces during the Vietnam War earned him unparalleled popularity for publicly doing what so many Americans wanted to do.

De Blasio said Ali "never backed down from a fight in or outside the ring." Originally born Cassius Clay, in 1965 he denounced his "slave name" and changed his name to Muhammad Ali as he publically became a Black Muslim. In 1966, Ali refused to be inscripted into the Army as he publically claimed he was a conscientious objector. He stated that war is against the teachings of the Qur'an. He said he was not "trying to dodge the draft", but that he was not supposed to take part in wars unless declared by Allah or The Messenger. He explained, "We don't take part in Christian wars or wars of any unbelievers."

Fans identified with the three-time world heavyweight champion and Olympic gold medalist when he stated, "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten-thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?"

In 1999, Time magazine named Ali one of the 100 Most Important People of the 20th Century. He was also dubbed Sportsman of the Century by Sports Illustrated. In 2001, President Bill Clinton presented Ali with the Presidential Citizens Medal, which recognizes an individual "who has performed exemplary deeds or services for his or her country or fellow citizens," and in 2005 President George W. Bush awarded Ali with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which is the highest civilian award and recognizes those individuals who have made "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors".

There are no current plans to permanently rename West 33rd Street in honor of Ali. New York streets may be renamed permanently if legislation is passed by the city council and signed by the mayor. The city permanently renamed the streets surrounding Madison Square Garden "Joe Louis Plaza" in 1984 to honor the previous heavyweight champion who died in 1981. However, the mayor's office reassured that a permanent renaming of West 33rd would not affect Joe Louis Plaza.

Former US president Bill Clinton and comedian Billy Crystal are to deliver eulogies at the boxer's public funeral in Louisville, Kentucky on Friday. Former world heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis and actor Will Smith - who portrayed Ali in the 2001 film Ali - will join Jerry Ellis - the brother of Jimmy Ellis, Ali's former sparring partner and world heavyweight champion - and Ali's cousins John Grady and Jan Wadell, nephew Ibn Ali, former brother-in-law Komawi Ali, and family friend John Ramsey as pallbearers.

Lewis said, "Ali has always been an enormous inspiration to me, not only in my boxing career, but also in life. His journey began 74 years ago, and in that time, he not only transformed the world of sport, he used sport to transform the world."

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