

World Champion  
Kickboxer **Lou Neglia**  
Has Found Happiness and  
Peace After a Rough  
Start in Life

BY DOUG JEFFREY

# Tough Guy

With a  
Tender Heart

**L**ou Neglia was never afraid to fight. That was not the problem. Choosing the right time to brawl, however, was a different story. Like the time during lunch at Franklin Pierce College in Rindge, New Hampshire.

It was a scene right out of *"Animal House."* As part of a freshman initiation, a senior football player asked, uh ... ordered, Neglia to take his finished lunch tray and return it. Well, that didn't go over too well with the Brooklyn native. He took the tray and flung the uneaten food across the cafeteria. The brawl was on, and then it got worse.

When someone grabbed him from behind, Neglia thought it was one of the football player's pals. So he decked him. As it turned out, it was an instructor, trying to break up the melee.

"It was mass confusion," says Neglia.

Well, order was finally restored, and Neglia went about his business for the day ... without throwing a single punch. He went back to the dorm that night without a care in the world. He had showed one of the big dudes from the football team that he couldn't be pushed around, the school wasn't going to harshly discipline him and life was good ... until the next morning.

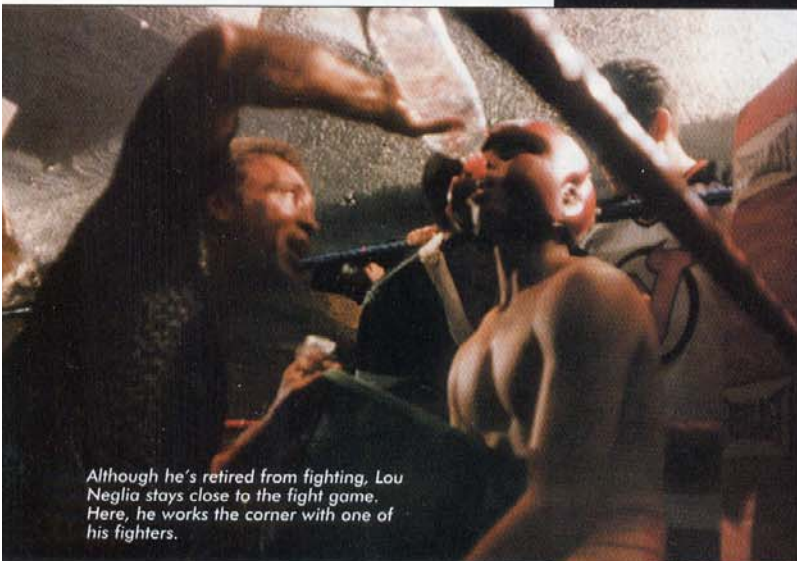
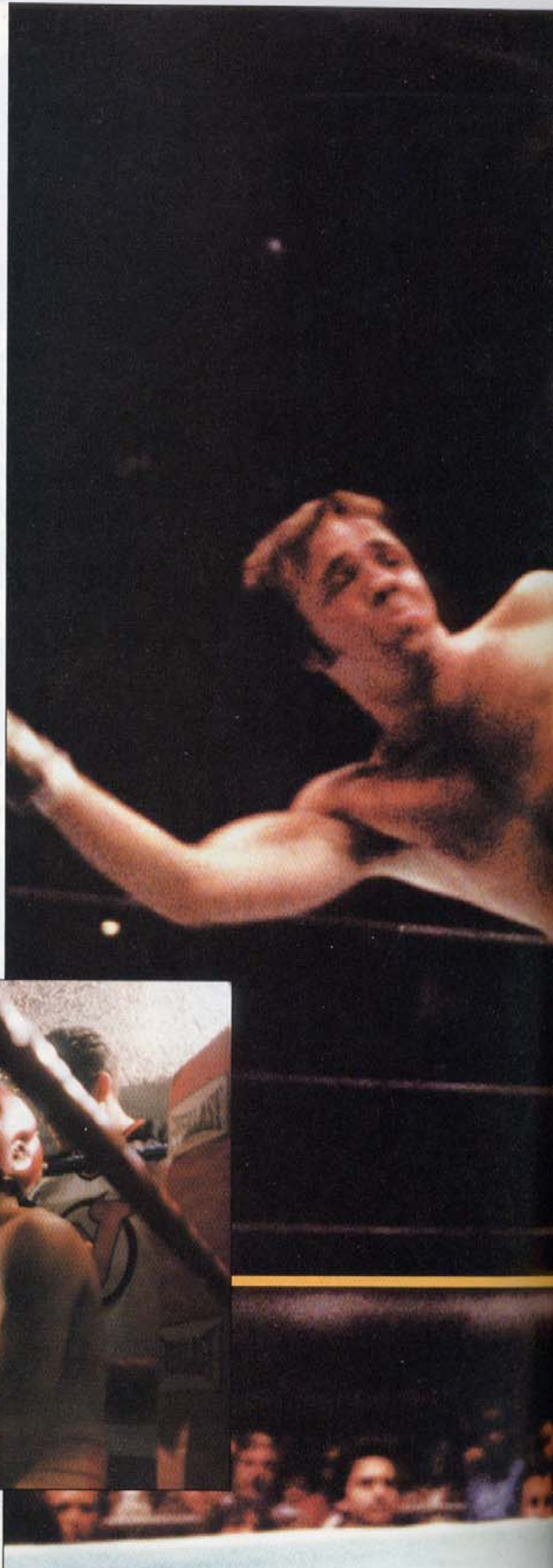
"There was a knock on the door," recalls Neglia. "As it turns out, it was the police. I received a police escort to the airport ... wearing the clothes I had on."

