

Name: Joe Bygraves
Career Record: [click](#)
Nationality: Jamaican
Birthplace: Kingston
Hometown: Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom
Born: 1931-05-26
Stance: Orthodox
Height: 6' 1"
Division: Heavyweight
Manager: [Johnny Campbell](#)

Bygraves left Jamaica as a young boy and took up boxing as an amateur in England. Became a British subject in 1967. Refused shot at British Heavyweight Title because he was not born in Britain.

JOE BYGRAVES

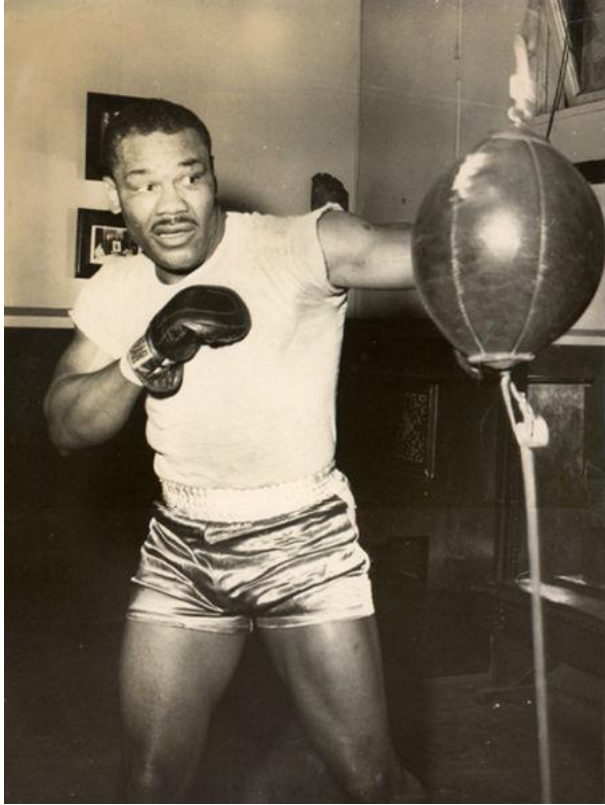
Joe was one of 12 children to a Jamaican Police Sergeant, Joe Bygraves was born in Kingston on 26 May 1931. He was 15 when he came to England hoping to study for a trade – in his case an electrician - three of his brothers also accompanied him; two settling in London, with Joe and another deciding on Merseyside.

Then, aged 17, that Joe became more interested in boxing and joined the Provincial ABC. He set off with the simple and modest aim of winning an Olympic title! Before joining the Provincial Joe had a number of schoolboy bouts in Jamaica, the results aren't known.

It was not long before he began to show great promise in the amateur game. He won Northern Counties titles at both light-heavyweight and heavyweight, and a West Lancs and Cheshire light-heavyweight championship – 1 between 1949 and 1952. He also represented England, along with Henry Cooper – a future opponent, Pete Waterman and his fellow club member Pat McAteer, against Wales in May 1952.

Joe lost this bout as well as his ABA semi final the same year and so after he decided to turn professional. It was an amateur referee who was the cause of Joe turning professional and taking his great friend, Pat McAteer with him. Following a disagreement Joe became disillusioned with the amateur game and talked Pat into the same frame of mind and together they joined Johnny Campbell's stable in Birkenhead.

Joe earned his living outside of the ring as a ship's painter. Joe made his professional debut at the Liverpool Stadium on 12 February 1953 stopping Don Maxwell (Nottingham) in the first round. He followed this victory with six straight wins, including a first round stoppage over former ABA champion, Peter McCann, who also lived in Birkenhead. Joe was rapidly becoming a firm favourite of the knowledgeable Liverpool Stadium fans. Despite his chosen profession, Joe was a deeply religious man and along with his good friend Hogan 'Kid' Bassey, another Liverpool fighter, were



staunch supporters of the Princes Gate Baptist Church in Liverpool.

When a boxer wins their first seven contests he is assured of attracting attention and Joe was no exception. He was beginning to get noticed and for his next contest he was asked to travel to London's White City to take on Stepney's Joe Crickmar. It was a step up in class for Joe and he suffered his first defeat — a fifth round stoppage. Despite losing to Crickmar in a quick return just a month later, Joe gained his revenge at the Liverpool Stadium in March the following year when he scored an eight rounds points victory.

