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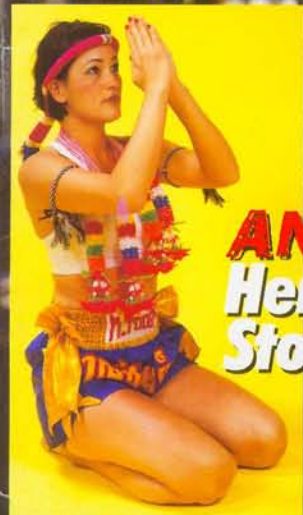
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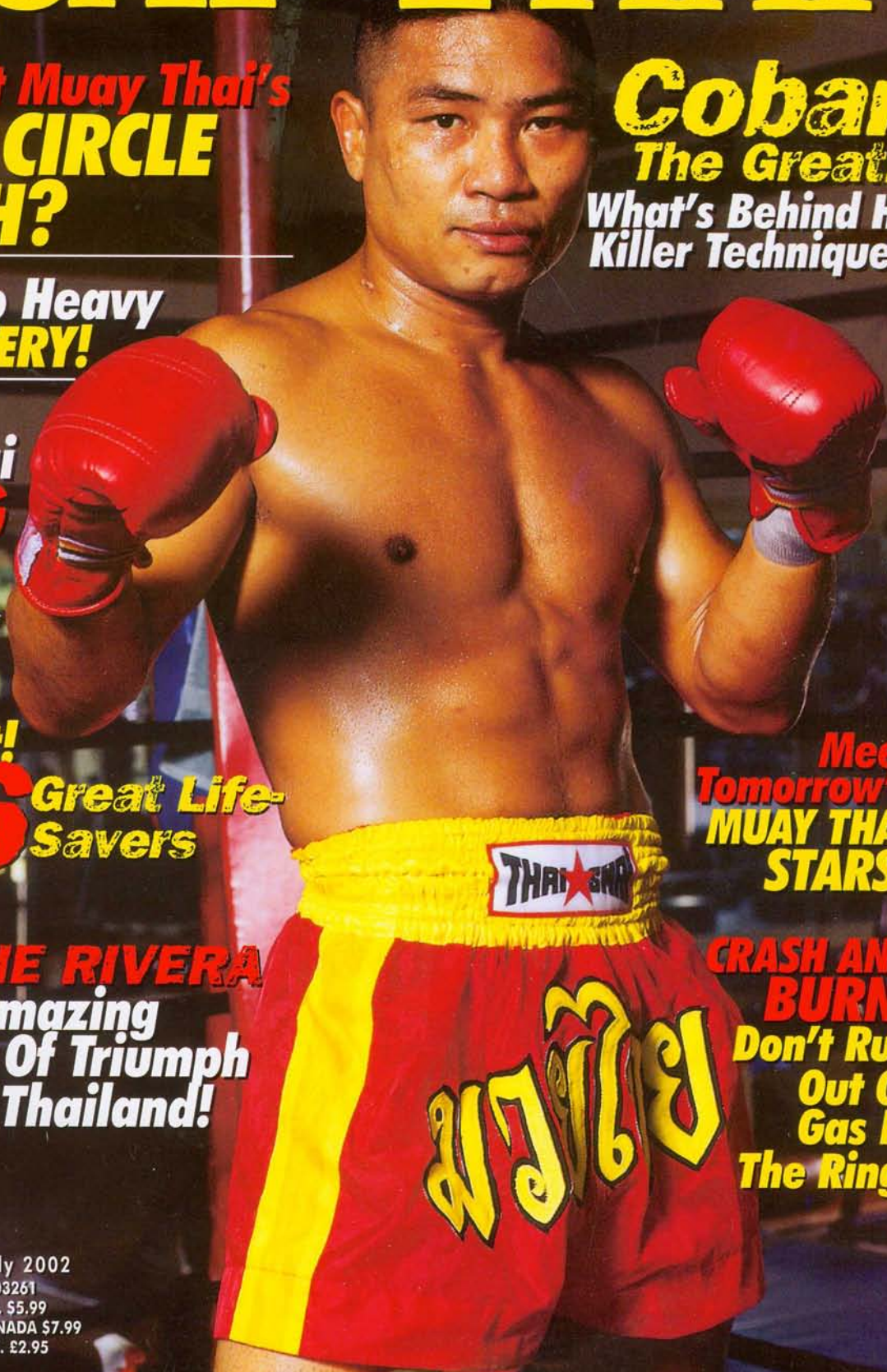
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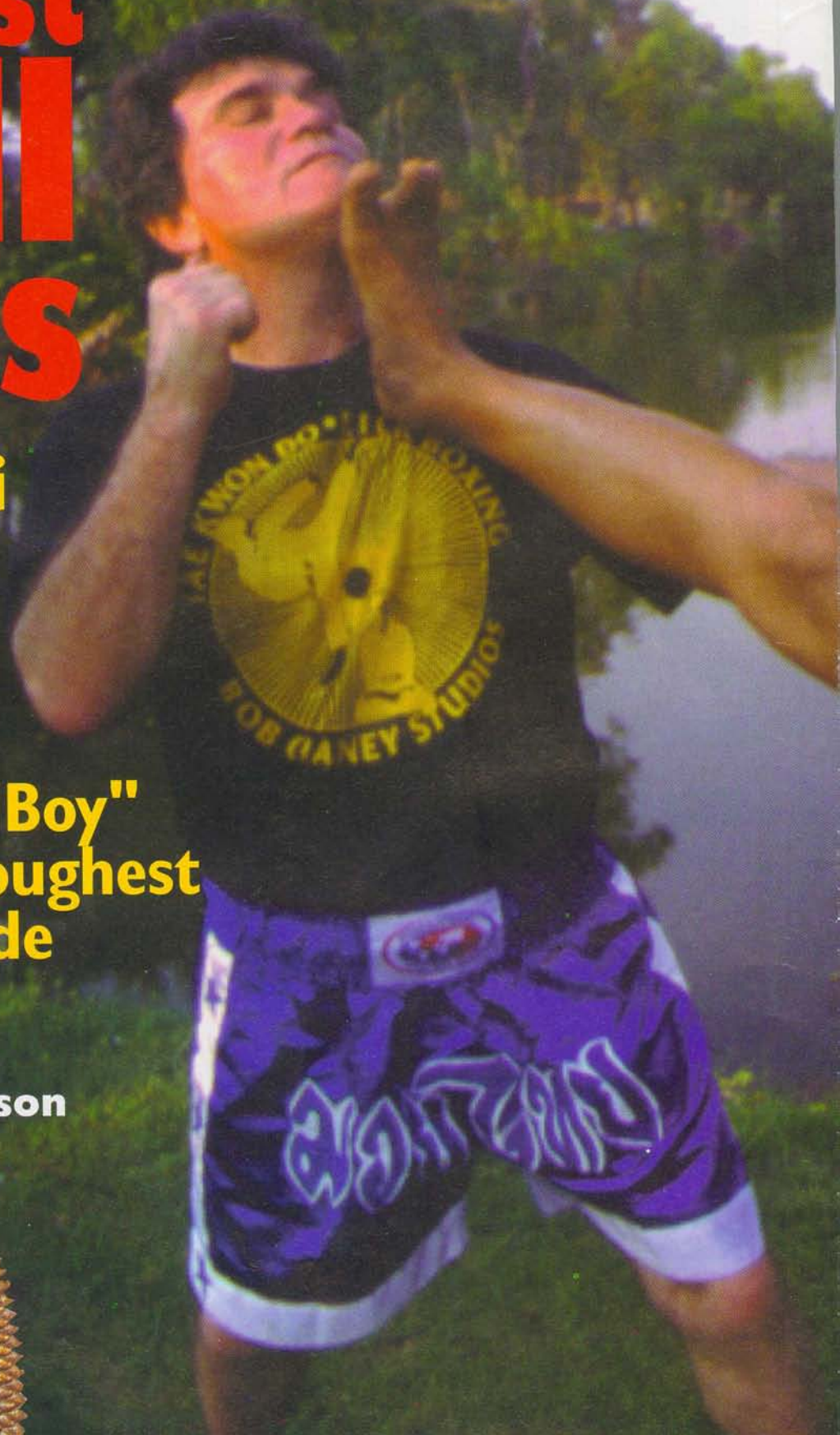
