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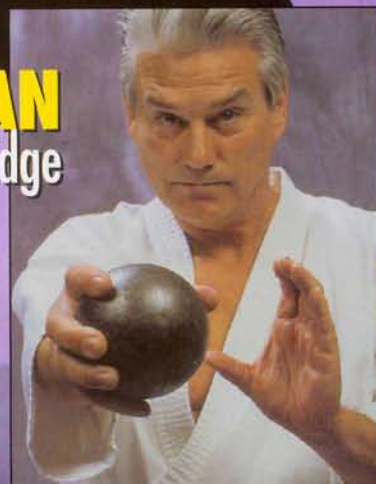
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The Lady Boy



Spectators Flock to Stadiums to Watch This Female Muay Thai Fighter Who Once Was a Man

BY TERRY L. WILSON



Nangtum Parinya at work inside the ring.

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

Called "The Lady Boy" because, although born a man, Parinya used his winnings for a sex change operation, earning her the nickname that brings both smirks and standing ovations wherever she travels.

"For as long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a girl," says the 27-year-old 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."

TRAINING AT 9

Parinya was introduced to *muay Thai* at the age of 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. In order 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. A secret that he feared — if revealed — would prevent him from pursuing a career in the ring.

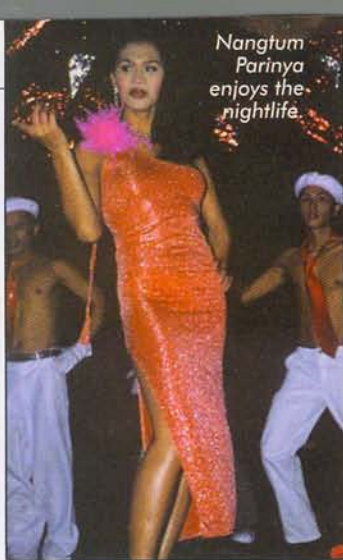
"I knew once I publicly announced my decision to become a female that it would change my life and my career forever," Parinya says. "But it was something I had to do. There was no doubt in my mind that I could win in the ring. However, one of my primary concerns was how other fighters and the public 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."

TRAPPED INSIDE A MAN

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



Photos by Terry L. Wilson



Nangtum Parinya enjoys the nightlife.

The Lady Boy

"The Lady Boy" could fight.

However, as much as the 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."

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. 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 with many of them.

SEX CHANGE

After more than a decade of fighting as a woman in a man's body, Parinya had finally saved enough money to have his sex changed via the skill of a surgeon's knife ... but not before he underwent psychological counseling.



Parinya and Bob Chaney work out.

"They wanted to be certain that I was of the correct mind set for the way this operation would change my life," she says.

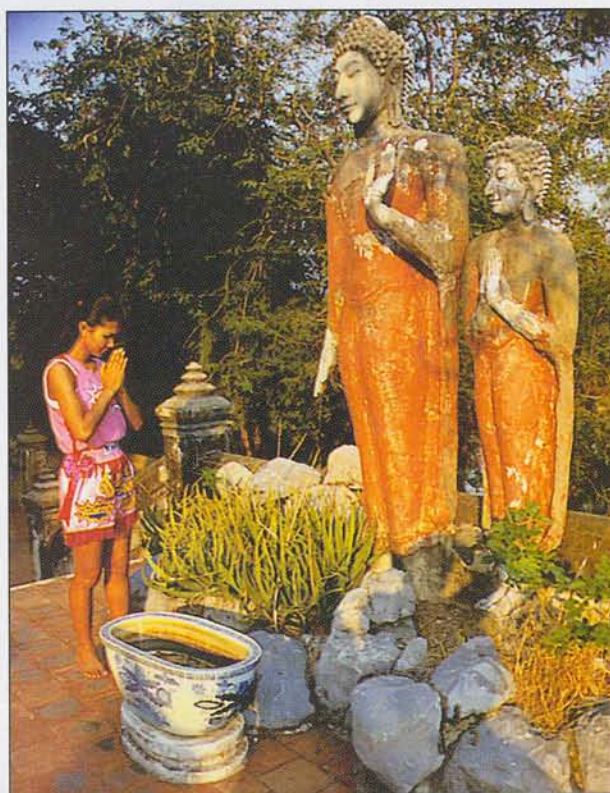
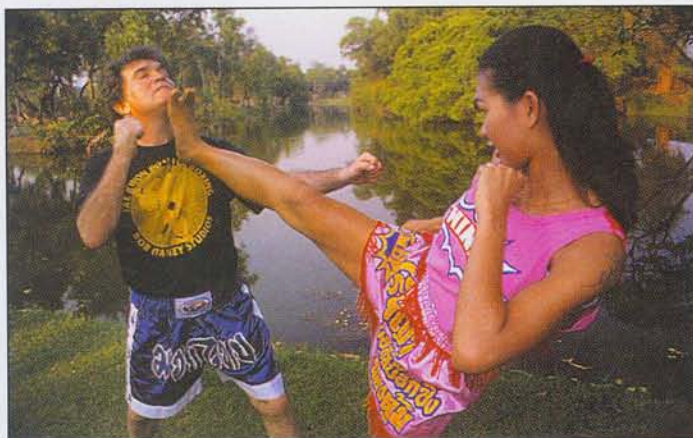
The operation not only changed Parinya's physical appearance, but it also altered her ability to fight. Much to her surprise, the once great muay Thai fighter discovered that the surgery and the implants had greatly diminished her capacity in the ring.

"The hormones I took for my breast enhancement greatly reduced my power and endurance," says Parinya.

BAD LUCK

In Thailand, women are not allowed to even train in the same ring as a man, let alone fight a man.

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THE LADY BOY

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"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," says 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 exorcize the evil spirits from the ring."

15 MINUTES OF FAME

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. As it turns out, this fight would prove to be disastrous to Thailand's most notorious kickboxer.

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. Therefore, Parinya was forced to take a bout outside the country.

"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.

When she entered the ring, the crowd went nuts. Throughout the ritual warm-up dance, people were cheering and applauding wildly. 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 lackluster," says Bob Chaney, a well-known muay Thai trainer and former martial arts world champion. "Brian (Dobler) 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."

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 Dobler stepped up the pace and by the fourth round the fat lady had sung. Parinya was unable to continue and the referee stopped the fight declaring Dobler the winner by TKO.

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. ☯

About the author: Terry Wilson is a free-lance writer based in San Diego, California.

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