

Laila Ali

Born: December 30, 1977
Miami Beach, Florida, United States

Also known as: She Bee Stingin'



EARLY LIFE

Laila Ali was born the second daughter of boxer Muhammad Ali and his third wife Veronica Porsche. She became the most famous of Ali's nine children. As a child, Ali was not close to her father but lived with her mother and older sister. Ali's teen years were difficult; she displayed a defiance that got her in trouble with the law, primarily for street fighting. She was arrested for shoplifting and spent three months in a juvenile detention center. She graduated from college in Santa Monica and worked at a nail salon before deciding to follow her father's career path. Ali, at about 170 pounds and 5 feet 10 inches, was classified as a super middleweight.

THE ROAD TO EXCELLENCE

Despite her father's warnings regarding the potential for injury as a boxer, Ali proceeded with her plans. On October 8, 1999, at the Turning Stone Casino Convention Center in Verona, New York, Ali made her debut as a fighter against another unknown, April Fowler. The bout drew a crowd of more than three thousand and attracted media from all over the world. Ali won her second fight by a technical knockout (TKO), with 3 seconds remaining in the final round, on November 10, 1999, in West Virginia. Her opponent was Shadina Pennybaker. Ali was not as smooth and deadly as her father had been, but she carried a similar swagger, taunting Pennybaker.

On December 10, 1999, Ali knocked Nicolyn Armstrong flat on her back, scoring a TKO. On March 7, 2000, in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in a fight that lasted only 70 seconds, Ali gained her fourth win by knocking out Crystal Arcand in the first round. Some spectators commented on Ali's power and quickness. On April 8, 2000, Ali got her

first big scare as a fighter when she was knocked down in the second round of a fight with Karen Bill. Ali got up and counterattacked strongly, but she was still getting pummeled at the end of the round. After Ali delivered a number of punches in the third round, the referee stopped the fight in Ali's favor. The crowd booed, many feeling the fight had been stopped too soon.

THE EMERGING CHAMPION

After her fight with Bill, Ali remembered her father's warnings and heeded her trainer, who told her not to turn her head away from punches. He also said she should not move away from contact. Instead, he advised, she should move in and take a beating: "People want to see women fight," he told her. Ali realized that her career was in danger and that she had to be more aggressive if she wanted to be a successful fighter.



Boxing Record			
Date	Location	Loser	Result
Oct. 8, 1999	Verona, N.Y.	April Fowler	1st-round knockout
Nov. 10, 1999	Chester, W.Va.	Shadina Pennybaker	4th-round technical knockout
Dec. 10, 1999	Detroit, Mich.	Nicolyn Armstrong	2d-round technical knockout
Mar. 7, 2000	Windsor, Ont.	Crystal Arcand	1st-round knockout
Apr. 8, 2000	Detroit, Mich.	Karen Bill	3d-round technical knockout
Apr. 22, 2000	Guangzhou, China	Kristina King	4th-round technical knockout
June 15, 2000	Universal City, Calif.	Marjorie Jones	1st-round technical knockout
Oct. 20, 2000	Auburn Hills, Mich.	Kendra Lenhart	6th-round unanimous decision
Mar. 2, 2001	Verona, N.Y.	Christine Robinson	5th-round technical knockout
June 8, 2001	Verona, N.Y.	Jacqui Frazier-Lyde	8th-round medical decision
June 7, 2002	Southaven, Miss.	Shirvelle Williams	6th-round unanimous decision
Aug. 17, 2002	Las Vegas, Nev.	Suzette Taylor	2d-round technical knockout
Nov. 8, 2002	Las Vegas, Nev.	Valerie Mahfood	8th-round technical knockout
Feb. 14, 2003	Louisville, Ky.	Mary Ann Almager	4th-round technical knockout
June 21, 2003	Los Angeles, Calif.	Valerie Mahfood	6th-round technical knockout
Aug. 23, 2003	Biloxi, Miss.	Christy Martin	4th-round knockout
July 3, 2004	Louisville, Ky.	Monica Nunez	9th-round technical knockout
July 17, 2004	Bowie, Md.	Nikki Eplion	3d-round technical knockout
Sept. 24, 2004	Atlanta, Ga.	Gwendolyn O'Neil	3d-round knockout
Feb. 11, 2005	Atlanta, Ga.	Cassandra Geiggar	8th-round technical knockout
June 11, 2005	Washington, D.C.	Erin Toughill	3d-round technical knockout
Dec. 17, 2005	Berlin, Germany	Asa Sandell	5th-round technical knockout
Nov. 11, 2006	New York, N.Y.	Shelley Burton	4th-round technical knockout
Feb. 3, 2007	Johannesburg, South Africa	Gwendolyn O'Neil	1st-round technical knockout

