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## Looking For Kicks And A Few Bucks, Too

**Equipped with a fighting name and a handful of karate titles, muscular young Joe Lewis decided to invent his own sport. The trouble is, he has already run out of opponents to kickbox**

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City Squire Motor Inn, hello." " Joe Lewis please."

" Joe Louis , the fighter?"

"You got it."

"Oh." (Aside: "Has Joe Louis checked in?") "Sorry, he's not here. We'd all know if he was."

"Wait a minute. Not that Joe Louis. This one is L-e-w-i-s. He's only 27. He's the heavyweight kickboxing champion of the United States."

"The what?"

Energy, energy," Joe Lewis growled playfully, starting his prefight lunch with a giant bowl of strawberries and ice cream, following it with a slab of broiled fish and a baked potato, finally shunting the empty potato skin aside. "Eat it, vitamins," someone said, and Lewis responded by tightening his arms and chest. On his left bicep a large vein stood out, visible even through the cloth of his shirt. Down the shirtfront, buttons appeared ready to pop. Joe Lewis grinned. "Do I look like I'm suffering from a lack of potato skins?" he asked quietly. He was young and strong and, even though he was the wrong L—is, in a sport no one ever heard of, confident.

That night young Joe Lewis would defend his kickboxing title for the first time, against a mystery named Ronnie Barkoot. It was rumored Barkoot could drive his foot through three cinder blocks, but Lewis was unworried. "I may not look particularly confident," he said, "but you can see it in my eyes." If a man's eyes are truly the window of his soul, then Barkoot was in trouble. Lewis seemed startlingly self-assured. He had come to fight in New York's moldering Sunnyside Gardens, he said, after only two professional kickboxing matches, to interest Madison Square Garden in its first kickboxing card. It never occurred to him that the Garden would not be interested.

Ronnie Barkoot, it turned out, was 29, a karate instructor from Columbia, S.C. and a former state karate champion. There was a softness at his waist, and before the fight he seemed dejected, his eyes downcast; perhaps it was the sight of Lewis' torso. As the fight began Barkoot seemed to overreact to the bell, charging out with whirling karate kicks that failed to land. Lewis stayed away for half a minute, then brought down Barkoot's guard with a faked kick, thudded a right to his chest and floored him with a left hook. Barkoot wobbled up but at 1:15 of Round 1 he bounced off the ropes into another left hook and onto his back. That was the fight. As Lewis paraded cockily around the ring minutes later, his arm raised in victory, Barkoot was still unable to stand.

After the fight Joe Lewis sat on the ring apron for nearly an hour, signing autographs, smiling and kidding with a group of wide-eyed teen-age girls. Despite the glances of boyfriends, some of the young ladies returned two or three times with their slips of paper, presumably more interested in the towel-draped

kickboxer with the Prince Valiant haircut than in his sport. Finally Lewis excused himself and walked toward his dressing room for more talk and, eventually, to dress.

In the audience there had been the constant expectation of something vicious and exotic but, except for the limited kicking, Lewis had looked like a conventional boxer. He said he had not needed much kicking to beat Barkoot and, anyway, he liked the punching part better. Not, he said, that he would ever want to become a conventional boxer. Joe Orbillo, whom Lewis met in California and who at one time was considered one of this country's finest heavyweight prospects, swore that Lewis could become a contender in two years, but, at only 195 pounds, Lewis was not tempted. He might have to fight 215-pounders with longer reaches who had been boxing all their lives. No, he would stick with kickboxing and karate, where he felt safer, even if his opponents did not.

Joe Lewis has been the world karate champion for the last five years. He won the U.S. karate championship in Texas in 1968 using what karate men call a side kick. En route to the championship he won a semifinal match that lasted three seconds, or about as long as it took Lewis to deliver the side kick. His opponent, with a number of his ribs crushed, both kidneys ruptured and his liver mashed, was not about to continue.

"With Barkoot," Lewis said as he left his shower, "I just used my arm. I'm afraid to think what would have happened if I'd really put my body into it." He said this disinterestedly, like the smart boy on the block who had just dissected his first frog. "I've always tried to understand people," he said, "and I knew I could beat Barkoot as soon as he stood up from his stool. He was stiff. There was no confidence in his eyes. He projected a feeling of uncertainty, and everyone in his corner looked the same."

The fight had followed 10 yawn-filled hours of karate competition, the crowd kept alert by an announcer whose real calling was the carnival midway. "Stick around folks," he barked. " Joe Lewis will be here.... Joe Lewis has arrived.... Folks, Joe Lewis comes on next."

