

Pongsaklek Batters Naito, Retains Title

Written by Scott Mallon
Monday, 10 October 2005 19:00

In front of a partisan Japanese crowd and defending his WBC flyweight title for the twelfth time, 28-year-old Pongsaklek Wongjamkam used short, crisp combinations to batter challenger Daisuke Naito for seven rounds before the bout was called due to a cut over the right eye suffered by the courageous Japanese fighter. Naito was never completely out of the fight and was highly motivated; his eagerness stemming from his desire to avenge his embarrassing 34 second knockout to Wongjamkam back in 2001.

In round one the Thai southpaw showed off his defensive skills, making the aggressive, hyperactive Naito look clumsy, missing wildly. Wongjamkam deftly covered and began landing right hooks to the head of Naito. The round ended with the fighters going toe-to-toe in the center of the ring, loading up and unleashing bombs.

Naito started the second round the same as the first, darting in and out, and trying to unload fast combinations before catching any return fire. Wongjamkam was again able to block or duck most of the punches and then back up Naito with his own shots.

Halfway thru the round as Naito came in with a left-right combination, the two fighters clashed heads, causing Naito to rub his right eye and turn away briefly. Naito moved back towards Wongjamkam and the action resumed. A minute before the end of the round, Wongjamkam fired a straight left. As he did so the fighters butted heads once again. Naito turned away, clearly hurt. Blood streamed down his face from a thin slice over his right eye. The referee momentarily stopped the bout and brought Naito over to the attending ring physician who took a quick look before giving the ok to let the fight continue.

A point was deducted from Wongjamkam for the head butt and the battle recommenced. Again the fighters went right after each other, neither giving ground. As the end of the round grew near, it was Wongjamkam who was pressing forward, confidently letting go of his punches, pushing Naito backwards.

By the fourth round it was clear the eye of Naito was bothering him and affecting his ability to see. Wongjamkam repeatedly landed straight lefts to the eye and right hooks to the temple, frequently knocking Naito off balance. The Thai was beginning to dominate Naito, who nonetheless bravely ate a mixture of right hooks and straight lefts.

Naito had his best round in the fifth, catching Wongjamkam several times with straight rights but never hurting him. When Naito landed a hard right to the jaw of Wongjamkam, the Thai smiled and waved him in. The two traded once again in the center of the ring with Wongjamkam knocking Naito off balance with a stiff left. Each time Naito landed, Wongjamkam was able to impede Naito from furthering his attack. Although the eye of Naito was bleeding and swelling badly, he still managed to have his best round of the fight.

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Wongjamkam picked away at the cut of Naito in the sixth with crisp jabs, dropping straight lefts to the stomach, followed by right hooks to the body. The end seemed near but Naito continued to give it his all and was still in the fight and landing punches.

The seventh round had just gotten under way when, after Naito pawed at the cut, the referee stepped in and again had him examined by the doctor. After a few seconds of consultation with referee Guadalupe Garcia, the doctor agreed to allow Naito to continue.

Naito launched a desperate attack, winging punch and punch until Wongjamkam countered, driving him back against the ropes. The pair traded leather for another thirty seconds with Wongjamkam getting the better of it before the referee stepped in. With blood flowing down the face of Naito and his forehead and eye swollen, this time the physician decided enough was enough and called an end to the bout.

According to WBC rules, the bout was to go to the scorecards. All three judges scored the bout 68-64 for Wongjamkam.

The straight punches, effective defense and overall skill of Pongsaklek, along with Naito's poor balance and inability to sustain his attack made the difference in the fight. Pongsaklek was clearly a notch above his outgunned opponent. It was a workmanlike performance by the champion and he now marches forward to a highly anticipated bout with Jorge Arce. First, though, he will need to get by the WBC's #1 contender, Rosendo Alvarez of Nicaragua.

The win was the fifty-eighth of Wongjamkam's career against only two losses, but even at this advanced stage of his career, he is still largely an unknown commodity in the U.S. He has never fought outside of Asia, fighting only Cambodia, Japan and his native Thailand.

There is a growing feeling the Thai is unwilling to face the WBC's interim champion Jorge "Travieso" Arce as he backed out of the scheduled fight a few months ago. Actually it's not quite as simple as being "scared" or not wanting to fight Arce.

According to Wongjamkam's camp, their fighter was originally to be paid \$250,000 by Top Rank, but as the fight drew near they were informed Wongjamkam would only be receiving \$150,000.

Taking a \$100,000 pay cut wasn't acceptable so his camp did the next best thing: they offered Arce \$100,000 to come to Thailand. This offer was rejected and the new date of the fight is now in limbo.

When asked what he would like to say to Jorge Arce, Pongsaklek's only response was "I'll have to be at my best against Arce. I know he's a very good fighter."

When Wongjamkam's sponsor and promoter tell him to fight, he fights. When they tell him they don't think a deal is what it should be, he listens. He is a simple and humble man, from the rice

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fields of Korat in the Issan province of Thailand, the poorest region of the country.