Ali's sixth win was in China on April 22, 2000. She battered Kristina King, gaining a TKO 3 seconds into the fourth round. King was not able to handle Ali's combinations and struggled from the start. In the third round, Ali knocked out King's mouthpiece and bloodied her opponent.

After taking a break from fighting to get married, Ali won a unanimous decision over Kendra Lenhart on October 20, 2000. On March 2, 2001, Ali improved her pro record to 9-0 when she knocked out Christine Robinson with powerful right-handed punches and a left uppercut.

CONTINUING THE STORY

During the 1970's, Muhammad Ali fought a series of epic heavyweight bouts with the hard-punching Joe Frazier. On June 8, 2001, Ali fought a so-called "grudge match" against Frazier's daughter Jacqui Frazier-Lyde. The bout attracted attention not only because the combatants renewed a family rivalry, but also because Frazier-Lyde, a Philadelphia lawyer, had taken up boxing specifically to fight Ali. Both women deemed the match to be beneficial financially and an important public relations event for women's boxing. However, some in the

sporting world thought that Ali and Frazier-Lyde would sully their famous fathers' reputations. In fact, the two women engaged in an exciting bout that Ali won in the eighth round.

In 2002, Ali became the International Boxing Association female middleweight champion. That September, the Women's Boxing Archive Network named Ali fighter of the month. In late 2002, in Las Vegas, Nevada, Ali defended her title and added the Women's International Boxing Association (WIBA) and International Women's Boxing Federation (IWBF) belts with an eighth-round knockout win over Valerie Mahfood. On June 21, 2003, Ali defended her title in a rematch with Mahfood, knocking her out in 6 rounds. On September 24, 2004, she captured the IWBF light-heavyweight title; on February 11, 2005, she beat Cassandra Geiggar in 10 rounds. In June of that year, Ali bested Erin Toughill to remain undefeated and won the World Boxing Council (WBC) title in addition to defending her WIBA crown. Sportswriters called the Ali's bout with Toughill one of the most violent female-to-female fights in history.

On December 17, 2005, Ali defeated Åsa Sandell by TKO in the fifth round, marking her

twenty-second win. Then, in 2006, she defeated Shelley Burton by a fourth-round TKO. On February 3, 2007, in Johannesburg, South Africa, Ali fought her last fight, retaining her WBC and WIBA super-middleweight world titles when she knocked out Gwendolyn O'Neil after 56 seconds. She retired undefeated: 24 wins, 0 losses.

On July 23, 2007, Ali married former NFL player Curtis Conway. They have two children together. Ali is the stepmother of Conway's three children. She has since appeared in several television shows, including *Dancing With The Stars*, *All In With Laila Ali* and *Chopped: All Stars*.

SUMMARY

In the past, women's boxing had been demeaned by male boxers, including Muhammad Ali, who once said that women were not meant to be punched in the face and breasts. Since boxing

involves hard physical labor and mental toughness, boxers must be in top physical condition. Laila Ali successfully disproved the many people who thought women did not have the mental and physical endurance to be boxers.