Surprisingly, Lewis' appearance in the ring was not greeted with the unalloyed delight one would have expected for a great and surpassing champion, although it obviously was the highlight of the evening. Many people had come to see Lewis lose. Between 1966 and 1969 Lewis won 26 karate titles, and somewhere along the line he got bored with the bowing and stiff ceremony that traditionalists love so. In fact, he actively rejects the almost religious rituals of the sport. "I never believed in that Oriental sportsmanship humble bullbleep anyway," he says. "I think it's the most messed-up philosophy in the world."

Karate, Lewis began to realize, was an art whose skills could never be fully used competitively. The only legal outlets for its blows were the breaking of boards that TV is so crazy about— "show business," Lewis says derisively—or self-defense, and who was going to pick on Joe Lewis? "I could never understand why we couldn't put on boxing gloves and just go at it," he says, so two years ago he began developing and teaching a brand of super-karate called, not too pithily, Joe Lewis-Style Self-Defense.

JLSSD differed radically from karate, with its straight punches and limited bare-handed contact. Lewis and his followers not only put on the gloves, they threw all-out hooks and uppercuts. Since they were not going to wear gloves on their feet, they decided to outlaw side and back kicks to the head. These, they pointed out, could kill. Instead, they would limit foot-to-head contact to less powerful—and just slightly more humane—kicks such as the round and the crescent. These hurt a good deal but usually they do not destroy.

Joe Lewis-Style Self-Defense was introduced in public last January at the Long Beach ( Calif.) Arena, but not under that cumbersome title. When Lewis was convincing leery Promoter Lee Faulkner to stage an exhibition, inevitably he had to describe his sport. Neither Lewis nor Faulkner ever mentioned the word kick-boxing, which is what Thailand calls its national game, but when Lewis later entered the ring to fight Greg Baines, a top karate heavyweight, for some strange reason the announcer said the dread word, "Kickboxing." Lewis has been stuck with the name ever since and, as he points out, there is only the mildest similarity between the Oriental sport and his. Thai kicking, he says, is less powerful and its punching is relatively poor.

The fight followed a program of 20 or so karate matches, and as Lewis and Baines left their dressing rooms they had to awaken a guard who had been sleeping soundly in his chair by their doors. The part of the audience that was still around seemed numbed by the experience. It did not help matters that three days before the exhibition Lewis had broken his left hand when a sparring partner kicked him. Lewis was forced to jab with his power side, his right, and his punching was not the authoritative last word Lewis had grown to expect of himself. Still, the whistling authority of the right roused the small crowd and intimidated Baines. Midway through the second round Lewis drove Baines to the ropes with a right hook to the temple, then finished him with another to the jaw. People milled around the ring, and the guard was jumping up and down. "That was the most exciting thing I've ever seen," he shouted. A few weeks later Lee Faulkner, persuaded that maybe the Thai did have a good thing going with their name, formed the U.S. Kickboxing Association. Its first heavyweight championship was set for last July in the Dallas Memorial Auditorium, provided Lewis could find an opponent. Boxers did not know how to kick, and even the best karate men were afraid of punches. Finally a 285-pound karate black belt named Ed Daniels accepted the challenge. Since this was Texas, the only tactics barred were holds. Lewis agreed to allow butting, the use of elbows and knees and kicks to the head and groin.

And Lewis lost the first round. Daniels, it turned out, was a monster. His head was 6□ feet from the canvas, so head kicks by Lewis were out. He decided, instead, to jab Daniels off balance with side kicks. He landed four of them, but they only reddened Daniels' stomach. Then at 1:00 of Round 2, Daniels caught four successive punches—two left hooks and two right crosses—and Joe Lewis was the first U.S. kickboxing champion. Daniels was almost the first U.S. kickboxing fatality. He developed a blood clot in the head and went into a coma. Fortunately, he recovered.

Last fall Lewis appeared on an all-night radio program in Little Rock to help promote a friend's health spa. "Come on down and see Joe Lewis, the world heavyweight karate champion," the disc jockey kept shouting, and all night crowds of young blacks poured in to see Joe Louis, the Brown Bomber. Lewis was

dumbfounded. "Wow, how could they think that?" he says. "They said world karate champion, didn't they? Well, their Joe Louis must be almost 60 by now."

Sometimes it seems to Joe Lewis that he has spent most of his life living that name down, and not necessarily because of the ex-heavyweight boxing champion. By the time he had reached high school in Raleigh, N.C. three of his four brothers had gone to jail. Even though he had done nothing wrong, he was "one of those Lewis boys." And there were other Lewis problems. "What happens if from the age of three you see your parents fighting every day?" he asks rhetorically. "It blows your mind."

