

Muangchai Kittikasem: J-Okay

Written by Scott Mallon

Sunday, 17 December 2006 19:00

Titles: WBC Flyweight Title (1991-1992), IBF Jr. Flyweight Title (1989-1990)

Alias: Muanchai Orathaigym

Nickname: J-Okay

Hometown and Birthplace: Chainart, Thailand

Divisions: Jr. Flyweight, Flyweight

Date of Birth: November 11, 1968

Trainer: Sutjai Supalek

Manager: Song Kanchanachusak

Promoter: Songchai Ratanasuban

Record: 25 – 4 – 0, 17 KO's

In July of 1990, Muangchai Kittikasem traveled to Phoenix, Arizona to defend his IBF Jr. Flyweight belt against Michael Carbajal. It was his first trip to the United States; in fact, it was his first trip outside of Thailand.

Kittikasem had defeated Tacy Macalos of the Philippines in May of 1989 to win the IBF belt. He defeated Macalos again in an October rematch and made two additional defenses before running into the future Hall-of-Famer Michael Carbajal. An entourage of ten accompanied Kittikasem but despite the moral support, it would not be his night. In previous bouts, Kittikasem had serious troubles making weight and was on his way up to the flyweight division. Kittikasem was a young lion but Carbajal was stronger and violently evicted the Thai from his territory.

A drained Kittikasem would be knocked down four times before losing his title to Carbajal via 7th round TKO.

Kittikasem would then go on to defeat Sot Chitalada to win the WBC Flyweight title in February of 1991 and again in a rematch but then suffered two devastating knockout losses to another rising star, Yuri Arbachakov, effectively ending his career.

The Sweet Science caught up with Kittkasem at his used car dealership late Saturday morning and found him more than willing to talk about his career and the current state of boxing.

TSS: Right off the bat I'll ask the one question I always ask of boxers from Thailand. Did you fight in Muay Thai before boxing and if so, did you win any championships like the Lumpini or Rajdamnern Stadium titles?

Muangchai Kittikasem: Yes, I fought around forty to fifty Muay Thai fights. I never won any championships though.

TSS: What was your record?

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Muangchai Kittikasem: It's hard for me to remember but I lost around ten fights and won the rest.

TSS: Why did you switch to boxing and who got you to do so?

Muangchai Kittikasem: I was fighting in Muay Thai. A promoter called and told me one of the fighters had dropped out. He asked if I'd be willing to box him and I said yes. The next thing I knew I was boxing and no longer fighting in Muay Thai.

TSS: What was the most you made for one fight? Was it the Carbajal fight?

Muangchai Kittikasem: Yes. I made around 5 million baht for that fight. At the time the baht was 25 to the dollar so it was more money than I'd ever seen. But Carbajal, I think he made five times as much as I did – and I was the champion.

TSS: He was the bigger name though.

Muangchai Kittikasem: It would have been nice to make what he made! In fact, if he reads this, ask him if we can do some sort of tour. I've only been to America one time and that was for the fight against him. I'd like to go back; maybe do a little shopping and some sightseeing.

Also, say hello to Yuri Arbachakov in Japan and Tacy Macalos in the Philippines.

TSS: Tell me about the fight with Carbajal. What happened? How difficult was it to make the weight and did that make any difference in winning or losing the bout?

Muangchai Kittikasem: I went to the U.S. two weeks before the fight so it was plenty of time. At that point, it was very hard to make weight. By the day of the fight, I was drained and very weak. He was an excellent fighter though and I just did not have it in me to beat him at that time.

TSS: Who was your toughest fight against? Was it Carbajal or Arbachakov or someone else?

Muangchai Kittikasem: They were both very good fighters and I feel no shame in having lost to them. Carbajal was probably the bigger puncher though and it was difficult for me fighting in America – for the first time – in front of his crowd.

TSS: You came back after nearly three years only to lose to Shigeru Nakazato. What made you come back?

Muangchai Kittikasem: I should not have come back but I missed boxing. Of course, the money helped too but the real reason was I missed fighting.

TSS: How did you do in boxing financially?

Muangchai Kittikasem: I did ok but in Thailand, fighters normally only receive 30% of their purse. The rest goes to the manager, trainer, matchmaker and promoter.

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TSS: You're thirty-eight now. What have you been up to after boxing?

Muangchai Kittikasem: Running my business, selling used cars.

TSS: How did you get into selling used cars? What made you say, "I think I'll open a car dealership and start selling used cars."

Muangchai Kittikasem: I got married at the end of my career. We have two children now, a boy and girl. But by the time my career was over, I really did not have any money left. My father-in-law owned a taxi business where he rented out taxis. He suggested we open a car dealership together. He had the money and I had the name so it worked well for both of us.

TSS: How's business?

Muangchai Kittikasem: It's good. We always have 15 or 20 cars on the lot and that's plenty. Any more and I wouldn't have any time left. Someone's always calling me asking if I've got this car or that car, when will I get this model or that model. So we're busy and it's a good business for me to be in.

TSS: What's your take on boxing in Thailand these days? Do you still watch it?

Muangchai Kittikasem: I don't usually watch it much and if I do, it's only for a few minutes.

TSS: Why is that?

Muangchai Kittikasem: Boxing isn't the same as it used to be. Nowadays it's all business. The truth is boxing in Thailand has gone downhill in the past 15 years. Before you had guys like Sot Chitlada, Khaosai Galaxy, Chartchai Chionoi, Pone Kingpetch and Samart Payakarun. Now there are so many titles available it's just not the same. Look at the rankings. You've got guys ranked in the top spots who have never beaten anyone. They win one regional title and then they're in the top ten.

TSS: What do you think about Pongsaklek Wonjongkam and what he's accomplished?

Muangchai Kittikasem: He's been marketed well. His people talk about the Hall of Fame and how many times he's defended his title – but against who? They are the only ones who talk about the Hall of Fame.

TSS: Why won't he fight in the U.S. or against some of the bigger name fighters?

Muangchai Kittikasem: He won't fight in the U.S. because he'll get beat.

TSS: He could do more with his title.

Muangchai Kittikasem: I'm proud to have fought Carbajal and Arbachakov. Even though I lost, I lost to two great boxers, fighters who deserve to be in the Hall of Fame.

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TSS: You fought and defeated Sot Chitalada. You're friends with him. Was it difficult for you to fight him?

Muangchai Kittikasem: Yes, I respect him very much and while I was happy I won, I was sad that I had to beat him.

TSS: Are there any Thai fighters you do like?

Muangchai Kittikasem: No, not really.

TSS: How about western fighters?

Muangchai Kittikasem: Oh, I don't know. Muhammad Ali is someone I would like to meet. But really, I don't watch boxing much so I don't know a lot of the fighters.

Time to go eat. Are you hungry?

TSS: No, I ate lunch right before I came here.

Muangchai Kittikasem: Ok, we're finished? I'm really hungry and need to get some lunch.

TSS: No problem. Thanks for meeting with me.

Muangchai Kittikasem: No problem. Call me anytime.