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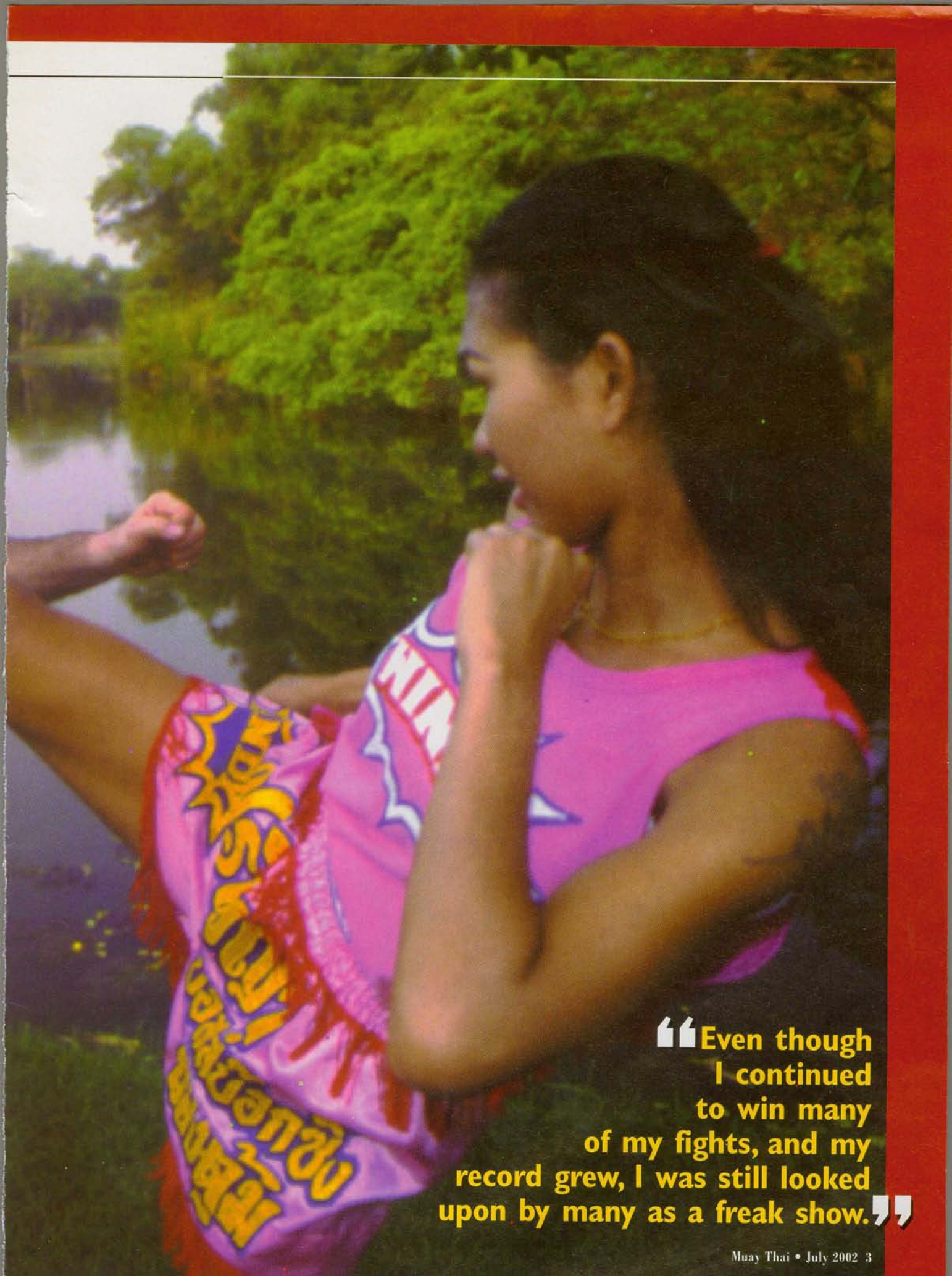
มวยไทย Muay Thai