It's bad enough to get thrown out of school, but it's particularly bad when your parents lose 80 percent of the tuition they paid.

"I had my problems when I was younger," the 50-year-old acknowledges.

And he isn't kidding.

There were other fights, too. Like the time he was put on probation for fighting and the time he was thrown out of high school. Some of his friends may not have had the greatest influence on him, either. To make matters even worse, he was hanging out in the



*Although he's retired from fighting, Lou Neglia stays close to the fight game. Here, he works the corner with one of his fighters.*

Photos courtesy of Lou Neglia

## Tough Guy With a Tender Heart

Gravesend section of Brooklyn, an area that didn't have the world's best reputation.

"It was a rough neighborhood," says the father of Louis, 21, and Irene, 24.

"When we were bored of doing nothing, we'd do something stupid for excitement," he recalls.

### The Scoop

**Name:** Lou Neglia

**Age:** 50

**Born and raised:** Brooklyn, New York

**Residence:** Long Island

**Siblings:** Two brothers (Peter, an attorney, and Joseph, a stockbroker) and one sister (Maria St. George, an employee with a school district)

**Owner:** Louis Neglia's Martial Arts Academy (kickboxing, goju-ryu, jujutsu) and kickboxing promoter

**Titles:** World heavyweight kickboxing champion, 1985

The results weren't pretty. One of his friends was shot. Another overdosed on drugs. The FBI arrested one for counterfeiting.

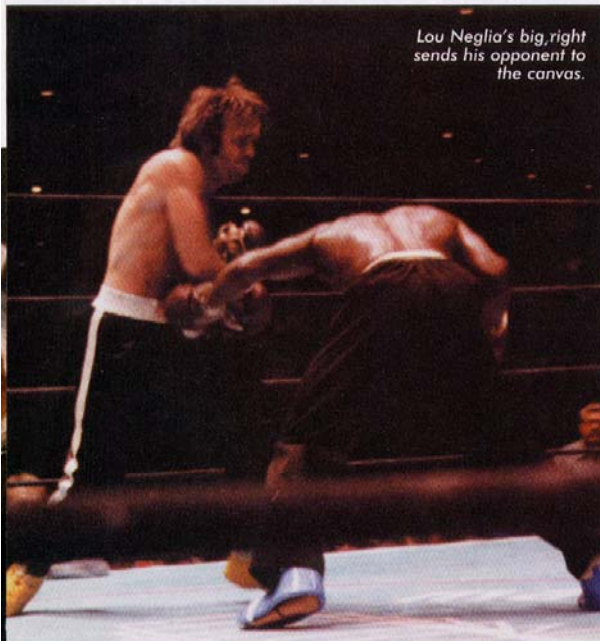
"I was with a rough crowd," he says. "I had a lot of energy, and I used it in the wrong way. I don't think I knew right from wrong. Later, I drifted away from my old friends. I

knew that if I stayed there would be trouble."

