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Muay Thai

Muay Thai (IPA: /muɑɪ.tʰɑɪ/, pronounced [muāit^hāi]; Thai: มวยไทย, lit. *Thai Boxing*) is a form of hard martial art practiced in several Southeast Asian countries including Thailand. The art is similar to others in Southeast Asia such as: Kun Khmer in Cambodia, Lethwei in Myanmar, Tomoi in Malaysia, and Muay Lao in Laos. Muay Thai has a long history in Thailand and is the country's national sport. Traditional Muay Thai practiced today varies significantly from the ancient art Muay Boran and uses kicks and punches in a ring with gloves similar to those used in Western boxing.

Muay Thai is referred to as "**The Art of the Eight Limbs**", as the hands, shins, elbows, and knees are all used extensively in this art. A practitioner of Muay Thai ("*nak muay*") thus has the ability to execute strikes using eight "points of contact," as opposed to "two points" (fists) in Western boxing and "four points" (fists, feet) used in the primarily sport-oriented forms of martial arts.

History

Various forms of kickboxing have long been practiced throughout Southeast Asia. As with the most countries in the region, Thai culture is highly influenced by ancient civilizations within Southeast Asia, India, China and Theravada buddhism. Muay Thai's origin in Thailand can be traced back to its ancestor Muay Boran ("*ancient boxing*"), an unarmed combat used by Siamese soldiers in conjunction with Krabi Krabong, the weapon-based style, and may be traced back to Bokator, the martial art of the Khmer Empire. Eventually Muay Boran was divided to:

- *Muay Korat* (Northeast) emphasized strength. A technique like "Throwing Buffalo Punch" was used. It could supposedly defeat a buffalo in one blow.
- *Muay Lopburi* (Center region) emphasized movements. Its strong points were straight and counter punches.
- *Muay Chaiya* (South) emphasized posture and defense, as well as elbows and knees.
- *Muay Pra Nakorn* (North) emphasized speed, particularly in kicking. Because of its faster speed, it was called as well "Ling Lom" (windy monkey or Loris).

There is a phrase about Muay Boran that states, "Punch Korat, Wit Lopburi, Posture Chaiya, Faster Thasao. (หมัดหนักโคราช ฉลาดลพบุรี ท่าดีไชยา ไวกว่าท่าเสา)".

As well as continuing to function as a practical fighting technique for use in actual warfare, Muay Thai became a sport in which the opponents fought in front of spectators who went to watch for entertainment. This kind of *muay* contests gradually became an integral part of local festivals and celebrations, especially those held at temples. It was even used as entertainment to kings.

Eventually, the previously bare-fisted fighters started wearing lengths of rope wrapped around their hands and forearms. This type of match was called *muay kaad chuek* (มวยคาดเชือก).

Royal Muay

Muay gradually became a possible means of personal advancement as the nobility increasingly esteemed skillful practitioners of the art and invited selected fighters to come to live in the Royal palace to teach *muay* to the staff of the royal household, soldiers, princes or the king's personal guards. This "royal muay" was called *muay luang* (มวยหลวง).

Some time during the Ayutthaya Period, a platoon of royal guards was established, whose duty was to protect king and the country. They were known as **Grom Nak Muay** (Muay Fighters' Regiment). This royal patronage of *muay* continued through the reigns of Rama V and VII.

Muay Renaissance

The ascension of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) to the throne in 1868 ushered in a Golden Age not only for *muay* but for the whole country of Thailand. *Muay* progressed greatly during the reign of Rama V as a direct result of the king's personal interest in the art. The country was at peace and *muay* functioned as a means of physical exercise, self-defense, recreation, and personal advancement. Masters of the art such as former fighters or soldiers began teaching *muay* in training camps where students were provided with food and shelter. Trainees would be treated as one family and it was customary for students to adopt the camp's name as their own surname.

After the occurrence of a death in the ring, King Rama the VII pushed for codified rules for Muay Thai, and they were put into place. These included the rules that the fighters should wear modern gloves and cotton coverlets over the feet and ankles. It was also around this time in the 1920s that the term Muay Thai became commonly used while the older form of the style was referred to as Muay Boran.

Legendary heroes

At the time of the fall of the ancient Siam capital of Ayutthaya in 1767, the invading Burmese troops rounded up a group of Thai residents and took them as prisoners. Among them were a large number of Thai boxers, who were taken by the Burmese to the city of Ungwa.

In 1774, in the Burmese city of Rangoon, the king of the Burmese, King Mangra decided to organize a seven-day, seven-night religious festival in honor of Buddha's relics. The festivities included many forms of entertainment, such as the costume plays called *likay*, comedies and farces, and sword-fighting matches. At one point, King Mangra wanted to see how Muay Boran would compare to the Burmese art Lethwei. **Nai Khanom Tom** was selected to fight against the Burmese champion. The boxing ring was set up in front of the throne and Nai Khanom Tom did a traditional Wai Kru pre-fight dance, to pay his respects to the Burmese king, as well as for all the spectators, dancing around his opponent, which amazed and perplexed all the Burmese people. When the fight began, he charged out, using punches, kicks, elbows, and knees, pummeling his opponent until he collapsed.^[1]

The referee however stated that the Burmese opponent was too distracted by the Wai Kru, and the knockout was invalid. The King then asked if Nai Khanom Tom would fight nine other Burmese champions to prove himself. He agreed and fought them all, one after the other with no rest periods in between. His last opponent was a great boxing teacher from Ya Kai City. Nai Khanom Tom mangled him by his kicks and no one else dared to challenge him any further.