Against **All Odds**

**Muay Thai
champion
Nangtum
Prinya,
dubbed
"The Lady Boy"
won her toughest
fight outside
the ring.**

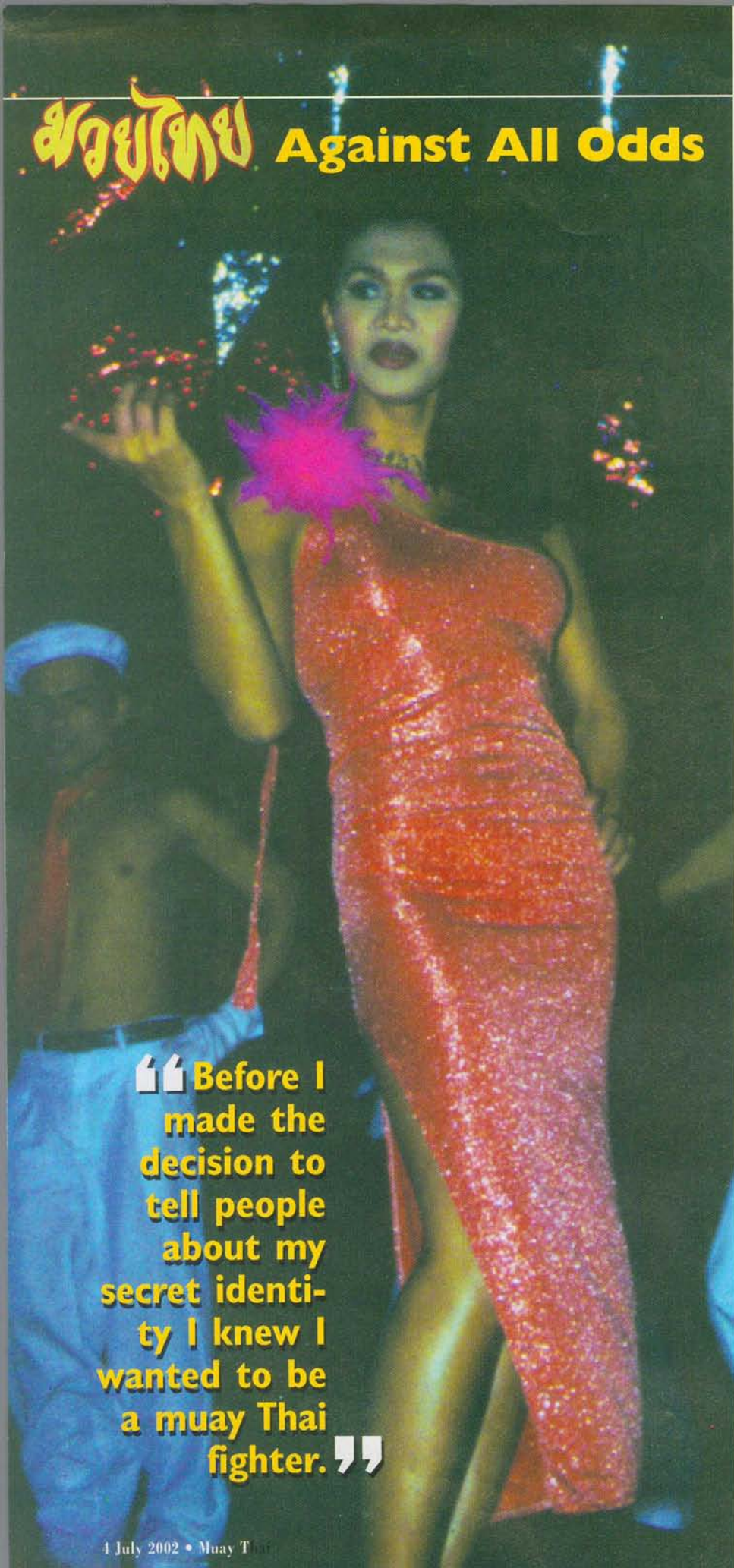
By Terry L. Wilson





“Even though I continued to win many of my fights, and my record grew, I was still looked upon by many as a freak show.”

มวยไทย Against All Odds



“Before I made the decision to tell people about my secret identity I knew I wanted to be a muay Thai fighter.”

Among the many superstars in the sport of muay Thai, never has a single fighter turned more heads or been the subject of controversy than Nangtum Prinya. Known in Thailand as "The Lady Boy", Prinya has an outstanding record in the ring, however that is only a small part of the fame that precedes this fighter.

Parinya is called "The Lady Boy" because although born a man, he used his winnings to pay for a sex change operation. This has earned him a nickname that brings both smirks and standing ovations wherever Parinya travels.

"For as long as I can remember I've always wanted to be a girl," says Parinya. "As you can imagine it was not something I wanted to tell my friends or parents and I kept it a secret until I was 14 years old."

GREAT PROMISE

Parinya was introduced to muay Thai at age nine. For three years he trained under the watchful eye of his father at their home in a small village in Northern Thailand. After three years of learning the basics, it was apparent that 12-year-old Parinya showed great promise as a fighter. To advance his skill level Parinya moved to Chiang Mai where he began training at the Lanna Muay Thai Camp.

Parinya continued to perfect his muay Thai skills, all the while keeping a secret tucked deep inside himself. It was a secret he feared would prevent him from pursuing a career in the ring if someone found out.

"Although I was a boy on the outside I was truly a girl on the inside," Parinya confesses. "But even before I made the decision to tell people about my secret identity I knew I wanted to be a muay Thai fighter."

Parinya continued to hone his fighting skills while secretly dealing with the question of how his revelation to the public about wanting to be a female would affect his career in the ring.

"I knew once I publicly announced my decision to become a female that it would change my life and my career forever," Parinya explains. "But it was something I had to do. There was no doubt in my mind that I could win in the ring."

“She’s so pretty I don’t know whether to fight her or ask her to dance.”