Some guys might drift aimlessly, but not Neglia. He was introduced to the martial arts, and his course was set for life.

### A LOVE AFFAIR

Neglia, who had a passing interest in baseball and football, fell in love with the martial arts when he saw one of Aaron Banks' demonstrations at the Manhattan



Lou Neglia's big, right sends his opponent to the canvas.



Lou Neglia still trains everyday and maintains his flexibility.

Center in New York.

"I was fascinated by this show," says Neglia, who ultimately earned his Bachelor of Science degree in business education from the University of Palm Beach in West Palm Beach, Fla. "I was amazed at the toughness of the fighters. In addition to that, I saw that they were fierce fighters during the event and gentlemen after."

Once Neglia realized he had that passion for the arts, he had another hurdle to overcome: his parents.

"My dad looked at me like I was crazy when I said I was going into kickboxing," he says. "As a good parent, he didn't see a future in it. He wanted me to use my education for my career."

Eventually, his father came around.

"Later, he became my biggest fan," says Neglia. "He used to jump up and down and scream the loudest during the matches. Now he teases me and says that's the career he wanted me to take all along."

His mother also jumped up and down a little bit ... for a different reason. When she found out that her son was opting for the "square jungle" as opposed to something a little less violent, she wasn't particularly pleased either.

"She was concerned," he says. "I think she wanted to know why this [kickboxing] and why not that."

Of course, it didn't help when he came home with bumps and bruises from the battlefield. While she grudgingly attended his fights, she never quite came around like her husband did.

"She would sit with her eyes closed," says Neglia. "She would not even know the fight was over until one of our relatives told her."

Professional kickboxing may not be what they envisioned for their son, but they were darn proud of him, especially in 1985, when he won the World Professional Karate Organization's middleweight heavyweight title when he knocked out John "Cyclone" Flood with a kick to the head at Madison Square Garden.

"That has to be my best memory in kickboxing," says Neglia, who finished his career with a record of 34 wins and 2 losses. "At that time, that was my dream."

Neglia was also a dream come true for Aaron Banks, a New York-based promoter.

"As a fighter, he could take it

## In Quotes

**"Louis Neglia was a true champion not only in combat but also in life. I've always loved him for that."**

— Aaron Banks,  
promoter of the Oriental World  
of Self-Defense

**"Louis Neglia has been a surrogate father to me, and he has helped me through some rough times."**

— Michael Pellegrino,  
student and an assistant superintendent for the New York City  
Housing Authority and  
Staff Development

**"Because of Louis, there's no limit as to where I can go or what I can do."**

— Richard Dambakly,  
student and a splicer for the  
phone company

and dish it out," says Banks, noting that Neglia fought for him for four years. "He had the veracity of a tiger."

In addition to excellent fighting skills, Neglia also exemplified the quintessential martial artist.

"He was a true champion because he was always respectful of his opponent," says Banks. "When he knocked somebody out, he always made sure that he was OK."

When Neglia fought, he certainly got an OK turnout from his friends from Brooklyn. They showed up in force, recalls Banks.

"He had a tremendous following from the Brooklyn area," he says. "When he won his matches, his friends would storm the ring and put him on shoulders and carry him around like a true conqueror."

