

Comeback Kings

GREAT SPORTING TURNAROUNDS

A look back in time to some of the greatest turnarounds of a sporting nature!

2009 has been the year of the sporting comeback. England, "Lazurus like" regaining the Ashes, Jenson Button emerging from the wreckage of his career to become F1 world champion, Lance Armstrong out of retirement to make podium in the Tour de France and the comeback that never was, Michael Schumacher coming close to making a sensational return to Formula 1.

With this in mind it seems fitting to look back on some of the most spectacular and unexpected sporting comebacks and turnarounds of all time. In no particular order.....

1. England vs Australia, Headingley Test 1981

England 1-0 down in the series and in general disarray; Australia batted first declaring at 401/9 and put England in. England's response, a dismal 174 all out. Asked to follow on matters went from bad to worse. The following day England flopped again to 105 for 5, still a massive 122 runs behind the Aussies. At this stage even the bookies' odds of 500/1 for an England win looked ludicrously short.

But then a certain I T Botham walked out to bat. His partners falling away at the other end, the end in sight, 'Beefy' simply defied the odds, producing one of the greatest innings of all time to end on 149 not out and give England a lead of 124. With a modest target ahead Australia floundered in the chase and after Botham took the first wicket cheaply, Bob Willis skittled them and eventually finished with figures of 8-43 as England won sensationally by 18 runs.

2. Manchester United vs Bayern Munich, European Champions League Final 1999

Two injury time goals in the final in Barcelona to beat a Bayern Munich side that had led for 85 minutes. The Munich players were left lying all over the pitch, many in tears.

3. Muhammad Ali vs George Foreman, Rumble in the Jungle 1974

After refusing to join the US Army, world heavyweight champion Ali was stripped of his licence and barred from boxing between 1967 and 1970. When he regained his licence, it took him four years to win back his title.



At the Rumble in the Jungle against George Foreman in the former Zaire in 1974, few gave Ali a chance; yet he came out fighting, then withdrew to the ropes and let Foreman punch himself to exhaustion. Sensing his chance in the eighth, Ali moved off the ropes and flattened him.

4. Dennis Taylor vs Steve Davis, 1985 World Snooker Championships

After losing the first seven frames of the world snooker final, to say Dennis Taylor started poorly would be an understatement. When Davis made his first significant mistake in the eighth frame, it seemed irrelevant. But Taylor won that eighth frame and so began snooker's greatest revival. He levelled the match at 17-all, and then won the deciding frame on a respotted black.

5. Lance Armstrong, Tour De France 1999

On October 1st 1996, the Texan-born American Lance Armstrong was ranked the number one cyclist in the world. On October 2nd, the then 25-year-old was told he had advanced testicular cancer and given a 50 per cent chance of survival. "I intend to beat this disease", he informed the press. After an aggressive period of chemotherapy, surgery and intense mental and physical pain, Armstrong did just that, returning to miraculously win cycling's most prestigious event, the Tour de France, in 1999. Armstrong's comeback is all more remarkable not just because of the inspirational way he battled cancer, but because of the longevity of his comeback. He didn't just return to win the most brutal, body-punishing race on the planet. Between 1999 and 2005, he did it an unprecedented seven times.