*Julia M. Meyers
updated by Susan Faber*

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Ray Allen

Born: July 20, 1975
Merced, California, United States

Also known as: Walter Ray Allen (full name)



BASKETBALL

EARLY LIFE

Walter Ray Allen was born on July 20, 1975. His parents are Walter Allen, who worked as a welder in the U.S. Air Force, and Flora Allen. He has two older and two younger siblings. Because Allen's father was in the military, the family moved frequently and lived overseas occasionally, including in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Allen played baseball, football, and soccer at an early age. He immediately demonstrated superior athletic skills. At the age of eight, he was the only child in the local baseball Little League who could hit the ball far enough to reach the home-run line. In later years, Allen first played organized basketball when his father was stationed at Edwards Air

Force Base in California. His mother told him basketball was his best sport.

THE ROAD TO EXCELLENCE

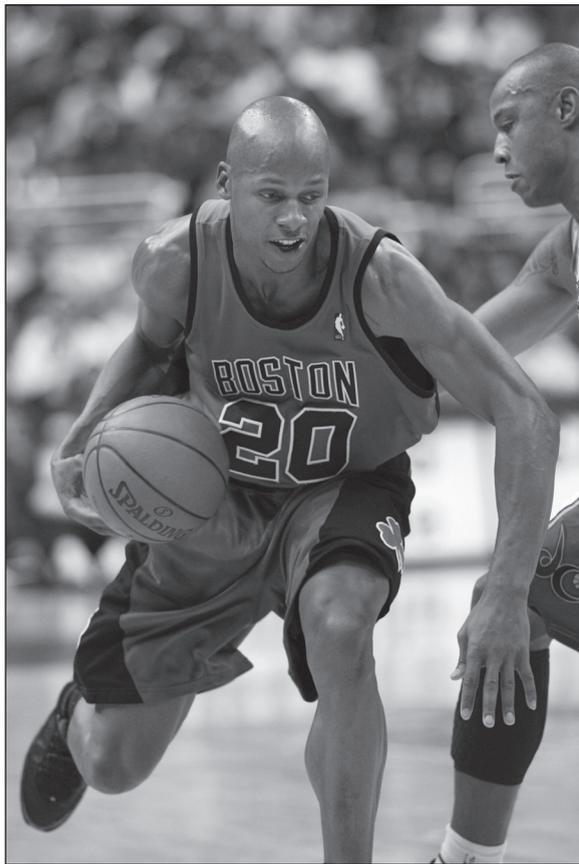
After the family moved to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, Allen made the varsity basketball team as a freshman at Hillcrest High School. He eventually led Hillcrest to a state championship. His success at the high school level led several top college basketball programs to recruit him, and he decided to attend the University of Connecticut.

During his freshman year, he did not start but was productive as a reserve. He became a starter his sophomore season. In 1994-1995, Connecticut was ranked number one for most of the season.

Statistics

Season	GP	FGM	FG%	FTM	FT%	Reb.	Ast.	TP	PPG
1996-97	82	390	.430	205	.823	326	210	1,102	13.4
1997-98	82	563	.428	343	.875	405	356	1,602	19.5
1998-99	50	303	.450	176	.903	212	178	856	17.1
1999-00	82	642	.455	353	.887	259	308	1,809	22.1
2000-01	82	628	.480	348	.888	428	374	1,806	22.0
2001-02	69	530	.462	214	.873	312	271	1,503	21.8
2002-03	76	598	.439	316	.900	381	334	1,713	22.5
2003-04	56	447	.440	245	.904	286	268	1,287	23.0
2004-05	78	640	.428	378	.883	347	289	1,867	23.9
2005-06	78	681	.454	324	.903	332	286	1,955	25.1
2006-07	55	505	.438	279	.903	247	228	1,454	26.4
2007-08	73	439	.445	215	.907	268	225	1,273	17.4
2008-09	79	499	.480	237	.952	278	218	1,434	18.2
2009-10	80	464	.477	231	.913	253	210	1,304	16.3
2010-11	80	480	.491	193	.881	274	219	1,321	16.5
2011-12	46	226	.458	97	.915	142	109	655	14.2
2012-13	79	292	.449	140	.886	217	135	863	10.9
2013-14	73	240	.442	105	.905	205	143	701	9.6
Totals	1,300	8,567	.452	4,398	.894	5,272	4,361	24,505	18.9

Notes: GP = games played; FGM = field goals made; FG% = field goal percentage; FTM = free throws made; FT% = free throw percentage; Reb. = rebounds; Ast. = assists; TP = total points; PPG = points per game



The team won its second consecutive Big East Conference regular-season championship. In the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Basketball Tournament, Connecticut lost in the West Regional Finals to the University of California at Los Angeles, the eventual national champion. Then, Allen was selected to play for the U.S. team at the World University Games in Japan, where the Americans finished undefeated and won the gold medal. Allen was named USA Basketball's male athlete of the year.