My being a girl had nothing to do with my ability as a fighter. One of my primary concerns was how other fighters and the public would accept me. I did not want to be a joke, or made fun of. This was not a publicity stunt; I was and am a serious muay Thai fighter and was willing to prove myself in the ring."

"LADY BOY" IS BORN

Once Parinya told the press that he was a woman trapped inside a man's body, the media dubbed him "The Lady Boy." Muay Thai fans loved it. Although Parinya had yet to go under the surgeon's knife to change nature's handiwork, Parinya insisted on being

referred to in the feminine rather than the masculine. While the reviews were mixed about his decision to openly declare his sexuality, the sensation of it all drove thousands into the stadium to see if "The Lady Boy," could or could not fight.

Although many fans may have loved the idea of Parinya being in the ring, his fellow fighters didn't always share the same enthusiasm about squaring off with a man who wanted to be a girl.

"The majority of fighters looked down at me," Parinya recalls. "There were a few who respected me for who I was and my fighting ability and they treated me like family. But mostly I was considered a joke and I had to prove myself to them (the

public) every time I entered the ring."

MEDIA DARLING

And every time Parinya entered the ring it was something to see. Adorned from head to toe and wearing make-up, "The Lady Boy" was quite a sight.

"She's so pretty I don't know whether to fight her or ask her to dance," quipped a nearby fighter.

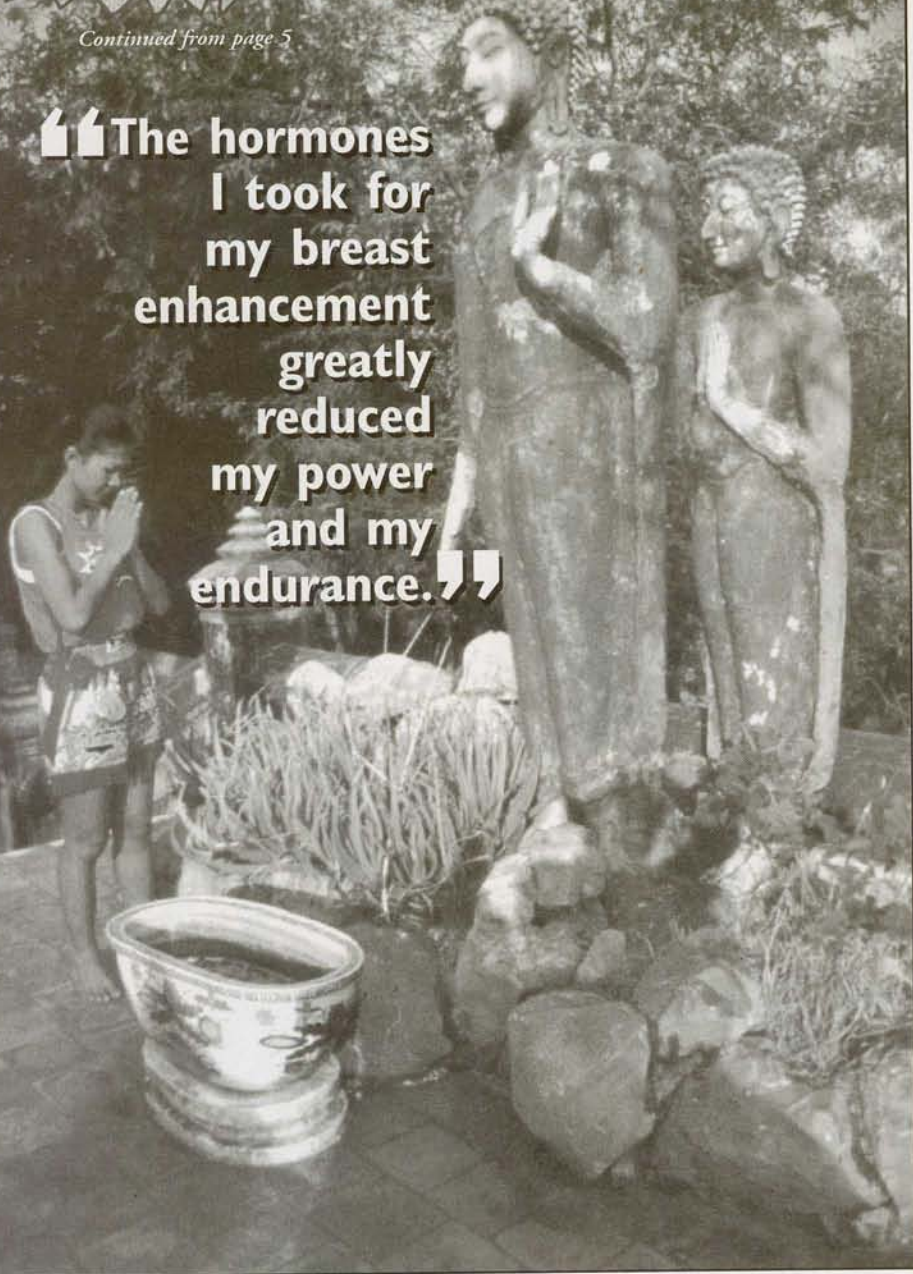
Because of the public interest that surrounded Parinya, he quickly became the darling of the media and whenever he fought "The Lady Boy" filled the stadium. His notoriety was worth big bucks to stadium owners and the gamblers who wagered thousands on Parinya's fights. As a result, Parinya was paid considerably more than his manly counterparts and this didn't set well

