Louis, Joe,

byname of JOSEPH LOUIS BARROW, also called THE BROWN BOMBER (b. May 13, 1914, Lafayette, Ala., U.S.--d. April 12, 1981, Las Vegas, Nev.), American boxer who was world heavyweight champion from June 22, 1937, when he knocked out James J. Braddock in eight rounds in Chicago, until March 1, 1949, when he retired undefeated. During his reign, the longest in the history of the heavyweight division, he successfully defended the title 25 times, scoring 21 knockouts. His service in the U.S. Army during World War II no doubt prevented him from defending his title many more times.

Louis began his boxing career in Detroit. He won the U.S. Amateur Athletic Union 175-pound championship in 1934 and also was a Golden Gloves titleholder. He had his first professional fight on July 4, 1934, and within 12 months had knocked out Primo Carnera, the first of six previous or subsequent heavyweight champions who were his victims; the others were Max Baer, Jack Sharkey, Braddock, Max Schmeling, and Jersey Joe Walcott. Louis sustained his first professional loss in 1936 at the hands of Schmeling, but in 1938, after having beaten Braddock and taken the title, Louis defeated Schmeling with a vengeance in the first round of their rematch.

Louis was at his peak in the period 1939-42. From December 1940 through June 1941 he defended the championship seven times. After the war he was less active, and in 1949 he retired as the undefeated champion long enough to allow Ezzard Charles to earn recognition as his successor. Louis returned as challenger for the championship but lost a 15-round decision to Charles on Sept. 27, 1950. In Louis' last fight of consequence, he was knocked out in eight rounds by future champion Rocky Marciano on Oct. 26, 1951. From 1934 to 1951, Louis had 71 bouts, winning 68, 54 by knockouts. He was an extremely accurate and economical knockout puncher.

After his second retirement he was faced with a vast accumulation of improperly paid federal income tax bills, owing to poor management of his financial affairs. Late in life he became a greeter for Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, Nev.