Written by Scott Mallon
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There are claims that boxing is dying. Hogwash. The heavyweight division isn't the only division in boxing and 2007 promises to be a banner year in boxing; especially for boxers hailing from Asia.

While Asia isn't Vegas or Atlantic City, it is a region packed of diamonds in the rough; undiscovered gems and potential superstars who wait for their moment in the sun.

The Sweet Science P4P Rankings – Asia

1) Manny Pacquiao – There's no way to dispute Pacquiao is the best fighter in Asia, if not all of boxing. He's exciting, he wins with Je Ne Sais Quois and is definitely "the man" in boxing.

2) Pongsaklek Wonjongkam – Although his competition leaves much to be desired, his longevity and skills are undeniable. He is currently Thailand's only world champion and is undefeated in ten years. Need I say more?

3) Chris John – A victory over Juan Manuel Marquez, however controversial, shows he belongs at the top of the heap. He easily outpointed Renan Acosta to close out 2006 and should have no trouble defending against Jose Rojas in February. A fight with Pacquiao would not be a good move on his part but a rematch with Marquez would not hurt – especially if he defeats the Mexican again.

4) Hozumi Hasegawa – Hidden away in Japan, Hasegawa is a sharp punching southpaw who put former champion Veeraphol Sahaprom to sleep. He recently bested Genaro Garcia and his herky-jerky style will give fits to any one who steps in the ring with him.

5) Masomori Tokuyama – Tokuyama has never shied away from a good fight and although he only fought once in 2006 (UD12 Jose Navarro), he ledger shows wins over Katsushige Kawashima (twice), Gerry Penalosa (twice) and In Jin Chi (twice). A fight with Hozumi Hasegawa is a distinct possibility in 2007.

6) Nobuo Nashiro – With only seven fights under his belt he took on WBA champion Martin Castillo – and defeated him. Although he's only fought a total of nine fights, nearly all have been against quality opposition. A victory in a rematch with Castillo would cement his claim as the king of the 115-pound division.

7) Yukata Niida – This light-hitting minimumweight defended his title twice in 2006, winning a technical decision against unbeaten Eriberto Gejon (Tech Win 10) and the other on points over Ronald Barrera (W 12). Scheduled to meet Katsunari Takayama early next year – the best has yet to come for this WBA belt holder.

8) In Jin Chi – Won back the title he lost to Takashi Koshimoto in January from Rudolfo Lopez.

While there's little uncertainty to his skills, at thirty-three, 2007 may provide some insight as to just how much he has left.

9) Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai –Sor Nonthachai is an exciting, top-shelf fighter with an iron chin. Has no trouble making mincemeat of mid-level opposition and deserves a title shot in 2007. Time is running out.

10) Rey Bautista – He's young, relatively inexperienced in big-time boxing, but will continue to shine in 2007. One of the better prospects in boxing, he should snag a title in 2007.

Asian Fighters Ranked in Ring Magazine

Pound for Pound:

Manny Pacquiao (Philippines): #2

Jr. Lightweight

Manny Pacquiao (Philippines): #1
Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai: #9

Featherweight

Chris John (Indonesia) #1
In Jin Chi (Korea) #3
Takashi Koshimoto (Japan) #5
Hioyuki Enoki (Japan) #7

Jr. Featherweight

Somsak Sithchatchawal (Thailand) #4

Bantamweight

Hozumi Hasegawa (Japan) #2
Veeraphol Sahaprom (Japan) #3
Ratanachai Sor Vorapin (Thailand) #6
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym (Thailand) #10

Jr. Bantamweight

Nobuo Nashiro (Japan) #1
Katsushige Kawashima (Japan) #7
Pramuansak Phosuwan (Thailand) #10

Flyweight

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam (Thailand) #1
Takefumi Sakata (Japan) #7
Daisuke Naito (Japan) #10

Jr. Flyweight

Koki Kameda (Japan) #1

Minimumweight

Yukata Naiida (Japan) #2
Eagle Kyowa (Japan/Thai) #4
Katsunari Takayama (Japan) #5
Rodel Mayol (Philippines) #7

Boxing in Thailand

There's no shortage of boxers in Thailand. With a huge pool of Muay Thai fighters to draw from and several talented amateur boxing prospects turning pro after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Thailand seems destined to remain a boxing powerhouse in Asia.

The country is known for having tough, determined and disciplined fighters who give their all whenever the step in to the ring. However, consistently losing while fighting abroad and padding their records with no-hopers has done nothing to enhance their reputation.