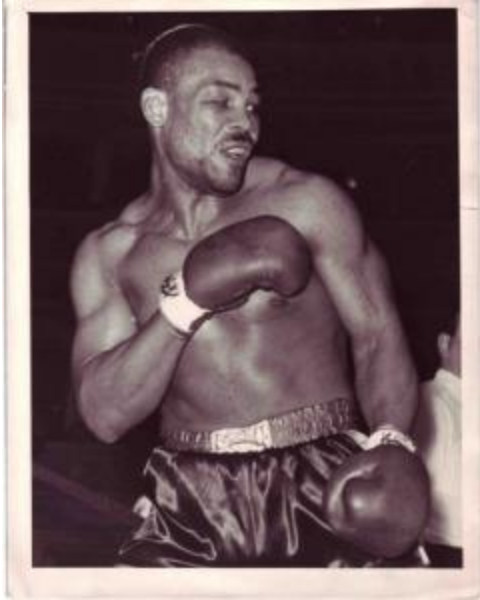
Wins over the highly rated Paddy Slavin, Frank Bell, Peter Bates and Bermuda's Ed Polly Smith saw Joe continue his rise up the rankings. Like Joe, another young heavyweight was rising fast in the rankings - Bellingham's Henry Cooper, and the exciting young prospect was Joe's next opponent at Manor Place Baths in April 1955. Joe was adjudged

the loser over eight rounds but just two weeks later he got back to winning ways with a fourth round KO over Battersea's Eddie Hearn at the Liverpool Stadium. A win over the dangerous Tongan sensation Kitone Lave, always a star attraction wherever he appeared in Britain in the 1950s, followed in Birmingham.

Joe's services were now being sought by European promoters and in October 1955 he travelled to Bologna, Italy only to be disqualified against Franco Cavicci. He returned to Italy six weeks later however, to spectacularly KO the highly rated Aldo Pellegrini in just 50 seconds! Earlier in the year Pellegrini had decked Ingemar Johansson before being disqualified himself.

Although a big man, with a bodybuilders physique, Joe was a clever, fast fighter. He did suffer from a stamina problem however, due in no small way to his training methods. By his own admission Joe disliked training, especially road-work. It was this lack of dedication to training that led to a split between Joe and Johnny Campbell. Joe was also running his own nightclub at the time on Liverpool's Upper Parliament Street, and this may have been a contributory factor in his failing to train fully. Joe may have felt however that he didn't need to train as hard as he should because if there was one thing he could do it was punch. There was no doubt that if he managed to hit you – you stayed 'hit'!

In January 1956 Joe returned to Italy and beat local boy Uber Bacilieri on points over ten rounds. A remarkable achievement. Indeed it was said that a foreign boxer often needed to KO the home fighter just to gain a draw in Italy at the time! The following month Joe had another trip abroad, this time to Gothenburg. Again he was adjudged a points loser over ten rounds but there was no shame in this as his opponent was non other than the 'Hammer of Thor' himself, Ingemar Johansen of Sweden. Johansen had KO'd seven of his 12 opponents as a professional previous to his meeting with Joe



and he would win the European title just two fights later. The Swede would of course go on to win the world title in 1959.

Joe got back to winning ways with an eight round stoppage win over tough Belgian Marcel Limage in Cardiff. This was in May 1965 and a month later Joe was matched with previous opponent Kitione Lave for the vacant British Empire heavyweight title. After 15 hard fought rounds at Wembley Pool, the referee raised Joe's hand to declare him the winner on points. The big Jamaican, a champion at last, was scared of no-one and over the next 12 months he met all of the leading British contenders.

Following a disappointing retirement loss against Wayne Bethea in New York, Joe was matched against former British, British Empire and European champion Johnny Williams of Rugby for the first defence of his Empire title. This contest

saw him back to his brilliant best and he stopped Williams in the sixth round at Belle Vue, Manchester. Next up was another old opponent; Henry Cooper. It was Cooper's first title shot, but Joe was again on superb form, and he sensationally KO'd the future champion in the ninth round at Earls Court. A further defence followed, this time against another future champion in the shape of Newport's Dick Richardson. Their May 1957 meeting in Cardiff resulted in a draw, which of course meant Joe kept his title. A disputed 15 rounds loss to Joe Erskine in Leicester in November 1957 saw Joe relinquish the crown and although he boxed on for a further 10 years he never fought for a title again.

