

## Boxing in Asia ... The Last Fights of 2005

Written by Scott Mallon

Friday, 23 December 2005 19:00

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December is not only Santa's month to stir the reindeer; it's also a month chockfull of boxing, with fighters around the world getting some end of the year work in before the holiday layoff. While none of the fights in the last few weeks of this year are incredibly significant, they do involve a few champions, former champions and one or two excellent up and coming prospects and contenders in some decent pre-Christmas get-togethers.

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Rey "Boom Boom" Bautista (18-0, 14 KOs) turned pro at sweet 16 and in the three years since he's racked up eighteen straight wins, 14 by knockout. He is the WBO #1 ranked bantamweight and is already a huge star in his native Philippines. Many view him as the possible heir to the throne now staunchly held by Manny Pacquiao,

Tonight at the Sycuan Resort & Casino in El Cajon, CA, Bautista the teenager takes on grizzled veteran and KO artist Geraldo Espinoza (28-9, 26 KOs). The matchup is specifically tailored to check his yet to be tested whiskers and should he pass, he should move in line for a shot at the world title.

This is third time in Bautista's relatively short career that he's traveled to the U.S.

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The flyweight division is one of the most talent-laden divisions in boxing; Wonjongkam, Parra, Darchinian, Narvaez and Arce (interim) currently reign as champions. Alvarez, Pachecho, Vilorio (Jr. Fly Champ) and various other are close behind and any number of fantastic matchups are there for the promoters making.

Takefumi Sakata (25-3-1, 11 KOs) has had two shots at the flyweight title, both against Lorenzo Parra, and both times losing majority decisions. In his first fight since his rematch loss to Parra, he squared off against journeyman Hiroyasu Hasebe (6-6-5, 1 KO). Sakata proved to be a cut above his outmatched opponent, stopping him via TKO in the sixth.

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Earlier today in Petchyaboon, Thailand, WBC Flyweight king Pongsaklek Wonjongkam (59-2, 32 KOs) faced the not-so-stiff challenge of Filipino Isidro Balabat (5-4, 2 KOs) in a ten-round tune-up.

Balabat came out in round one throwing strong, three and four punch combinations which had little effect. Pongsaklek deftly sidestepped and countered, content to bide his time and wait for Balabat to make mistake.

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In round three Pongsaklek picked up the pace, using angles and increasing his punch output. He stepped in strong with long, left shots to the pit of Balabat's stomach. Excellent round for Pongsak. For the next two rounds, the champion set down on his punches, moving less and repeatedly unleashing the straight left and right hook to the body. In a show of bravado, Balabat waved in the champion but had little left to give. When he caught Pongsaklek with a left hook at the end of round five, the Thai didn't flinch.

Round six was over almost before it began. As Pongsaklek stepped in to let go of a punch, the top of his head smacked Balabat over the right eye, immediately releasing a torrent of blood. His pain-wracked face told the story. The ring doctor quickly appraises the injury and calls a halt to the bout. Wonjongkam wins a technical decision as all three judges had him ahead on the scorecards.

\* \* \*

Last Friday night, Wonjongkam's arch-rival and WBC interim flyweight titleholder Jorge Arce (41-3-1, 31 KOs) once again did his part in setting up a possible showdown with Wonjongkam when he scored a tenth round TKO over for WBO super flyweight champion Adonis Rivas (21-7-2, 10 KOs).

According to the WBC, Arce is scheduled to defend his interim title January 28th against unranked Nicaraguan, Everth Briceno (22-4, 18 KOs) on the WBC's "Night of Champions." This is disputed however by recent victim Adonis Rivas, who claims to have a signed contract for a rematch with Arce. Possible 2006 opponents on the table for Arce; Brian Viloria, Rosendo Alvarez and of course, Pongsaklek Wonjongkam. Somewhere down the line, the current champion (Wonjongkam) needs to face the current interim champion (Arce) to keep the boxing gods happy!

\* \* \*

WBA interim bantamweight champion Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym impressively defended his title against Leo Gamez of Venezuela Thursday afternoon. In Gamez he got just what he needed; an over-the-hill, yet still-dangerous fighter whom he couldn't steamroll.

In the first thirty seconds of round one it became abundantly clear the hand and foot speed of Poonsawat was far superior to that of the plodding Gamez. Nonetheless, the powerfully built Venezuelan waded in, winging left hook bombs and attempting to draw the Thai into a war. Surprisingly, Poonsawat obliged, and the two stood face-to-face for the better part of the first three rounds. While on the inside, Poonsawat was busy, unloading left hooks to the body, followed by rights to the head. He mixed it up with short, crisp, left and right uppercuts. Gamez tried in vain to counter his faster opponent but Poonsawat's subtle adjustments were more than he bargained for and had him swinging at air.

Poonsawat began clearly dominating the fight in round four, boxing smartly and showing the full repertoire of his offensive and defensive tool bag. Quick, stiff jabs allowed him to move in and out of range at will while his side to side movement took him away from the wild, looping shots

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of Gamez.

When Gamez came out for the fifth round, he did so with a small cut over his right eye. Seemingly out of desperation Gamez throws it into overdrive and nails Poonsawat with a big right to the head. Then another. Poonsawat fires off a big left hook and stops Gamez dead in his tracks. For the rest of the round, both fighters moved cautiously and without initiating any further action. As the bell sounds, Poonsawat catches Gamez with a solid jab, knocking him off balance and stealing the round.

\* \* \*

Although Gamez was never completely out of the fight, by the eighth round Poonsawat had effectively defanged the lion. Gamez was visibly tiring and his punches had lost their pop. At the end of round nine, Poonsawat lands a quadruple jab, right uppercut, left hook combination that wobbles Gamez. He storms back and at the bell clips Poonsawat with a left hook to the head.

In round eleven Poonsawat digs in with a left hook to the body and Gamez backs away, obviously hurt. The Thai unloads on Gamez but he's game and refuses to be stopped. Clearly battered and beaten, the gritty Venezuelan continues to give his all until the bell sounds to end the fight.

Judges scores: 119-110, 119-110,120-119

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Congratulations to Steve "The Mongoose" Quinonez, a class-act who was recently signed to an exclusive promotional contract by Canadian Promoter Denis Benoit of Ringway Promotions. Back in 1996 I got to know Quinonez and his family while training at the Desert Hot Springs Boxing Club. Like many fighters, he's had his share of career ups and downs; he's come up on the short end of four split decisions (three in a row) and got KO'd in the first round by one of Mickey Ward's patented left hooks to the body. Despite these setbacks he's fought on and tallied wins against such notable fighters as Lovemore N'dou, Juan Valenzuela and Antonio Ramirez. In his last fight, Quinonez handed undefeated prospect James Armah his first lost.