THE EMERGING CHAMPION

Allen had an even better year the following season. He led Connecticut to a 30-2 record, a top seed in the NCAA Basketball Tournament, and a Big East Conference tournament championship. Perhaps his best individual moment in college was making the game-winning shot in the conference-title game, providing Connecticut with a 75-74 win over Georgetown. He was named as a first-team all-American.

Milwaukee Bucks Records

Most consecutive games played (400)
 Most three-pointers in career (1,051)
 Most three-pointers attempted (2,587)

NBA Records

Most three-pointers made in career (2,973)
 Most three-pointers attempted in career (7,429)

Honors and Awards

1997	NBA all-rookie second team
2000	Gold medal, Olympic Basketball
2000-2002, 2004-2008	NBA all-star
2001	All-NBA third team
	NBA three-point shootout champion
2003	NBA sportsmanship award
2005	All-NBA second team

After his junior season, Allen decided to move to the professional level, declaring himself eligible for the NBA draft in 1996. He was selected by the Minnesota Timberwolves as the fifth-overall pick in the draft. However, he was immediately traded to the Milwaukee Bucks for Stephon Marbury and a future first-round pick.

Allen had an instant impact on the team. He started all but one game his rookie season for the Bucks and finished third on the team in scoring, with 13.4 points per game. As his career continued, he was consistently one of the best players on his team. His strengths were three-point shooting and free throws. His performance helped the Bucks make the playoffs in three consecutive seasons, from 1999 to 2001. In the 1999-2000 season, he led the Bucks in scoring with 22.1 points per game, which was fourth best in the NBA. After the season, he played for the U.S. Olympic team, which won the gold medal. He served a key role for the United States, averaging more than 10 points per game.

CONTINUING THE STORY

The Bucks' best season during Allen's tenure was 2000-2001. The team advanced to the Eastern Conference Finals before losing to the Philadelphia 76ers in the seven-game series. Allen's individual performance contributed to the Bucks' success that year. He had career-best statistics in field-goal percentage, rebounds, assists, and steals.

He also showed outstanding longevity, starting in 366 consecutive games and playing in 378 straight games, retroactive to his rookie year.

Though the Bucks' performance declined significantly following the 2000-2001 season, Allen's level did not. In the next year, he was named to his third-consecutive all-star team. He scored a career-high 47 points in a single game. He ranked among NBA leaders in scoring, three-point percentage, three-point field goals made, and free-throw percentage. He extended his streaks of consecutive games played to 400 and consecutive games started to 388, until tendinitis in his left knee briefly prevented him from playing.

Halfway through the 2002-2003 season, Allen was traded to the Seattle SuperSonics. In almost five seasons with the Sonics, he increased his points-per-game average. Prior to the 2007-2008 season, he was traded to the Boston Celtics. Along with Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce, Allen helped lead the team to an NBA-best 66-16 regular-season record and an NBA Championship, the franchise's first in twenty-two years.

Allen and the Celtics returned to the NBA Finals two years later, before losing to the Los Angeles Lakers. In game two of that series, Allen set the record for most three-point shots made in a Finals game with 8. Following the 2011-2012 season, Allen rejected a contract offer from the Celtics, signing instead with the Miami Heat, and leading to an acrimonious exit from Boston. In two years with the Heat, Allen teamed with LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Bosh to twice take the team to the NBA Finals, winning in 2013. A free-agent after the 2013-2014 season, Allen did

not sign with a team, and in 2016, he officially announced his retirement.