Continued on page 66

Against All Odds

Continued from page 5

“The hormones I took for my breast enhancement greatly reduced my power and my endurance.”



to the operation.

"I decided to have (everything) done at the same time," Parinya says. "The operation was painful, but not as painful as it was for me to live in a man's body."

The operation not only changed Parinya's physical appearance, but it also altered her ability to fight. Much to her surprise, the once-great muay Thai fighter discovered that the surgery and the implants had greatly diminished her capacity in the ring.

"The hormones I took for my breast enhancement greatly reduced my power and my endurance," says Parinya. "And I knew that I now had to be extra careful about getting hit in the chest because of the damage it could cause."



with many of them.

"The other fighters resented that I received more money when I fought," said Parinya. "It bothered me that I was being paid so much money because I was considered a novelty. I should have been paid for my skills as a fighter, which I proved time and time again. Even though I continued to win many of my fights, and my record grew, I was still looked upon by many as a freak show."

After more than a decade of fighting as a man in a woman's body, Parinya finally saved enough money to have her

sex changed via the skill of a surgeon's knife. The decision to do so was not taken lightly by Parinya or her doctors.

"I underwent much psychological counseling before the doctor's would consent to the operation," Parinya explains. "They wanted to be certain that I was of the correct mindset for the way this operation would change my life."

FINAL REQUEST

Eventually doctors and counselors realized what Parinya had known since age five; he was indeed a woman living inside of a man's body and they agreed

KO'D BY TRADITION

Once the procedure was complete Parinya's fans began to agree it was time for her to retire. Prior to her having the sex-change operation, she was a man who wanted to be a woman fighting men. However, once Parinya underwent the change, he was definitely a she and in Thailand women are not allowed to even train in the same ring as a man, let alone fight a man.

"In Thailand we do have women that train and fight in muay Thai, however they are not permitted to train in the same ring as their male counterparts," relates Thakoon Pongsupha,



head trainer and owner of the Sasiprapa Muay Thai Gym in Bangkok. "This has nothing to do with chauvinism. We are a very traditional people and it is out of respect to the ancient tradition of muay Thai that we segregate the training. We have women who train in the same gym as the men; they just aren't allowed to fight in the same ring. It brings us bad luck if a woman gets in our ring. If one does, we must bring in a monk to exorcise the evil spirits from the ring. To the best of my knowledge, the women have no bad feelings about this."

"Parinya was something new to muay Thai," recalls Bob Chaney, a

well-known muay Thai trainer and former martial arts world champion. "Parinya was never a class 'A' champion fighter; she was a good fighter who won frequently but it was the Lady Boy's notoriety that filled auditoriums. And thanks to her, a new generation of female fighters are making their presence felt in Thailand."

Parinya realized that her career as a professional fighter was coming to an end, but like most fighters "The Lady Boy," wanted another 15 minutes of fame. However, this fight would prove to be disastrous to Thailand's most notorious kickboxer.

