

## Delivering the Punch, Part 2

Written by Scott Mallon  
Sunday, 05 March 2006 19:00

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The long introductions are over, and we can finally get to the boxing. All who don't belong in the ring scurry out to take their respective places. In less than sixty seconds, only the referee and the two fighters remain.

Devid Lookmahanak (7-0, 4 KO's) and 85 fight veteran Rey Llagas of the Philippines start the show off. The partisan Thai crowd began singing and chanting, "Thailand, Thailand, Thailand!" Dodo, the boxing mascot of Thailand, revs up the crowd. Lookmahanak is an inexperienced fighter and Llagas is not only experienced but experienced at losing. He is a survivor – this doesn't make for the most exciting of fights. Twelve rounds go by like molasses. Lookmahanak wins every round on all three judges' scorecards and by the end of the fight the crowd is asleep. Thankfully, before I nodded off, the bell rang and the decision was announced.

Next up to the plate – Veeraphol Sahaprom.

There was little doubt in my mind as to the outcome of the fight. The majority of bouts in Thailand are "predetermined," and the chances of Bauya pulling off the upset were about as good as the chance of Buster Douglas putting down a chicken wing or Mike Tyson passing on the ear. This didn't concern me though; I was more interested in seeing how Sahaprom looked in winning.

The fight was a boring affair and anti-climatic; I could have left and come back and nothing would have changed. It immediately became apparent Sahaprom was not the fighter he once was. Although he dominated his opponent, winning eight of ten rounds, he looked slow and tentative – sadly, over-the-hill. His opponent's sparring partner mentality and low work rate allowed him to win the fight easily without extending himself. If he had been in the ring with Rafael Marquez instead of Joel Bauya, he wouldn't have seen the end of the third round.

The next two fights ended in TKO's and were the best fights of the day. I was still in shock at how sluggish Sahaprom looked. Maybe it was his opponent.

Napapol Kiatisakchokchai came on next and TKO'd Julius Taronas in nine. Kiatisakchokchai's lone claim to fame was a 10th round TKO loss to champion at-the-time, Oscar Larios. Thong Por Chokchai then closed the show when he TKO'd Yoshihisa Kobura in four. It was 6 PM.

I packed up my camera and made my way out to the dirt road, looking for a taxi or tuk-tuk. No luck. I stood in the midst of a madhouse. A thousand people all wanted to leave simultaneously but had no room to move. The tiny road had reached its capacity, so I did the only thing I could do, I started walking.

The sun is setting and it's getting dark as I make my way to the main road. Its 6:30, I'm drained and looking forward to the comfort of my Easy-chair, remote control and cable TV. Taxis and tuk-tuks usually drive and look for customers or park and waiting for them. I was out in the rice

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fields, away from the main road and there were no taxis, no tuk-tuks, and no motorcycle taxis – I had no way to get to the bus station.

There was a long row of food vendors lined up along the road. I bought some water and asked “How can I get to Bangkok?” All had the same response: “All the buses are finished now. No more.”

This was not the answer I was looking for.

I kept asking until I found a man willing to take me to the bus station on the back of his motorcycle. When I ask him how much he wanted for the 30-minute ride, he of course responds, “up to me.”

Ten minutes later, he stops at a small, wooden hut along the highway, the same highway that leads to the bus station. He informs me this is the nearest “bus station” and in 30 minutes the bus will pass by. I pay him \$3, he grumbles, I grumble and I sit down and wait – and wait and wait.

An hour goes by, and still no bus.

The owner of the house that is adjacent to the “bus station” was working on his car and sees me standing. By this time it’s after 8 PM. “Do you need a ride?” he asks.

Now I have my reservations but short of walking over to the fleabag motel down the road, it’s my best shot at getting home, so I agree.

We head down the highway in his truck and engage in the usual chit-chat; “Where do you come from, how long have you been in Thailand and what are you doing in Chainart? To my surprise though, ten minutes down the road he stops at another wooden hut doubling as a “bus stop.” In my most polite and proper Thai I ask him where the buses are. “Coming soon,” he declares.

I’m on a dark highway in the middle of nowhere and at this moment I wonder why I felt the need to come see Veeraphol Sahaprom fight.

Despite speaking Thai fluently, this fellow conveniently didn’t understand a word I was saying. After bickering back-and-forth, I get it thru his head I want to go to the proper bus station. He emphatically states “No more buses tonight.”

I’m either in the Twilight Zone or in an episode of Abbott and Costello doing the “Who’s On First” routine.

Didn’t he just tell me the bus was “coming soon?” I tried telling myself “it’s all a part of the adventure, it’s all part of the adventure” but nonetheless I found it difficult to be proper and polite when I asked the driver to take me back from where we came.

I spotted a police booth as we were nearing our destination. We drive to the little shack and I

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explain to police how I want to get on a bus and get home. The home owner has his hand out for money but I tell him “no, sorry, it doesn’t work this way.” He isn’t too happy but I wasn’t in a popularity contest. It turned out one of the policemen was finishing his shift and passed the bus station on his way home. Fortunately he was willing to take me there.

He drove me to the station. I got out of his truck, thanked the driver profusely and literally seconds afterwards stepped onto a bus. I was on my way in a matter of minutes. I breathe a sigh of relief and drift off to sleep; dreaming of my next adventure and anxious to get home.

And so it goes in life as a boxing journalist in Southeast Asia – my day started at 9 AM and I eventually made it home shortly after midnight. As a boxing journalist, there’s no six-figure salary, no expense account, no “minders” and, unfortunately, no groupies. There’s plenty of excitement though.

It’s not always easy delivering the punch but nobody ever said it would be...and it makes it that much more worthwhile.

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On February 16th I made another journey to Chainart. This time the fight was a championship bout between Pongsaklek Wonjongkam and Gilberto Keb Bass. There were no problems this time around. It was as easy as clicking my heels and saying, “there’s no place like home.”

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Veeraphol Sahaprom has fought three times since his victory over Joel Bauya. In his last outing against African fighter, Scari Korori, he scored a one-punch KO that had his opponent floundering around the ring for the next 15 minutes.

On March 25th he’ll attempt regain the WBC Bantamweight title from Hozumi Hasegawa in Kobe, Japan. I have my reservations about Sahaprom’s chances of reclaiming the title; after all, he’s a 37-year-old bantamweight and Hozumi is a 25-year-old with good hand speed. The former champion has a great punch and the fan in me would like to see him pull it off.  
Sahaprom TKO9

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Scott Mallon is now on another adventure...this time in Indonesia covering the Chris John – Juan Manuel Marquez fight.