Allen also had a major impact off the court. He served as a member of the all-star advisory council for the Junior NBA youth basketball program. He has also been the NBA spokesperson for the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund. In 2000 and 2001, he was named *The Sporting News* "good guy."

SUMMARY

Ray Allen established himself as one of the best shooters in professional basketball history. He consistently ranked high in the categories of scoring, free-throw percentage, and three-point percentage. Furthermore, his endurance is noteworthy; he put together remarkable streaks in games played and games started. These achievements helped make him an all-star ten times. He remains the all-time leader in 3-point shots made.

*Kevin L. Brennan
updated by Andrew Schenker*

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Aric Almirola

Born: March 14, 1984
Eglin Air Force Base in Fort Walton Beach,
Florida, United States



EARLY LIFE

Aric Almirola was born on March 14, 1984, in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, at the Eglin Air Force Base where his father was stationed. He grew up in Tampa, a short two hours from Daytona, and he would go to the races there with his grandfather when he was a child. His grandfather, Sam Rodriguez, had come to Florida fleeing Castro's Cuba; Almirola is proud of his Cuban descent. Sam Rodriguez was locally famous as a dirt sprint car racer in his younger days, and the three generations from Sam to his grandson would often travel as a close-knit family to attend various racing events on the East Coast.

Under his grandfather's tutelage, Almirola began racing go-karts at the age of eight. Before long, he was winning competitions and moving up in the go-kart racing scene to the national level. When Sam Rodriguez retired, he passed down his own old rocket go-kart to his grandson.

THE ROAD TO EXCELLENCE

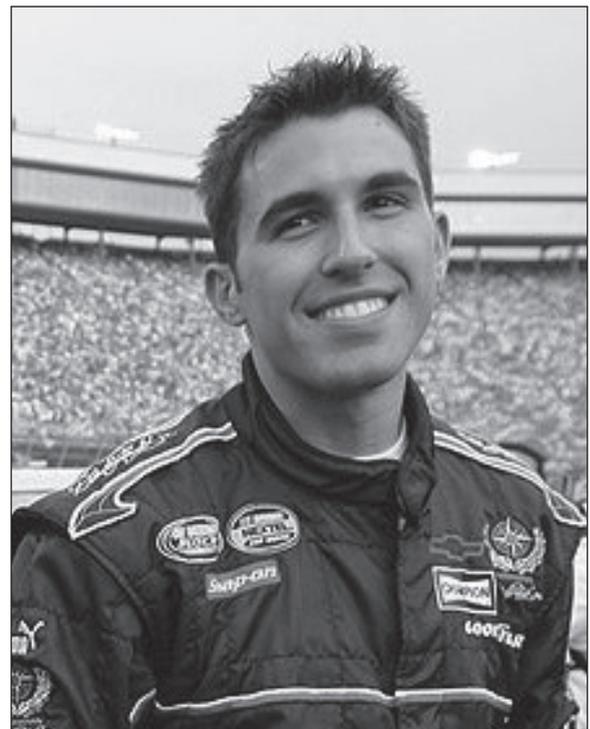
Almirola first raced nationally at the World Karting Association (WKA) race when he was fourteen. Although it was his first race at that level, his excellent qualifying time at the trials earned him the pole position. In the World Karting standings for that year, his first with the Association, he ranked fourth place. He continued with World Karting for two more years.

After an interlude spent racing modified stock cars, Almirola entered the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) Sun Belt Weekly Racing Division at the age of eighteen in 2002. His mounting achievements continued when he took second place in the Rookie of the Year standings that year. In 2004, he signed with Joe Gibbs Racing, which had a strong development program for

promising drivers. Joe Gibbs had teamed up with former National Football League (NFL) star Reggie White to create a diversity program that would later be emulated in NASCAR's own Drive for Diversity, and it was under the auspices of this effort that Almirola was signed.