Whether because of a lack of marketability, a lack of funds or their unwillingness to travel abroad, the vast majority of boxers from Thailand remain a mystery to fans in the west. If anything though, the boxing scene involving Thai fighters will be active. In fact, it's one of the most active in the world; since 2000, the number of fights has nearly doubled in the country.

The Sweet Science P4P Rankings – Thailand – August 2006

1) Pongsaklek Wonjongkam
2) Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym
3) Somsak Sithchatchawal
4) Wandee Singwancha
5) Sirimongkol Singwancha
6) Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai
7) Veeraphol Sahaprom
8) Pramuansak Phosuwan
9) Terdsak Jandaeng
10) Oleydong Sithamerchai

Current Sweet Science P4P Rankings – Thailand

1) Pongsaklek Wonjongkam (Flyweight) – Definitely the top dog in Thailand

2) Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai (Super Lightweight) – He's a seasoned fighter who has proven himself in the big-time. He's one Thai who can fight outside of Asia. He has an abundance of skills and one-punch power. His overall ability and ease in dispatching anyone other than championship caliber get him the runners-up spot.

3) Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym (Super Bantamweight) – After losing to Vladimir Sidorenko he's bounced back. He's young, he can punch, but the former interim champion needs to prove himself against a name fighter.

4) Somsak Sithchatchawal (Super Bantamweight) – Was his win over Monshipour a fluke or was Celestino Caballero just that good? Did Sithchatchawal catch Monshipour at the right time and can he rebound from the devastating loss? The jury is still out.

5) Wandee Singwancha (Flyweight) – He doesn't have much of a punch which will be his downfall in the end. He can box, as was evidenced in his recent victory over Juanito Rubillar, but this won't be enough. He can no longer make the Jr. Flyweight limit and with no punch he'll have a hard time competing against the "big boys." Although he's now rated second by the WBC, he doesn't deserve to be.

5) Sirimongkol Singwancha (Super Lightweight) – Get this guy a fight. He's better than Jose Armando Santa Cruz and would have beat up Inada had the fight taken place. He'll fight anyone but his biggest obstacle is staying motivated fighting tomato cans in Thailand. Like many Thais, he needs a fight against a name opponent.
6) Wandee Singwancha (Flyweight) – He doesn't have much of a punch which will be his downfall in the end. He can box, as was evidenced in his recent victory over Juanito Rubillar, but this won't be enough. He can no longer make the Jr. Flyweight limit and with no punch he'll have a hard time competing against the "big boys." Although he's now rated second by the WBC, he doesn't deserve to be.

7) Pramuansak Phosuwan (Super Flyweight) – A genuine tough guy. Always calm and focused no matter how heated the battle. But at thirty-eight, he'll be in trouble should he fight one of the division's elite.
8) Veeraphol Sahaprom (Bantamweight) – Will be lucky to get another crack at the title. Although he has a puncher's chance of winning a belt, that's about all he has left at this point. A third shot at Hasegawa is unlikely.

9) Oleydong Sithamerchai (Minimumweight) – He's fought better than the usual opponents faced by Thais at his level and he moves up one spot with the departure of Terdsak Jandaeng. He lacks the punch and is in the wrong division to become a superstar. He'll need to defeat a name opponent to convince me.

10) Saenghiran Lookbanyai / Napapol Kittisakchokchai (Super Bantamweight) – These two square-off in early March, supposedly to see who deserves a shot at Israel Vasquez. Kittisakchokchai has the edge in experience but some feel Lookbanyai has the edge in heart and is the favorite.

Neither has defeated a top twenty fighter and yet are ranked number one and two respectively in the WBC's world.

In Kittisakchokchoi's lone shot at the big-time, he was TKO'd in 10 by Oscar Larios. His dreadful performance against Larios and lack of quality opposition leads me to believe Saenghiran might have more of a shot at beating him than some suspect. Regardless, neither of them lasts longer than six rounds with Israel Vasquez.

Honorable Mention: Wethya Sakmuangklang, Denkaosan Kaovichit, Devid Lookmahanak, Nethra Sasiprapa, Chonlatarn Piriyapinyo, Pornsawan Kratingdaenggym

Thai Fighters Ranked in Ring Magazine

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam: #1 Flyweight
Pramuansak Phosuwan: #10 Jr. Bantamweight
Veeraphol Sahaprom: #3 Bantamweight
Ratanachai Sor Vorapin: #6 Bantamweight
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym: #10 Bantamweight
Somsak Sithchatchawal: #3 Jr. Featherweight
Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai: #9 Lightweight