In his 72 professional contests Joe met some of the country's, and indeed the world's, top heavyweights. Not only did he meet the likes of Cooper, Erskine, Richardson and Johannsen, but he also fought such men as Zora Folley, Karl Mildenberger, Jack Gardner, Billy Walker and Willie Pastrano. He had a total of 19 bouts in Liverpool, he last a fifth round disqualification against Ray Shiel in August 1963, whilst his final contest came at the Anglo-Sporting Club at the Hilton Hotel, London in March 1967; a ten rounds points defeat to Edwardo Corletti of Argentina.

. After Joe retired from boxing he had a 160 acre pig farm in stanmore, middlesex. He use to name his boars after former opponents he had one called Dirty Dick after Dick Richardson, one day the pig called dirty dick bit him and he had to go to hospital for stiches, he told dick what happened and he roared with laughter. He had a boar called Harry Gibbs after the famous ref, Billy walker and George Chuvale, to name a few. in 1984 and we heard after his funeral that joe had sold the farm and moved back to Jamaica

As well as raising animals, Joe built a training camp for boxers, and would often let old-time fighters stay at his Portuguese villa he had acquired during his boxing days. Although Joe's post-boxing career is difficult to ascertain, He now lives in Jamaica and Portugal, although not in the best of health.



End

The Sunday Gleaner 20 April 1958

TWO BOXERS will climb between the ropes in Leicester. England, tomorrow, and be called together by the referee, before fighting out 10 rounds.

One will be tall, handsome, curly-haired Willie Pastrano, rated the fourth best heavyweight in the world The other will be a 14 stone 3 pound giant — Joe Bygraves by name, the former champion of the British Empire, who is making a "come-back" to the ring.

This contest will undoubtedly be the most important in the whole of Bygraves' career, for it will decide whether he goes to America with the hope of eventually meeting the world heavyweight champion, Floyd Patterson, or whether he hangs up his boxing gloves and becomes one of the ring's many "has been"

Who is this fellow Joe Bygraves? How did he get into boxing? And just how did he become a champion! To find the answers, let us go back 10 years. When Bygraves was a chubby well built kid of 16, in England to seek fame and fortune, but not as a fighter.

NO JOE did not know how box when he set foot in England. He had never put on a boxing glove in the whole of his childhood in Kingston. Jamaica. Why should he? He did not want to become a fighter.

He landed in Liverpool and eventually got a job on the docks. He liked Liverpool, so he stayed there. Often he wrote back to his folks at home. Joe's father was a Detective-Inspector in the Kingston Police Force, and he had five brothers and six sisters.

Then Joe got himself into boxing. It all started as an accident. He was loafing around on a street corner, as he used to do often during the evening after work, when he saw the shadow of a man coming towards him. Without hesitation big Joe turned and fled.

He explained later "I had never forgotten the night I got a real beating from my dad for standing on a street corner in Kingston. Now when this guy came down the road towards me that night in

Liverpool, I just ran and ran because he reminded me of my pa."

He sat down and thought it all out. "I came to the conclusion I was doing myself no good, hanging around street corners and wasting away my time, so when a pal asked me to go with him to a local boxing club I agreed to go. But only to watch.

But of course he did not stay watching for long. "I put on the gloves one night, just for a bit of fun. Some guy hit me, so I hit him back. He never touched me again, and I guess that is how I first started fighting".

Mr Johnny Campbell, a local engineer from Birkenhead, very interested in amateur boxing saw Joe , noted his enthusiasm and when he found himself short of a heavyweight he asked Joe if he would like to take up boxing seriously, as an amateur. Joe said simply **"I don't mind I'll have a go sir"**

That was the beginning. Then began the serious business of getting Bygraves into fighting condition, teaching him how to box correctly, how to use his tremendous strength in delivering each punch, how to take a punch on the chin without going down, how to maintain his stamina throughout a fight.

