

Burmese Boxing

Written by Scott Mallon

Tuesday, 04 October 2005 19:00

“This is Burma and it will be quite unlike any land you know about.” (Rudyard Kipling 1898)

When most fans think of boxers, they almost certainly think of the modern-day warfare between fighters with names like Hopkins, Pacquiao, Klitschko or Corrales. What most don't know is far away from the bright lights of Las Vegas, away from the grasp of the organizations like the WBA, WBC and IBF, brutal, gloveless bouts still take place on a regular basis. Think boxing under the Marquis of Queensberry rules is tough? Think again. In the small, oft-forgotten country of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), the sport known as *Leth Wei* or Burmese boxing is about as close as it comes to the stand-up fighting from long ago.

Participants in Burmese boxing fight without boxing gloves, wrapping their hands in hemp rope or gauze cloth or not at all. The wraps provide little padding and cause frequent cuts and abrasions. Head butts and throws are also allowed, as are elbows, knees and kicks; however the majority of fighters mainly use their hands and the occasional knee to the body or head of a hunched over fighter. Each fight lasts five three-minute rounds and the contests are usually wild and bloody. Victory comes by surrender or knockout and if both participants are still standing at the end of the bout, the fight is declared a draw.

Fighters who are knocked out have five minutes to be revived and fight on or to concede the bout. If the fighter chooses to continue the fight there is a three knockout limit. That's a three *knockout* limit, not three knockdown. Fighters are often knocked out one or two times during a bout only to battle back and then KO their opponent for the victory.

In the past, bouts were held in sand or dirt pits, but this has increasingly given way to standard boxing rings. The fighters live the majority of their fighting careers in a few small camps set up around the country, training year-round. They are poorly paid by western standards, and in contrast to the big name fighters of the west, champions of the Burmese boxing are fortunate to make \$500 for a title defense.

Myanmar has been under military leadership since 1962 and has been led by the current administration, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), since 1988. When the military rule rejected the results of the elections in 1990 and refused to step down, international sanctions were imposed, resulting in global isolation that still remains today. This is the backdrop in which Burmese boxing is practiced. Burmese boxing was banned from 1886 until 1948 when the nation once again enjoyed its sovereignty. Only recently has the government begun promoting Burmese boxing in hopes of better presenting the sport to the rest of the world.

The boxers are to some extent akin to old-time pugilists who fought bare-knuckle in England and America in the 1800s and early 1900s. They travel from city to city, looking for fights and looking for a quick payday. They fight primarily to survive and to feed their families and are

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willing to fight anyone, anywhere, anytime. There are no huge entourages, no multi-million dollar purses, and aside from an occasional bout on the Thai border, very few fighters fight outside of their country.

In 2001, three American fighters, Doug Evans, Shannon Ritch and Alberto Ramirez went to Yangon, Myanmar to battle the Burmese. All were promptly knocked out in the first round. Ramirez gave up and both Ritch and Evans were knocked out by knees to the solar plexus. Although there was some controversy in the Evans bout, a rematch never took place and probably never will.

News and Notes

Approximately 70 Thais will be making the trip to Tokyo, Japan to root for WBC Flyweight champion Pongsaklek Wongjamkam in his defense against Daisuke Naito of Japan on October 10.

Wongjamkam leaves for Tokyo on October 4.

One week after WBA interim bantamweight champion Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym suffered a nasty gash in his victory over Ricardo Cordoba, he was back in the gym, sparring with Pongsaklek Wongjamkam, helping him prepare for his bout against Naito.

Quick Results

Rachadamnern Stadium, Bangkok, Thailand

Date: Wednesday, 28th September, 2005

Sing Carryboy UD10 Panomdej Or Yuthanakorn
Vacant Thai Flyweight Title

The Mall Department Store, Bangkok, Ngamwongwan, Thailand

Date: Friday, 30th September, 2005

Sataporn Singwangcha UD12 Nonoy Gonzales
Asian Boxing Council (WBC) Light Welterweight Title

WBC #1 ranked lightweight Sirimongkol Singwangcha UD8 Arniel Tinampay

Bangkok, Thailand

Date: Friday, 30th September, 2005

Promoter: Petchyindee Boxing Promotion
WBC#5 ranked Chatchai Sasakul KO6 Tata Polinar
Asian Boxing Council (WBC) Bantamweight Title

Fahpetchnoi Sor Chitpattana KO3 Richard Garcia

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WBC Youth Flyweight Title

Upcoming Bouts

Bangkok, Thailand

October 7, 2005
Denkaosan Kaovichit vs. Jun Eraham
PABA Flyweight Title

Sangyo Hall, Kanazawa, Japan

October 9, 2005
Wethya Sakmuanglang vs. Yasuo Kunimi
OPBF Super Bantamweight Title

Korakuen Hall, Tokyo, Japan

October 10, 2005
Pongsaklek Wongjamkam vs. Daiske Naito
WBC Flyweight Title

Korakuen Hall, Tokyo, Japan

October 18, 2005
Yoshinori Nishizawa vs. Peter Mitrevski
OPBF Super Middleweight Title

Bangkok, Thailand

October 20, 2005
Crazy Kim vs. Somchai Chimrum
Vacant Asian Boxing Council (WBC) Light Middleweight Title

Desert Diamond Casino, Tucson, Arizona, USA

October 29, 2005
Ratanachai Sor Vorapin vs. Jhonny Gonzalez
WBO Bantamweight Title

Fernando Montiel vs. Pramuansak Posuwan
WBO Super Flyweight Title

Hugo Cazares vs. Kaichon Sor Vorapin
WBO Light Flyweight Title

Sod Looknongyangtoy vs. Daniel Ponce De Leon
WBO Super Bantamweight Title