

Lumpini Stadium Turns Fifty

Written by Scott Mallon

Tuesday, 19 December 2006 19:00

It is the domain of gladiators and has been the site of countless battles between some of the best boxers and Muay Thai fighters in the world.

Much like the Roman Colosseum, Bangkok's Lumpini Stadium is filled with ghosts of the past. The spirits of gloved warriors who fought for fame and fortune prowl the dimly lit arena with authority day in and day out. Only Rajdamnern Stadium, also in Bangkok, rivals the prestige of holding the title of Muay Thai Champion of Lumpini Stadium and simply fighting in Lumpini is an honor in itself.

Fighters and fans pass through the stadium doors for what is but a brief glimpse of those boxers deemed worthy of admittance. Inside and out, enthusiasts nourish the old stadium—its combatants feed off the roar of the four-thousand strong crowd and are perpetually charged with electricity.

“O-way, o-way” sings the crowd with each blow those in the ring put forth. They are in unison and it doesn't take long before foreigners are singing along too.

Foreigners, or Farang as they are referred to in Thailand, normally fill the pricey ringside seats. Tickets for these seats and the other levels have nearly doubled in price over the past ten years. Chalk it up to worldwide growth and shrewd marketing.

Most Thai fans are content to sit in the outer region of the stadium—behind a chain link fence.

While gambling in Thailand is technically illegal, it is not in Lumpini Stadium. Any visitor stepping in to the circular arena will immediately notice the frenzied betting around the ring—for Thais, the gambling is one of the main attractions of going to the stadium.

Muay Thai fights take place at Lumpini Stadium four times per week. Occasionally there is western style boxing included along with the Muay Thai but the vast majority are bouts allowing not only punches, but also kicks, knees and elbows. Those who enter the ring are generally fearful of the elbow for one blow can end a fight and scar a fighter forever.

The western style boxers who fight in the stadium are more often than not highly rated fighters or champions, but every so often there are amateur fights and less than experienced professionals.

The stadium is a revolving door of fighters and it rarely sleeps. During the downtimes, food vendors, equipment merchants, ticket scalpers and a host of other characters surround the dingy building, preparing for the night's vigorous activities or recuperating from the previous evening.

Lumpini Stadium opened for action on December 8, 1956. Operated by Thailand's Army

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Welfare Department of the Royal Thai Army, all proceeds from the fights go towards supporting the various departments of the Thai Army. The initial reason for opening the venue was to promote Thai boxing worldwide as well as in Thailand. Over the years though, the stadium has become a tourism bonanza and known around the world. It is now much more than just a stadium to its visitors. Along with Rajdamnern Stadium, it is considered the home of Muay Thai.

Currently there are approximately a dozen promoters presented with the responsibility of bringing fighters to fight in the stadium. Women are not allowed to fight in the stadium or enter then ring, period. Boxers must be male, over fifteen years-of-age, weigh over 100-pounds, and a five-pound weight difference between the boxers is the maximum.

Earlier this year, there were talks of moving the fabled stadium to the Suan Plu area of Bangkok. In order to make way for the world's tallest building, the old stadium would be demolished. Since the new stadium would no longer be in the Lumpini district, it would need to take a new name. It was later determined naming the new stadium any thing other than Lumpini Stadium would be detrimental to its history and future prosperity but this would be immaterial.

The plan to build the skyscraper, at least for now, has been scrapped. For the time being, the stadium will stay put and it's business as usual.

Fortunately, fights at Lumpini Stadium still take place. There are shows on Tuesday and Friday (6:30 PM) and Saturday (4:30 PM and 8:30 PM). Tickets are 2000 baht (\$56), 1500 baht (\$42) and 1000 baht (\$28).

Some of the many name fighters who have fought in Lumpini Stadium:

Boxing:

Khaosai Galaxy

Muangchai Kitticasem

Sot Chitlada

Pone Kingpetch

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam

Samart Payakarun

Netrnoi Sor Vorasingh

Hussein Hussein

Pascual Perez

Muay Thai:

Deisel Noi Chorthanasukarn

Pud Pad Noy

Nong Toom (Transvestite fighter, AKA Beautiful Boxer)

Sakmongkol

Anuwat Keawsamrit

Chokdee Por Pramook

Buakaw Por Pramook

Peter Smit

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Michael Liewafat

Ramon Dekker

Rob Kaman

Ivan Hippolyte

Thai Tidbits – Samson Dutchboygym

Former WBF super flyweight champion Samson Dutchboygym fought a total of forty-three times, winning all of his bouts. Thirty-six of his wins came by way of knockout and he successfully defended his title an incredible thirty-eight times. At the time, the WBF, now known as the World Boxing Foundation, was the World Boxing Federation.

While the Thai never attained the status he could have if he had won one of the major belts, he did fight and defeat some well-known and relatively good fighters; Genaro Garcia, Rolando Pascual, Cruz Carbajal and Hugo Soto to name a few.

Dutchboygym, whose real name is Saengmuangnoi Lukchapormasak, won the title in his fourth fight and retaining it until his retirement in 2002.