Written by Scott Mallon
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The Lookbanyai Boxing Camp is nestled in a densely populated, residential neighborhood in Bangkok, just up the street from the Fortune Hotel where pirated software and videos are sold by the thousands. More specifically, the gym is off Soi 17, also known as Soi Poisedon for the five-story massage parlor that adorns the street's corner. A left, a right and fifty yards further at the end of a dusty road are the wrought iron gates marking the entrance to the camp.

Inside, the compound is quiet. A filthy white dog chases a chicken back and forth, under a field of heavy bags, thru the lone boxing ring, around some dilapidated motorbikes and back underneath the ring until the pursuit is over – at least temporarily.

The scruffy little mutt looks to be part poodle but for now, he is simply the hunter. The chicken has perched itself upon the top ring rope and stands motionless. The bewildered dog takes a moment to sniff the ring, baffled by the disappearing fowl. Spinning around in circles, the canine searches in vain; completely unaware his silent quarry is standing just above him.

Eventually though, the dog loses interests and runs off to do whatever it is dogs do.

Ninety-nine percent of boxing gyms are identical to the Lookbanyai gym. They're always outdoors: behind a house, next to a police station, outside of an apartment complex or between a row of homes and a dirty canal.

In Thailand, you'll find the darnedest things in the unlikeliest of places, fruit stalls in front of tire shops, insect carts next to camera shops and Dim Sum carts on wheels that prowl the streets for customers. The running joke among expatriates is if there is an empty plot of land, Thais will figure out how to squeeze a beer bar or squid stall on to it. Bangkok is a throng of humanity and the air is heated, full of grime and thick with congestion from a mass of pollutants.

None of this matters to the Thai fighters though. Unlike fighters from the west, Thai boxers train six days a week and rarely take more than a week off between fights. It is a full-time job and they are employees of the promoter.

When one of the boxers has a fight approaching, the entire gym comes alive. Six hours a day; three hours in the morning, three hours in the evening, the sounds of boxing resonate throughout the gym with abandon.

During the downtime though, the pace of the training slows, intensity wanes and sounds of laughter are heard more frequently.

The name Lookbanyai literally translates into children in the big house. In actuality, the Lookbanyai camp is a gym surrounded by four connected buildings that house the fighters and their families.

Training is a time-honored ritual followed by fighters around the country; after the fighters finish their morning workout, most shower and go back to sleep. A few watch TV, some listen to music or run errands and others read boxing magazines. At around 3:15, boxers inevitably begin their shuffle to the training area from their communal quarters.

The afternoon training session commences around 3:30 at the Lookbanyai camp. It kicks off unhurriedly; after all, there is time and then there is Thai time.

Nothing in Thailand ever starts faithfully and Thai fighters are no different.

The fighters leisurely wrap their hands, put on their shoes and socks and in due course, hit the Bangkok streets in mass for a 3-mile run, their second of the day.

For now, the training is relaxed in the Lookbanyai Camp. The gyms' most well-known fighter, Saenghiran Lookbanyai (20-0, 15 KOs), had been scheduled to face fellow Thai Napapol Kittisakchokchai (40-2, 36 KOs) on March 2nd, only to have the bout postponed because of a shoulder injury suffered by Kittisakchokchai.

Training was in full swing when the Lookbanyai Camp got word Kittisakchokchai had suffered a most unusual injury. While sparring, he was accidentally headbutted – to the shoulder. Just like that, the date for the bout was pushed back to April 6.

So in the interim, Lookbanyai bides his time, eager to get the fight over with and move on to bigger and better things.

”I've gotten better and better with each fight and will defeat Napapol,” said Lookbanyai.

“I'm not looking past him but after I beat him I want to challenge Israel Vasquez,” he continued.

”He's probably the best fighter in the division and I'm eager to test my skills against him.”

Lookbanyai is ranked second by the WBC, Kittisakchokchai first. While many debate the pair's lofty ranking; few question the competitiveness of the bout. Saenghiran is known for his heart and technique; the same cannot be said for Kittisakchokchai. He's known for his knockout power and has been criticized for lacking a champion's heart. He knows this may be his last run at a title.

Although unbeaten for over 3 years, Kittisakchokchai remains haunted by his two knockout losses: first to Filipino journeyman Rey Llagas at the start of his career and his last loss, a 10th round KO at the hands of former champion Oscar Larios.

The Saenghiran Lookbanyai – Napapol Kittisakchokchai bout had originally been scheduled to be for the WBC interim super bantamweight championship but for whatever reason, it's now been downgraded to a title eliminator.

Whatever happens, Lookbanyai plans on taking it all in stride, “Obviously I'd like to fight

Napapol right now, but whatever happens, I'll just keep fighting.