

## 1994 Hall of Fame Inductee Lou Nedbalski – Denver

Lou Nedbalski was born Jan. 9, 1916, in Denver. He and Leila Cheney met at a dance in 1939 at the old Crystal Hall, and were married Jan. 14, 1940, in Denver. They have a daughter and son with five grandsons.

Lou Nedbalski was quick to tell a joke. But he was Silent Sam when it came to talking about himself and his heroics. Like the time he saved a fellow firefighter's life. No one knew until John Horan told the story. There was a fire on Larimer Street in the 1950s. Horan's grandfather was trapped in a building that collapsed. Lou went into the ruins and hauled the elder Horan to safety.

Lou, a retired Denver assistant fire chief, had many nicknames in his life - "Ned" when he played baseball and basketball at Manual High School and in his early 20s; "Sluggo" when he was a heavyweight boxer; "Cool Lou" when he was a Denver firefighter.

He was quite the athlete, and was fond of telling people, "If it's worth playing, it's worth winning." But he turned down an athletic scholarship at Regis College to support his family.

He grew up by the stockyards near Globeville. Life was tough, and he had to work early on. He sold newspapers in front of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Later, he was a plumber. He learned to pinch pennies because he had to. It became a joke later in life.

For instance, in 1982 he had to go for a department physical at the old Denver General Hospital, All the parking spaces for city officials were full, so Lou paid 25 cents at a parking meter, and then wrote a letter of complaint to parking officials. Lou was reimbursed. His boss, Jack King, received a response from Milo Schram, assistant administrator of the city's treasury division. "At the time I received your request, I could not believe that a Denver fire chief could be so hard up as to miss a lousy quarter," Schram wrote.

"However, when you informed me that the fire chief was 'Cool Lou' from old Globeville, we knew that we had trouble." Schram said city employees checked 214 parking meters before finding Lou's quarter. And they knew it was his because "his thumb and fingerprint had thoroughly squashed the edge of the coin."

But Lou was also generous, said his grandson, Terry Nedbalski, who said his grandfather "wore the same suit for 20 years, and wouldn't spend a dime on himself, but would literally give his family the shirt off his back."

Lou joined the fire department in 1941. Two months later, he was drafted into the Army and served as a firefighter in Italy during World War II. Most firefighters have second jobs that they work on their days off. Lou was no different. He was a baseball umpire and basketball referee at the high school and college levels. Lou taught himself to play piano and guitar.