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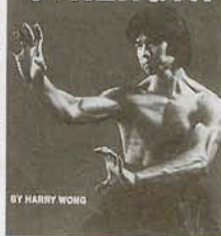
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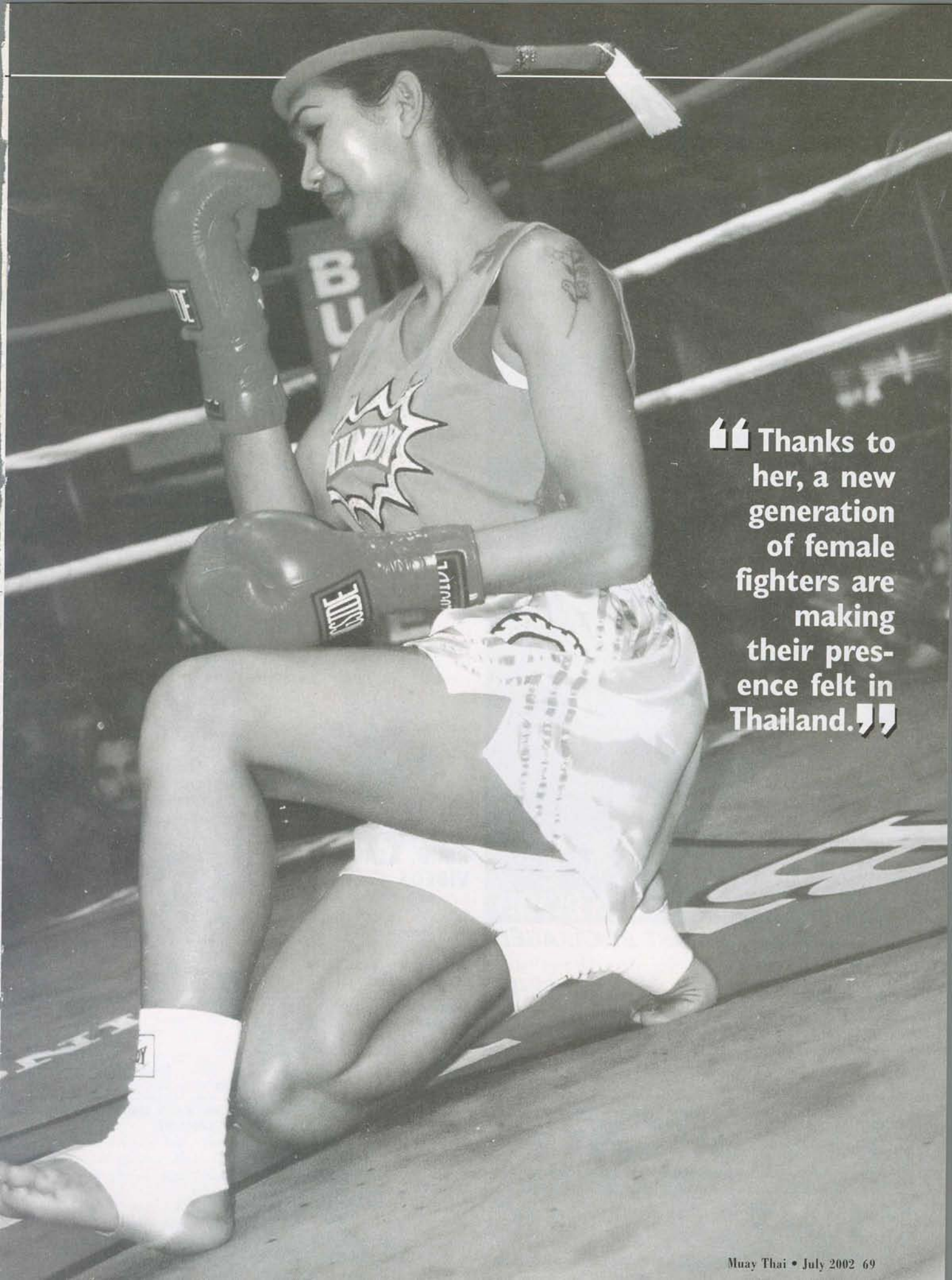
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“ Thanks to her, a new generation of female fighters are making their presence felt in Thailand. ”

HITTING THE ROAD

The adverse effect of Parinya's surgery was painfully evident during her first fight following the operation. Because she was now anatomically a woman, Parinya was not permitted to fight another man in a muay Thai ring in Thailand. Prior to her operation, Parinya was by nature a man, even though he dressed and acted like a woman, thus he was allowed to fight. Now that the fighter was officially a she, Parinya was forced to take a bout outside Thailand.

"I came to California thinking that I was to do an exhibition bout but to my surprise it was scheduled as a semi-main event," Parinya says. "I was very embarrassed at my performance."

An omen of her lackluster American debut was evident to Chaney as he watched Parinya work out at his kickboxing school. Parinya was scheduled to fight Brian Dobler, one of Bob's best students.

"I was watching her train a few days before the fight and I noticed that she didn't look particularly strong or conditioned," Chaney recalled. "I think she fought too soon after her surgery. On the other hand, my fighter Brian was in great shape and very strong."

The event was billed as Thailand vs. the World and it played to a packed house. Many fans came specifically to see "The Lady Boy" in action. When she entered the ring the crowd went nuts. Throughout the ritual warm-up dance (wai kru) people cheered and wildly applauded. The girl from Thailand had the Americans in the palm of her hand. That is, until a few seconds into the first round.

