

ONLY THE BEGINNING?

Officials, Fighters Hope That More U.S. Kickboxing Cards Will Feature Traditional Muay Thai Rules

BY TERRY L. WILSON

Joshua Bendell (left) and Armando Ramos

Photos courtesy of Bob Chaney

Do you have a special fondness for special or historical dates? If so, jot down December 14, 2001 because martial arts history was made that autumn day.

The event was IN SYNC Production's "Super Showdown." What made this Dennis Warner and Bob Chaney production special was that this was the first sanctioned kickboxing card that featured Muay Thai fights (using traditional Muay Thai rules) on American television, says Chaney. The event was televised live on Pay-Per-View from the Palms Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Some may immediately dispute the claim, asserting that the K-1 or other events may have beaten them to the punch. Not so, says Chaney.

"An American Muay Thai match uses modified Muay Thai rules that forbids elbows and knees to the face," he says. "Full Muay Thai rules allow knees and elbows to the face. It's been argued that the K-1 events have used full Muay Thai rules, but that isn't true. While the K-1 did allow elbows to the face, they

restricted the kind of elbow strikes the fighters could use. Downward elbows and spinning elbows were not allowed and neither were knees to the face. So our fight was truly the first sanctioned event that allowed full Muay Thai rules in the United States [on PPV]."

This was all quite apparent in Thongthai's match. He landed a blinding fast blow to his opponent's forehead that required 22 stitches.

OPENING DOORS

The televised broadcast lasted less than 90 minutes, but it was years in the making.

"In the early 1990s, the Thais didn't really care if Muay Thai expanded to other parts of the world," says Chaney, who made numerous trips back and forth to Thailand to facilitate the deal.

Slowly, however, they started to come around. He convinced the leading Thai officials to come to America and give a seminar to members of the Nevada Athletic Commission.

Once they agreed, Chaney had to get the Nevada Athletic Commission to participate, which they did. Finally, in December, he opened a door that had remained locked for decades. They pulled off the event, though it wasn't easy.

"If it were not for Bob Chaney, this event would not have been possible," says Sudjai Horprasertkij, who — along with his brother — owns the Omni Stadium in Thailand. "Bob understands our sport, our customs and has earned the respect of the fighters, promoters and officials in Thailand. They would not do this for anyone else."

Despite the positive reviews from the event, there may not be another one unless the Nevada Athletic commission agrees. They will determine the fate of future fights using Muay Thai rules.

"I think this fight was a good beginning in regards to introducing Muay Thai rules to America," said Mark Ratner, an official with the Athletic Commission. "We need to walk before we run, and we (the commission) want to see more such fights."

According to Horprasertkij, the Thai fighters are ready, willing and able.

"We have many Thai fighters who would like to fight in America, but they will only compete if they are allowed to use their elbows and knees and be scored using Muay Thai rules," he says. "If you want to do the sport but disallow the elbows and knees, it is no longer Muay Thai."

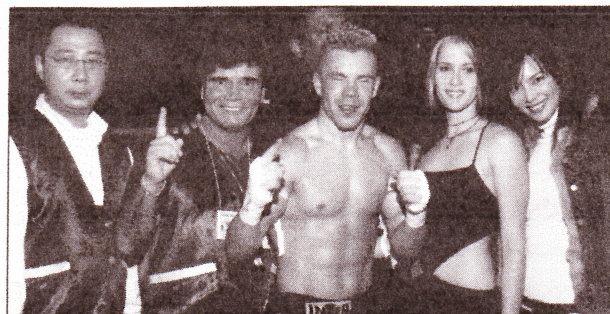
Thakoon Pongsupha, owner and head trainer for the Sasiprapha gym in Thailand, says it's important for Americans to accept Muay Thai under traditional Muay Thai rules.

"I fought many years ago in America (1980), but we were not allowed to use elbows or knee strikes," he says. "We (Thai fighters) were at a great disadvantage and were not able to demonstrate the effectiveness of our art. So for us to finally be able to come to your country using traditional Thai rules is a big step in the development of Muay Thai in America."

NEXT UP

Chaney's next big step is to get Ratner and other American officials to Thailand so they can visit the Thai training gyms and see some fights. Chaney and Warner hope that the commissioners will realize that Muay Thai is a safe sport and that Muay Thai rules can — and should be — allowed in the United States.

"American fighters can't compete in international competition coming up under modified rules," explains Chaney. "And we can't attract the best athletes in the sport from Thailand, Holland, France etc. There are many exciting things in the works that can bring Pay-Per-View events from Thailand to here and visa versa. We have many fighters who are eager to compete, and some will go on to become international champi-



Left to right, Thakoom Pong Supha, Bob Chaney, Joshua Bendell, Samua Checker and Thailand supermodel Sonia Couling.

ons. But none of these things can happen until our Athletic Commissions sanction full Muay Thai rules. So this first step was important one for us and the Thais."

At this stage, things look good. And it's likely the Commission will take that next step.

"The sport is exciting, and I don't see a problem with bringing more of the same here, especially with the success of the various mixed martial arts events," says Ratner. "I think that also opens the door a little bit for full-contact Muay Thai rules." ☺

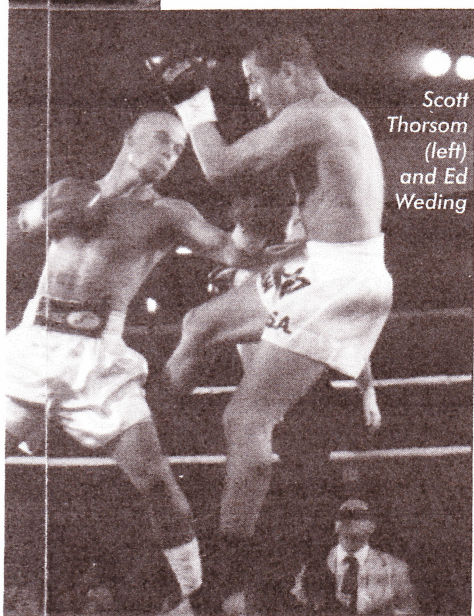
About the author: Terry Wilson is a martial artist and freelance writer who lives in San Diego.

SUPER SHOWDOWN WINNERS

By Dan Bucher

Following are the winners of the Super Showdown:

- Manson Gibson
- BM Sasiprapa
- Ed Wedding
- Craig Buchanan
- Thongthai
- Joshua Bendell



Scott Thorsom (left) and Ed Wedding

37 YEARS of Magic

Competitors Vie for Gold at KUBOTA'S ALL-STAR Karate Championship

BY HANK HAMILTON

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