He is a fighter through and through, having fought fifty Muay Thai bouts before deciding to turn to boxing. He lives at the gym with thirty to forty other fighters, only leaving after a fight to visit his mother. A week later he is back at the gym, building his future and his legacy. He is never out of shape, doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, trains six days a week, year-round. He lives to be a fighter and is happy and willing test his skills against anyone put before him.

When the question was raised as to whom he would most like to fight, his first response was Lorenzo Parra, quickly followed up by Vic Darchinyan. While he would like to unify the titles to become the undisputed champion, he also knows that in the business of boxing this is highly unlikely.

News and Notes

In their recent convention, the World Boxing Council has mandated the following: Lightweight: The winner of the fight between world champion Diego Corrales of the United States and No. 1 ranked Jose Luis Castillo of Mexico was approved for a voluntary defense in December, then must fight No. 2 ranked Sirimongkol Singwancha of Thailand.

Super featherweight: World champion Marco Antonio Barrera of Mexico is in a voluntary period. The fight between No. 1 ranked Erik Morales of Mexico and No. 2 ranked Manny Pacquiao of the Philippines was approved as a final eliminator.

Featherweight: World champion In-jin Chi of Korea and interim champion Humberto Soto of Mexico were both approved for voluntary defenses. The winners of the two fights must fight for the undisputed WBC title by April. The fight between No. 1 ranked Nicky Cook of England and No. 2 ranked Robert Guerrero of the United States was approved as a final eliminator.

Bantamweight: World champion Hozumi Hasegawa of Japan must fight No. 1 ranked Diego Morales of Mexico if Morales is medically approved. If not, Hasegawa must fight No. 2 ranked Veeraphol Nakhornluang of Thailand.

Super flyweight: World champion Masamori Tokuyama of Japan has reached an agreement to fight No. 1 ranked Jose Navarro of the United States in January.

Flyweight: World champion Pongsaklek Wonjongkam of Thailand must next fight No. 1 ranked official challenger Rosendo Alvarez of Nicaragua.

Light flyweight: world champion Brian Vitoria of the United States must next fight No. 1 ranked official challenger Juanito Rubillar of the Philippines.

Strawweight: World champion Eagle Kyowa of Japan will make a voluntary defense against Masaki Nakanuma on January 3. No. 1 ranked Rodel Mayol of the Philippines and No. 2 Lorenzo Trejo of Mexico have reached an agreement to fight in an eliminator.

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This Week's Results

October 4, 2005 - Gyungju-gymnasium, Gyungju City, South Korea

Jun Alos KO7 Jae-won Kim

October 4, 2005 - Tokyo, Japan

Nobuhito Honmo TD5 Dainoshin Kuma

October 4, 2005 - City Hall Ground, Nakornrachasima, Thailand

Terdsaek Jandaeng KO9 Jaime Barcelona Vacant WBO Asia Pacific Featherweight Title

Ratanapol Sor Vorapin KO1 Dicky Timor

October 7, 2005

Denkaosan Kaovichit Defeated Jun Eraham (PABA Flyweight Title)

October 8, 2005 - Thomas and Mack Center, Las Vegas, NV, USA

Jorge Arce KO2 Hussy Hussein

Bobby Pacquiao SD10 Carlos Hernandez

October 8, 2005 - Sinsin, Cebu City, Philippines

Gabriel Pumar UD10 Noel Veronique

October 9, 2005 - Sangyo Hall, Kanazawa

Wethya Sakmuangklang MD12 Yasuo Kunimi (OPBF Super Bantamweight Title)

Upcoming Bouts

October 18, 2005 - Korakuen Hall, Tokyo, Japan

Yoshinori Nishizawa vs. Peter Mitrevski Jr. (Vacant OPBF Super Middleweight Title)

October 20, 2005 - Bangkok, Thailand

Promoter: Onesongchai Boxing Promotion

Crazy Kim vs. Somchai Chimrum (Vacant Asian Boxing Council [WBC] Light Middleweight Title)

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October 26, 2005 - Bangkok, Thailand

Carina Moreno vs. Nongmai Sor Siriporn (WBC Womens Mini Flyweight Title)

October 29 - Tucson, Arizona, USA

Jhonny Gonzalez vs. Ratanachai Sor Vorapin (WBO Bantamweight Title)

Fernando Montiel vs. Pramuansak Phosawan (WBO Junior Bantamweight Title)

Hugo Cazares vs. Kaichon Sor Vorapin (WBO Junior Flyweight Title)

Daniel Ponce de Leon vs. Sod Looknongyangtoy (WBO Junior Featherweight Title)

October 30, 2005 - Philsports Arena, Pasig City, Philippines

Gerry Penalosa vs. Mbwana Matumla

November 4, 2005 - Sriprajan, Supanburi, Thailand

Promoter: Nakornluang Boxing Promotion

Devid Lookmahanak vs. Akiyoshi Kobayashi (Asian Boxing Council [WBC] Super Flyweight Title)

Napapol Kiatisakchokchai vs. Yoshimitsu Shibanuma

Veeraphol Sahaprom vs. Roy Doliguez

Thong Por Chokchai vs. Jaime Barcelona