"The first round was very lack luster, reports Chaney. "Brian was going about 30 percent and Parinya wasn't doing much more. It quickly took on the appearance of an exhibition and the crowd didn't like what they saw.

"Brian, a really good guy and staunch Christian, was struggling with the decision to fight her from the beginning," Chaney adds. "He basically took the fight as a favor to me. Brian was concerned about hurting Parinya's (chest) and he didn't want that to hap-

pen. So I think Brian was holding back way too much in the beginning of the fight. I also think Parinya sensed an opportunity for an easy fight and held back accordingly."

Boos and a wide range of crude remarks aimed at Thailand's "Lady Boy" replaced the adulation that only moments earlier had filled the arena. The fight, if you can call it that, took on the appearance of a sophisticated game of tag.

Eventually Brian stepped up the pace and by the fourth round the fat lady was singing. Parinya was unable to continue and the referee declared Dobler the winner by TKO.

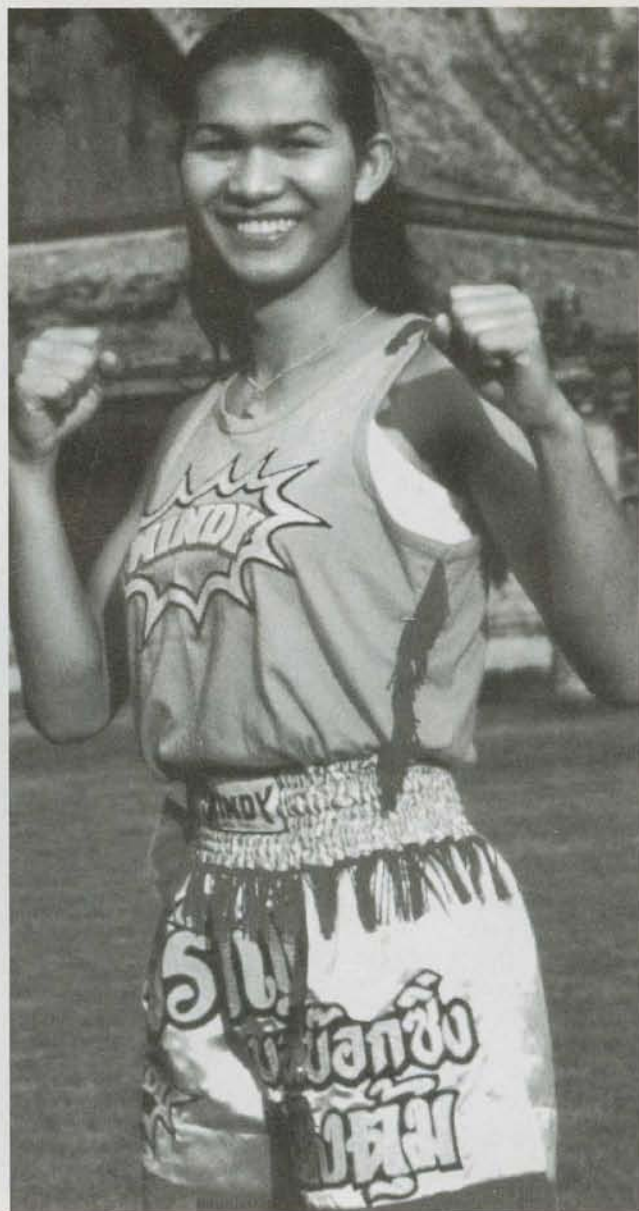
Parinya was so humiliated that she walked out of the ring before the official announcement was made. With her head hung low, the once-great fighter sulked past the jeering crowd and all the way back to Thailand.

"A lot of people thought Parinya just quit, but she didn't," Chaney said. "She was hurt and the referee stopped the fight. I asked her later why she just walked out of the ring before the decision was announced and she said, 'I was embarrassed by my performance.'"

Parinya has had almost a year to recover and she plans a return to the United States for one more fight. This may well be her final professional fight and she vows to redeem herself in the eyes of American kickboxing fans.

Although Parinya plans to continue doing exhibition fights, she is setting her sights on a career outside the ring, as a night club performer. The "Lady Boy," can be seen lip syncing on stage at a popular Bangkok Cabaret featuring an "All Boy Review" show.

A warm and loving person, Parinya



has a special place in her heart for children, and she says that one day she would like to get married and adopt children of her own. Her longtime boyfriend is a dancer in the Cabaret show and says he is Parinya's biggest fan.

As for "The Lady Boy," she is focused on the future, and although she will miss fighting professionally, the memories of her days as a muay Thai champion will always carry a special place in her heart. 🌐

Terry L. Wilson is a frequent contributor to martial arts magazines.