

Pagliaro: Table Tennis Legend

by Dean Johnson

On July 8, table tennis lost one of its legends. Four-time US Open Champion and 1947 World semifinalist, Lou Pagliaro, had celebrated his ninetieth birthday in May.

"Paggy" lived alone in Staten Island, New York and was healthy and fit for his entire life. His well-established routine included a daily visit to the local Senior Center where he socialized and played cards. Every afternoon, one of the many members of his family, most of whom lived close by, would stop in for a visit or to enjoy a meal with him.

On the occasion of her father's birthday, Lou's daughter, Lois, said: "I would like anyone who knew our dad to realize how happy we are to have him home with us for so long. In the 1950s, he gave up the sport he loved and relocated to Brooklyn to be near his family. He has had a wonderful and full life with us... We are blessed to have in our lives the kindest, most gentle father on earth."

Lou Pagliaro leaves his children, Paulette, Lois, Janis, and John, seven grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

A Champion of the Classic Era

by Robert Palgon

Along with Sol Schiff, Dick Miles, and Marty Reisman, Lou Pagliaro was one of the four greatest American male table tennis champions of the classic era. Though the game has changed, these relics of the past comprise the pantheon of American table tennis champions of the 1930s, '40s, '50s, and '60s. How many American and international titles did they win? How many exhibition halls and venues did they fill with their play, all over America and all over the world? What Americans ranked more highly than did they in world competition? How many books about the game did they write - or have had written about them? How many players did they inspire? What other American players' names are so widely known in table tennis circles throughout the world?

Anyone who ever saw any of them play - even long after their prime - can attest to their artistry and skill, their near magical chops, forehand drives, drop shots, table game, and smashes. Lest one suspect that I wax too nostalgic about their mastery of the classic game, may I remind the doubtful that these players were so appealing to watch that thousands of fans and spectators filled Madison Square Garden in those days for the opportunity to witness a night of their table tennis play.

These four champions were all New York City street kids - who mainly grew up without coaches, without institutionalized training programs, but, oh what sound and polished strokes they developed. what well-rounded play - subtle and flamboyant at the same time. Their shot selection was a wonder to behold. But even more important than their strokes, footwork, and general physical ability, these great champions always demonstrated that the game, at root, was a mental challenge at least as much as it was a physical one. These champions also brought what champions in all sports must have - enormous reservoirs of desire and heart- those intangible qualities without which everything else matters little.

If you never saw Lou play, you might want to see this video from the 1940 US Open: <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=25310>