Joe was a very quick learner," says Mr. Campbell, who is now his professional manager. **"He would always take advice and never complained once of hard work."**

"I was never a bad sort of bloke." says Joe, today, with a grin. "The worst things I ever did were to purposely forget to pay my bus fare or sneak into the pictures without paying. But that unknown man who frightened me into running away gave me back my conscience. Now I'll chase after the conductor if he forgets to take my bus fare."

SO JOE turned boxer, He went into one fight after another- Winning, winning, winning. He was a sensation, almost overnight.

There was one snag. Joe was a very moody young man. Often he felt lazy. He would box as though he was half asleep. Let anyone hurt him, however, and Joe soon changed his mood. He would turn swiftly into a menacing, vicious fighting machine, slashing and chopping at his opponent, until he dropped.

"I just don't like getting hurt." said Joe, explaining his ferocity in the roped square. Then came the end of his amateur career. And that, too, was purely an accident . Joe was fighting in the England versus Wales match in 1952 when he was disqualified in the third round, after having his opponent on the canvas a number of times. When the referee sent him to his corner and declared his opponent the winner, Joe saw red. He turned and grappled with the referee. Mr. Campbell turned to see the referee on the floor. Boxing enthusiasts at the ringside said Joe struck the referee. Whatever happened, Joe was suspended for six months. **"I was so upset and so fed up with amateur boxing that I decided to turn professional,"** Joe told me.

He asked Mr. Campbell if he would manage him, but he was a strictly amateur enthusiast. When Joe pleaded with him — **"Please help me win a title. Mr. Campbell,"** — he changed his mind. So the



faithful partnership of Bygraves and Campbell was established.

JOE made his debut into the profession of paid boxing by knocking out a promising young heavyweight, Don Maxwell, in exactly 65 seconds of the first round, at Liverpool Stadium on February 12th. 1953.

His bulging -muscles and magnificent physique and the fire with which he fought soon earned Joe a host of admirers. Joe lost only four of his first 28 fights, and it was not long before he was being

considered as a title prospect. His terrific punching made Bygraves a feared man in the ring.

His big chance came in April, 1956, when he met the former British heavyweight champion, Jack Gardner, In London. Joe created a sensation by stopping the ex- Guardsman in two rounds. Such a victory put Joe well on the way to a championship fight.

After stopping Marcel Limage in seven rounds in May, 1958, Bygraves was matched against the tough Tongan fighter. Kitone Lave in London, for the British Empire title.

The Jamaican became champion after one of the most brutal battles in ring history. THE Kid from Kingston was there. "I always wanted to be a champion, ever since I first took up fighting," said Joe, "When I gave up amateur boxing. I was determined to show them I could make the grade as a professional scrapper.

He wanted to put his native Jamaica on the map. "I wanted the folks back home In Kingston to be real proud of me, 'cos I was sure proud of my homeland."

But, despite his viciousness as a fighter, outside of the ring, Joe was a quiet, unassuming guy, liked by everyone who knew him. Johnny Campbell once told me: "Joe is very religious. He will never train on a Sunday. He goes to church, instead, and often reads the lesson from the pulpit."

Joe soon became known as the "Quiet Champ". The idol of every kid in his district of Liverpool.

JOE makes no secret of the fact that he does not like training. Realizing that it is all part of being a professional fighter, however, he accepts it with a smile. In September, 1956. Three months, after winning the British Empire heavyweight championship. Joe went to America with his manager, Mr. Johnny Campbell.

He had already fought In Germany, Italy and Sweden, as well, of course. In various towns and cities in Great Britain, but this was his first visit to the U.S.A. The trip proved to be a disappointing one. Joe received a big American build-up, but he was forced to retire after five rounds of his fight with

the American, Wayne Bethea, in New York.

He later explained the end of that fight: "People may have thought I was getting out of it because I was yellow. That wasn't so. I just felt my arms and legs go limp on me. It was no good going on after that."

He returned to Britain, and his headquarters on Merseyside, and prepared for his next fight. It put him back in boxing's good books, for Joe stopped another former British champion, Johnny Williams, in six rounds.