THE EMERGING CHAMPION

Almirola drove nine races in the Busch series for Gibbs in 2006 and then moved into that series as a regular in 2007. He is credited with his first Busch series win that year, but it occurred under unusual circumstances. Driver Denny Hamlin's helicopter arrived late to the site, and Almirola, who wasn't



Career Highlights

Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series:	2014 Coke Zero 400 (Daytona)
NASCAR Xfinity Series:	2007 AT&T 250 (Milwaukee)
“	2016 Subway Firecracker 250 (Daytona)
“	2017 Sparks Energy 300 (Talladega)
NASCAR Camping World Truck Series:	2010 Dover 200 (Dover)
	2010 VFW 200 (Michigan)

slated to drive, started the race in Denny’s place. On the fifty-ninth lap, Hamlin took over, as was required by sponsorship agreements. Almirola performed quite well, having been in the lead for the first forty-three laps, and Hamlin went on to win the race. Later in 2007, Almirola joined with Dale Earnhardt, Inc.

Almirola was selected to be a co-driver with Mark Martin for the 2008 Sprint Cup Series. He performed well behind the wheel of the number 8 United States Army Chevrolet, and, as a result, he was chosen to be its full-time driver for the 2009 series. Unfortunately, he performed poorly for the first several races of the season and then quickly developed trouble with sponsorships. He was forced to drop out after seven races. Undeterred, Almirola continued through the year racing in other venues, including driving in the Truck Series.

Almirola spent much of 2009 and 2010 driving full-time for Phoenix Racing before turning his attention to the Truck Series, doing well in a close finish at the Mountain Dew 250 in 2010. Almirola finished in second place by the merest fraction of a second—0.002 of a second, to be precise. This is remembered as the closest finish to date in Truck Series history.

CONTINUING THE STORY

Almirola reached greater heights in 2012 when he was chosen to drive the number 43 in the Sprint Cup Series for Richard Petty Motorsports. The number 43 is among the most famous in motor sport history. It debuted in 1959 with a team led by Lee Petty. Later, number 43 was driven by Lee’s

son Richard Petty through seven championships and 200 wins.

In his first year driving number 43, Almirola finished in twentieth place overall, collecting a respectable four top tens along the way. He was contracted by Richard Petty Motorsports to drive number 43 for a second year in 2013, and he finished that year at eighteenth in points.

In January 2014, Almirola signed a three-year contract with Richard Petty Motorsports. Riding the wave of this success, Almirola went on to win his only Sprint cup championship in the 2014 Coke Zero 400 at the Daytona International Speedway in July of that year. Because of rain, the race was ended after 112 laps, with Almirola in the lead. It was the first championship win for the number 43 since 1999. The second year of his extended contract, 2015, Almirola finished at a respectable seventeenth in the standings.

In 2016, Almirola won his first Xfinity Series since the unusual circumstance in 2007 when he won with Denny Hamlin. This time it was at Daytona, and Almirola narrowly edged out Justin Allgaier at the finish by 0.003 seconds. In early May 2017, he won a third Xfinity Series race, the Sparks Energy 300 at the Talladega Superspeedway.

A career-defining event occurred on May 13, 2017, as Almirola was nearing the end of his contract with Richard Petty Motorsports. During the Go Bowling 400 held at the Kansas Speedway, Almirola was badly injured in a violent crash. Two other drivers were involved — Joey Logano and Danica Patrick. Logano’s brake rotor exploded, causing a violent collision with Patrick. Almirola then slammed into Patrick’s car. Almirola suffered a back injury and had to be cut from the vehicle and airlifted to the University of Kansas Hospital. With a compression fracture to a vertebra in his back, Almirola was out of the sport for several months for recovery.

Late in 2017, Almirola announced that he had signed with Stewart Haas Racing to drive the number 10 Smithfield Food Ford Fusion in the 2018 NASCAR Monster Energy Cup Series the following year.

SUMMARY

With the completion of his recovery following a serious 2017 back injury, his driving career

remains in full swing. To date, Aric Almirola has one championship win, eleven career top-five finishes, and thirty-one top tens. He is married to Janice Almirola and they have two children, a son (Alex) born in 2012 and a daughter (Abby) born in 2013.

D. Alan Dean

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