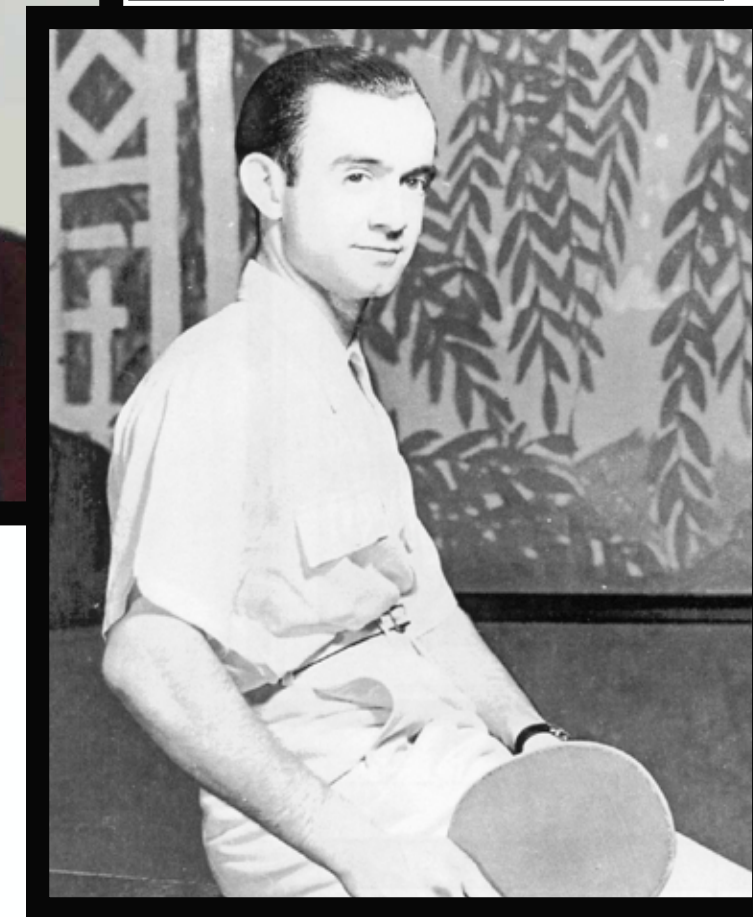
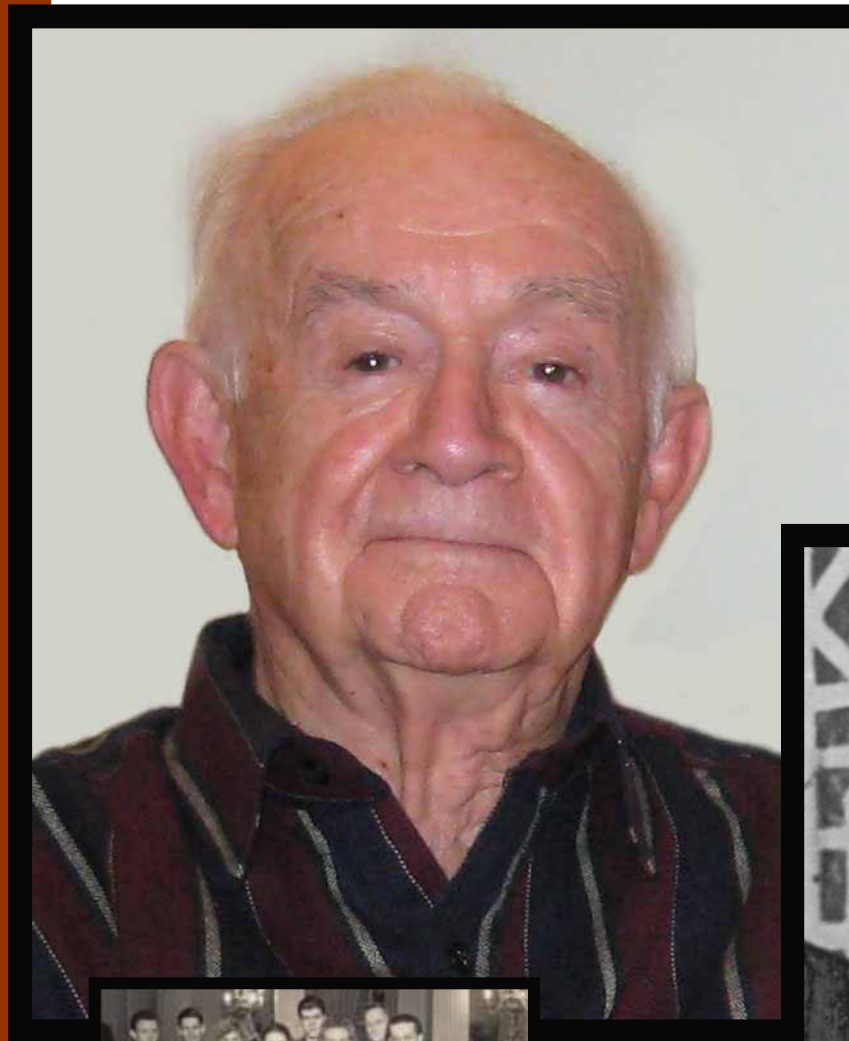
Lou Pagliaro: An Excerpt from his USATT Hall of Fame Profile (1979) by Tim Boggan

Born May 5, 1919, Pagliaro came from Manhattan's Lower East Side (14th St. and 1st Ave). When little Louie was eight, he joined the Tompkins Square (Ave. A and 10th St.) Boys' Club, and this, he told me, kept him off the streets and away from where some of his "Dead End" friends ended up-- in jail. In spite of his short stature, during his years at this Boys' Club Lou said he not only became promisingly adept at table tennis but enjoyed other games and sports, shot pool, played basketball, though, O.K., often on tiptoe. Though he had three brothers and a sister, not one of them was ever interested in serious table tennis.

Arresting, Louie and his table tennis play doubtless became, but his development as a young player of note was anything but arrested. By 1932 he'd won the New York City Boys' Club and Inter-Settlement Championships for his age-group. In 1933, from a field of youthful players representing various schools, YMCAs, scout troops, and welfare organizations, in matches played during weekdays after school at Bloomingdale's Department Store, Louie celebrated, as it were, his upcoming fourteenth birthday. He defeated the 92nd YMHA's Arthur Spitzer to win the season-ending NYC's Metro Junior Championship (8-13 Division).

Then, as a member of the Boys' Club Team, he began winning matches in the annual NYTTA Round Robin League, crediting Abe Krakauer, whose game Lou once said he'd copied his own after, for having given him "some pointers." Krakauer, one of Schussheim's 1929-30 Boys' Club teammates and manager of the game room at the Tompkins Square Boys' Club where Pagliaro learned to play, was the runner-up to Coleman Clark in the 1932 Parker Brothers' American Ping-Pong Association's National Championship. Thanks to Abe or anyone else, Louie was obviously a quick learner. By the end of the '33-34 season he and his Boys' Club teammates (Garrado, Koshak, and Sam Hoffner) had won the NYTTA "B" Division League Championship.

Photos: (top left and right) Lou in 2007 during a reunion in New York with fellow legends Sol Schiff, Dick Miles, Marty Reisman and his friend Dean Johnson. (center left). Lou (far right) with the U.S. Swaythling and Corbillion Cup teams on the liner "Aquitania" in 1938. (lower left) part of a 5-page article in a 1942 issue of Life magazine which featured Lou. (middle right) Lou in 1952. (lower right) during an exhibition in 1947.



PAGLIARO 1919-2009

4-time US Open Champion, World's Semifinalist,
US Table Tennis Hall of Fame Member