A FIGHT with the up-and-coming Henry Cooper followed, in which Bygraves put his Empire title at stake. He earned admiration from all quarters when he said: "I am prepared to put my title up every time I fight." He knocked out Cooper in the ninth round, in London, in February 1957-.

Three months later, he put the title up again, this time against Dick Richardson, a tough hard-hitting Welshman, tipped by many as the next British and Empire champ. Joe drew with Richardson over 15 rounds, the contest being fought on the Welshman's own doorstep, in Cardiff.

A visit to Germany followed. Joe met Heinz Neuhaus, Germany heavyweight champion and one-time contender for the world title. It ended in defeat for the 25-year-old Jamaican, when the referee disqualified Joe for "boxing on" before being told to do so, after knocking down his opponent, in the sixth round. Again, ringside spectators said it was a case of Bygraves being too anxious to go in for "the kill."

Joe never once predicted a fight. Whenever he was asked by a newspaper reporter if he was going to win a certain fight, the young man from Jamaica would always reply: "I don't know if I'll win or not, but I can tell you one thing — the guy who steps in with me will certainly know he's been in a fight." And he always kept his word.

OUTSIDE the ring, Joe lived up to his reputation as the "Quiet Champ". He spent most of his spare time in the cinema and playing records at his cousin's home in Liverpool. By now Joe was not getting homesick any more, for he had four brothers and two sisters in England.

His popularity increased as he readily accepted invitations to open garden fetes and collect money for charities. Then came the end of the reign of the "Quiet Champ." In November last year, he put his Empire title up for the third time in a year, against the clever British champion. Joe Erskine, reckoned to be the fastest heavyweight boxer in Europe. After 15 rounds of fierce slugging, Bygraves lost his precious title. He could not catch up with the fast and elusive Erskine, try as he would to land a knock-out punch. "Bygraves lost all right, but he is the gamest fighter we have ever seen." said many people at the ringside at the end of the contest.

Naturally Joe was disappointed. More than anything he wanted a return fight with Erskine, to prove that he could beat him. "Joe was really off form. We are both confident he could beat Erskine if they fought again" his manager Mr. Campbell told me. With the loss of the title, Joe laid off training for a

few months. He was not seen in his training camp in Birkenhead for nearly two months.

When he opened a night club in Liverpool, to provide him with some form of business for when his boxing days were over, some folk said Bygraves had retired from the ring for good.

"Nonsense," said Big Joe, annoyed at the rumours. "I aim to show 'em I'm still a champ." He returned to boxing two months ago, and quickly set about the task of getting back into perfect fighting condition.

ON FEBRUARY 10th, he climbed between the ropes once again and faced the rugged Joey Armstrong, from Ghana. Armstrong is a highly-rated boxer. Ringsiders were betting on the result. "Armstrong will outbox him," said most of them.

They did not know Bygraves. Fighting almost like a beast, he chased his opponent round the ring, punching him mercilessly from corner to corner. He was in such a fierce mood that his manager had to tell him to "cool off." The fight lasted under three rounds, before the referee intervened to save Armstrong suffering further punishment. Joe Bygraves was back on the title trail.

"All I want now is a fight with Erskine. So that I can win back my Empire title," Joe told his manager.

But another boxer. Brian London, was nominated, instead, to meet Erskine for his British and Empire titles. Bygraves was left out in the cold. There was only one thing to do - . . . Joe realised he had to prove his capabilities. He threw out a challenge to the American, Willie Pastrano, currently rated the fourth best heavyweight in the world. Pastrano has accepted the challenge.

JOE and Pastrano meet tomorrow in Leicester. England. The Jamaican is confident of victory, despite the fact that the odds are 8-1 against him beating the American. Whether he wins or not is unimportant. What does matter is that Joe Bygraves, the man who left his native Kingston as a kid to seek fame and fortune, has found both.

If he beats Pastrano, he will go to America again, this time with various offers to meet the best fighters in the world. Probably he will get a match with world heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson. If he loses, well, he has tried. And no one can ever say Bygraves is not a trier.

The secret of Bygraves's success? Joe sums it up like this' "I reckon boxing is in my blood. You can laugh and joke at me as much as you like when I'm not in the ring. But, man once I've climb into the ring, you're no friend of mine any more.