At 10 Joe Lewis was a bright kid who walked around with his head down. "I was ashamed of many things," he says. At 15 he started lifting weights, interested, he says now, "in the perfection of physical movements." He also liked having big arms. They and no doubt his A average in high school and his good looks brought Lewis the recognition he craved, but even with that he was vaguely dissatisfied. "People saw only the external me," Lewis reasons now.

At 17, two months before he was to graduate and with plans made to attend college there was a domestic explosion at home. Lewis will not talk about it, but he ran away and joined the Marines. It seemed a logical step: the Leathernecks, tough Joe Lewis the he-man. "Just another recognition kick," he says. He spent 16 months in training in the U.S. before the corps sent him to Okinawa. One day while there he watched a karate demonstration. He never touched a barbell again. He practiced three to five hours every day and seven months later he had earned a black belt; two years is considered super progress.

Lewis learned to be a radio operator and was sent to Vietnam, the first man in his battalion to go there. "I felt great about it," he says. "You know, I'm the chosen one. Me. They chose me! Another recognition kick." In Vietnam he taught self-defense to Force Reconnaissance, the corps equivalent to the Green Berets. Before then he felt he had been pushed around in the Marines, especially at Parris Island ("They didn't treat me like a man and I built up a tremendous resentment"). But while he was an instructor, he says, he "developed a sense of personal value." He decided he deserved respect; he expected it; he demanded it.

In May of 1966, during a three-month stay at Camp Lejeune, Lewis went to Washington, D.C., entered his first karate tournament and won a national title. He still wasn't satisfied; he was looking for the real him. Maybe he could find himself in acting. He took lessons and on his discharge went to Hollywood to become a star. "One more recognition bit," he says. His movie career lasted two months and he was off into the karate business, opening a school in Los Angeles and beginning to win title after title. And was he satisfied? Not really. Success was real enough, but he felt that people still were seeing his external self, "the physical being." He sold the school in 1968 and began giving private lessons. "I wanted to know the richest, most intelligent people."

This time he was recognized and it was by a psychologist named Nathaniel Branden. Lewis had gone to Branden's place in Beverly Hills to interest him in karate lessons. He spent more than an hour by

Branden's swimming pool explaining the complexities of his work, the psychic ways of relating to physical movements and how some people learn better visually, others audibly, when he discovered what it was that Branden did for a living. Oops, and more. Branden just happened to be working on his first book, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*.

Branden recalls the first meeting. "Here was a man who hadn't gone beyond high school and didn't read books but who possessed unmistakable intelligence and self-esteem. He had problems, but also a very real psychological strength." Lewis says simply, "The meeting was the turning point of my life." 1 2 3 4

Each came under the other's tutelage. Sometimes a session in psychology followed a private karate lesson. Finally, they stopped paying each other. Through hypnosis, Branden took his young patient as far back as his third year, reliving traumas, searching for insights. "I made Joe Lewis visible to himself," Branden says. "It's important and difficult for a young person to see himself objectively. Those who saw Joe as merely a genius at karate didn't know him. He is a man with the psychology and self-esteem of a champion, and that goes for everything he does. There isn't anyone left for him to fight, but it's just as well. It's time he opened his life to other avenues of activity."

And other avenues it was. Rather than devoting all his time to killing or being killed by whatever few heavyweight Joe Lewis-Style Self-Defense kickboxers were extant in the U.S., Lewis turned more to commerce and money, which, it now appeared, seem to have been behind this recognition thing all along. Last March he became national director of Tracy's Karate Studios, with 93 schools in 25 states. "We took on Pittsburgh this spring," he says, "and we've hit Toronto and Dayton, and now we'll hit Dallas, constantly outsmarting the opposition. It'll be like a surprise attack. They'll never know what hit them. We'll have 150 schools in a year, 1,000 by 1976, and by then we'll be all over Europe. We'll be millionaires."

He will be a millionaire plus if the nationally syndicated exercise and self-defense program for women that he is currently trying to peddle to Paramount TV is bought. But, no, wait, money is not what really matters. The only rewards of all this wheeling and dealing are the constant challenges. And anyway, "There are more important things about me than big muscles, trophies, titles or money," he says. "I want to develop my intellect."

So Joe Lewis' search goes on. He will continue to kickbox whenever someone has the temerity to challenge him, and someday he may give that old recognition a swift side kick in the gut, not the head. New rules.

