

One on One with Siraphop Ratanasuban of One Songchai Promotions

Written by Scott Mallon

Wednesday, 28 December 2005 19:00

For over a decade Songchai Ratanasuban (Promoter Songchai) has been Thailand's #1 boxing promoter/manager and the world's premiere boxing and Muay Thai promoter. His son, Siraphop, and daughter, Pariyakorn, have slowly begun the transition of taking over the reigns of One Songchai Promotions; their stable of boxers includes former champion Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai and Pichitnoi Sitbangprachan, along with up and coming, undefeated prospect Chonlatarn Piriapinyo.

Siraphop Ratanasuban took time out from his hectic schedule to answer a few questions.

TSS: Hello Khun (Mr.) Siraphop, how is everything going?

Siraphop: Very good, thank you.

TSS: I know you're quite busy. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to answer my questions.

Siraphop: No problem. My family appreciates all the hard work and dedication fighters in the sport of boxing and it's because of them that we are what we are today.

TSS: Your family is quite well-known as promoters of Muay Thai and boxing here in Thailand. While Muay Thai has grown in popularity the last few years, it actually seems as if boxing has gained in popularity here in Thailand. Is this true and which sport has the bigger fan base in Thailand, Muay Thai or boxing?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: I could be wrong but I believe it's boxing.

TSS: What percentage of Muay Thai do you promote versus boxing?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: We promote Muay Thai six times per month and promote Pan Asian Boxing title fights such as ABCO / PABA once a month.

TSS: That brings me to my next question. What is the current state of boxing in Thailand and what do you think about where boxing stands worldwide? Some people think boxing is dying out and other sports like Muay Thai and MMA are surpassing it. What do you think?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: It's the second most popular sport Thais love to watch. Boxing is very popular in Thailand, just after soccer. It has remained very stable over time. It gains popularity as we have more world champions. Boxing and weightlifting are actually the only two sports that Thailand's people expect to win any medals in at the Olympic Games. There are now over twelve boxing promoters in Thailand, and there are shows televised on Thai national TV once a week. So boxing is still very popular here in Thailand.

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TSS: Thailand , Japan and the Philippines have a loyal fan base with excellent turnouts for fights. Why is boxing so popular in these countries versus others? Is it because many of the fights are free?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Japanese, Thailand , Philippines have cultures that love fighting sports. They love their sports heroes. Thus, boxing brings fame to these three countries. Japanese is number one, Thailand is number two, and the Philippines are number three. Japanese and Philippine audiences pay money for gate fees; Thai audiences are spoiled because there are many promoters offering free bouts. Promoters often get their money from politicians and sponsors.

TSS: Who do you think is currently the best boxer from Thailand and why?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Veeraphol Sahaprom. He is 38 years old, but very disciplined and well-behaved. He's married and takes good care of his family. He's fought in Japan many times, also in France , and done quite well.

TSS: Who do you think has the most potential for international stardom? Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym? Chonlatarn Piriapinyo?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Chonlatarn Piriapinyo . We called him the Thai Marvin Hagler and he is undefeated in his twelve fights.

(Piriapinyo impressively defended his ABCO title on December 5th against Jeffrey Onate of the Philippines)

TSS: Thai boxers don't fight in the US very often. Tell us about the difficulties in getting boxers to the US to fight.

Siraphop Ratanasuban: The US promoters are generally not willing to invite Thais because of the expense involved; airline tickets, lodging, training facilities, etc.

TSS: Many times, when Thai fighters go outside of Asia , they don't seem to do very well. Why is this and what do they need to do to win on a more consistent basis?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Unfortunately, 99% of Thai boxers lose when they journey to the US . Thais need to stay in the U.S. for at least a month to get used to the overall different atmosphere in the US ; the weather, the culture, the food and the people. They also need to train hard with Cuban or US trainers.

TSS: While Thai fighters fight quite often compared to their western counterparts, they are often criticized for the weak level of their opposition. For example, many times a fighter with 50 fights will fight another fighter with only 5 or 10 fights. These fights are very clearly tune-up bouts, but this seems to be at least one of the reasons why they tend to not do as well when they fight outside of Thailand , don't you think?

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Siraphop Ratanasuban: Yes, this is surely one reason. Some Thai promoters invite cheap boxers as opponents. They just try to keep their costs down. They did not think about the long-term and what it takes to make world champions.

TSS: In October of this year Golden Boy Promotions staged the Mexico vs. Thailand World Cup of boxing. This gave the Thai fighters much needed exposure in the US boxing market. What do you think about this team concept and do you have any plans to put on any formal event here in Thailand such as this?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Mr. De La Hoya invited the Kokiet Group (another promoter) and we think it is a good idea. But if Mr. De La Hoya invited us, they would not win all of the bouts. I guarantee this.

TSS: I'm going to name a few names and I'd like you to tell me what you think of each of these fighters.

Pongsaklek Kratingdaenggym
Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai
Ratanachai Sor Vorapin
Veeraphol Sahaprom
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Sorry, I should not judge other people's boxers.

TSS: #2 ranked Sirimongkol Singwancha is scheduled to fight the winner of Jose Luis Castillo and Diego Corrales. How do you think he will do and what does he need to do to win?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: It all depends on Sirimongkol's conditioning. If he trains well, he will win. But if he still thinks about his girlfriends and parties too much, he will lose by knockout.

TSS: Flyweight champion Pongsaklek Wonjongkam was scheduled to face Jorce Arce of Mexico back in July of this year. What do you think will happen if the two do eventually meet and what does Pongsaklek need to do to defeat him?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: Pongsaklek needs to learn Jorce Arce's style. He needs to stay calm and not get nervous in his US debut. He can knockout Arce in the early rounds, but Arce will pressure him and there will be a lot of action.

TSS: What are one Songchai's plans for 2006? Any big fights or events planned?

Siraphop Ratanasuban: We have four events planned up until March and a few more tentatively planned in the months following. Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai, Chonlatarn Piriyaipinyo, Yoddamrong Sithyodthong and Suddam, Kietyongyuth will all take part in these fights, as well as a few other of our fighters.

TSS: Well, Khun Siraphop, it looks like the boxing scene is still going strong here in Thailand.

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Siraphop Ratanasuban: Yes, I think so

TSS: Thanks once again for taking the time to speak with us.

Ratanasuban: No problem. Thank you.