## THE PARTY'S OVER

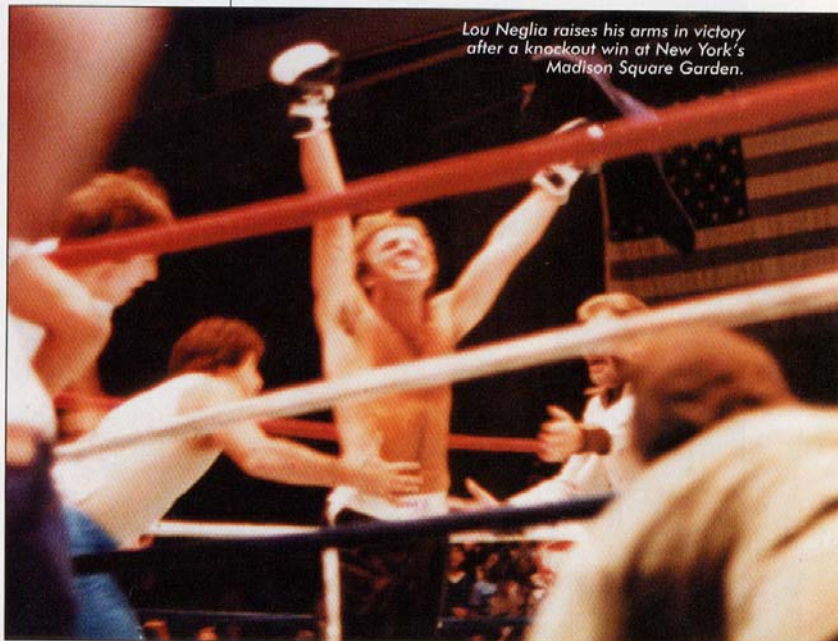
While Neglia was living one dream and sitting atop the kickboxing world, he was also experiencing a nightmare.

Rocky Graziano, the famous fighter, used to come to his fights. After Neglia won his championship, Graziano told him that it's nice to retire as a champion. Neglia, who had the sport and training engrained in his blood, pondered the advice a little bit ... and figured he'd keep fighting.

"I kept thinking that I should have one more fight and then quit," he says. "It was like being at a party and not knowing when to leave."

Then he thought about Graziano's advice a little more.

"At the time, I was married with children," he says.



Lou Neglia raises his arms in victory after a knockout win at New York's Madison Square Garden.

## Tough Guy With a Tender Heart

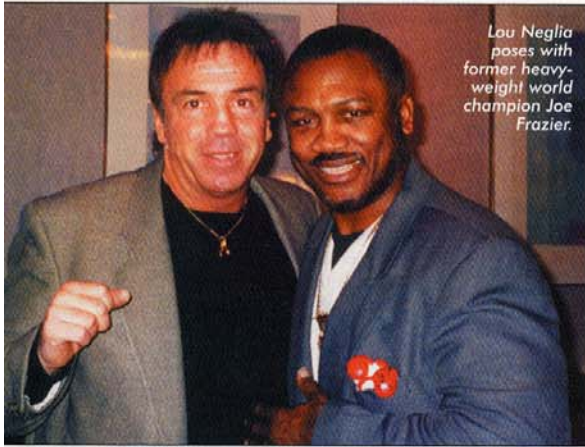
"But I was so obsessed with training that I went overboard with it. I trained religiously, but I almost isolated myself from people. That took me away from my family, friends and people in general."

Eventually, he knew it was time to leave.

"I took his advice," he notes. "I figured one more [championship] was not going to make that much difference."

### A NEW LOVE

While Neglia may have hung up his fighting gloves, he



Lou Neglia poses with former heavy-weight world champion Joe Frazier.

soon found out he wasn't ready to give up his affinity for the fight game.

"I probably decided to get into promotions when I realized I was missing the fighting," he muses.

He started with some small shows and liked the feeling.

"I felt like I was back in the ring," he says. "I was training some of my fighters, and I set up their strategy."

Starting with small promotions between schools, Neglia kept bumping up the shows little by little. Soon, his shows were telecast on ESPN and MSG and pay-per-view. Some of them were at the Taj Mahal, others at the Tropicana. Then he was having six shows per year, some of which had an international flavor. On top of all that, his last 50 shows have been sellouts.

Neglia believes he's been successful in promotions because he takes time to match up the fighters.

"The worst thing you can have is a mismatch," says Neglia, whose matches are sanctioned by the International Sport Karate Association, Kick International Council of Kickboxing and the United States Kickboxing Association.

An exciting match keeps people interested.

"It's exciting and beautiful," he notes.

And the result is a fight that the audience enjoys.

### Lou Neglia's Instructors

Goju-ryu: Chuck Merriman  
American karate: Warren Siciliano  
Kickboxing: Stu Ray Skarcia  
Jujutsu: Moses Powell

### SATISFACTION

For a man who has won a world kickboxing title, for a

*Continued on page 98*



Lou Neglia with his blackbelt kickboxing team. Lou is proud of their victories in life as well as in the ring.