King Mangra was so impressed that he remarked, "Every part of the Thai is blessed with venom. Even with his bare hands, he can fell nine or ten opponents. But his Lord was incompetent and lost the country to the enemy. If he would have been any good, there was no way the City of Ayutthaya would ever have fallen."

King Mangra granted Nai Khanom Tom freedom along with either riches or two beautiful Burmese wives. Nai Khanom Tom chose the wives as he said that money was easier to find. He then departed with his wives for Siam. Other variations of this story had him also winning the release of his fellow Thai prisoners. His feat is celebrated every March 17 as "**Boxer's Day**" or "**National Muay Thai Day**" in his honor and that of Muay Thai's.

Today, some have wrongly attributed the legend of "Nai Khanom Tom" to King Naresuan, who was once taken by the Burmese. However, Nai Khanom Tom and King Naresuan were almost two centuries apart.

Tradition of Wai Khru

One of the most important traditions of Muay Thai is *Wai Khru* (*Paying Respect to Teachers*). In order to become a fully-fledged Muay Thai fighter, a person has to pass through a series of ceremonies. First comes the **Initiation as a Trainee Fighter Ceremony** (*Kuen Khru*), in which the *khru muay* accepts young fighters as his students and pledges to teach them to the best of his ability. After fighters have been accepted, they must demonstrate a good conduct, diligence and endurance, in addition to training as hard as they can, following implicitly all the teacher's rules.

During their apprenticeship, young fighters will experience the second type of *Wai Khru* ritual, the **Annual Homage-Paying Ceremony** (*Wai Khru Prajam Pee*). This annual

ceremony is usually held on **Muay Thai Day** (March 17) for young fighters to pay respect to their teachers and souls of teachers long passed away. The ceremony then progresses to the students honoring all the teachers present, who will mark sacred symbols on the fighters' forehead in order to bestow prosperity and success upon them - a custom known as *jerm*. The ceremony culminates with the third form of *Wai Khru*, the **Ritual Dance of Homage** (*Wai Khru Ram Muay*) performed by the fighters as a mark of respect.

It is only when fighters have passed all these three milestones (initiation, training and participation in contests) that they are entitled to call themselves as real Muay Thai fighters. When fighters have satisfied their teachers on all these counts, then they can participate in the fourth *Wai Khru* ritual, the **Initiation as a Teacher Ceremony** (*Khrob Khru*), which bestows on them the rank of *khru muay* and again involves a performance of the *Ritual Dance of Homage*.^[2]

Approaching the Ring Rites (*Kuen Suu Weitee*)

In ancient times, Siamese people believed in the power of incantations and protective amulets, the common belief was that everything was ruled and inhabited by unseen spirits, and that places were either blessed or cursed. Because of these beliefs, it was necessary to perform special rites before a fighter entered the ring, asking the spirits' permission to do so.

Even today, before entering the ring many fighters perform rituals. It is very much a matter of individual preference these days, with no prescribed rules. Some may kneel before the ring, others might pray with their *khru muay* or perform a series of repetitive movements, such as touching the ring ropes 3 times and avoiding the bottom stair before taking the first step up to the ring.

Fighters always leap over the ropes into the ring, because the head is considered to be more important than the feet and therefore it has to stay always above the feet while entering the ring, then they will go to the center and pay respect (*panom mueae wai*) in all four directions to the spectators.



"The Kneeling Sequence" Wai khru ram muay.



"The Standing Sequence" Wai khru ram muay.

Wai Khru Muay Thai is a tradition which goes back to ancient times, it is not an optional ritual or reserved for special occasions: the official Muay Thai regulations[1] specify that both fighters must perform the *Wai Khru Ram Muay* before each and every bout. It's a tradition in which fighters pay respect to their teachers, parents and things they hold sacred and pray for their safety and victory. The ritual has been developed in different ways, in different regions, even under different teachers and therefore it is theoretically impossible for two fighters to perform identical *Wai Khru*.

The *Wai Khru* is graceful and aesthetic ritual, both practical and spiritual. In a practical sense, it functions as a final pre-fight warm-up and gives the fighter some time alone before the fight to collect his thoughts. It can be divided into three main sections:

- **The Royal Homage Sequence**

This was originally intended to show devotion to the King, going back to the days when fighters were selected to display their skills in front of him. It has three subsections: *Prostration, Outstretched Arms* and *Act of Homage*.

- **The Kneeling Sequence**

This section is performed in a kneeling posture, one knee on the ground and the other leg out in front. the fighter pivots around on the spot to repeat the same sequence facing all four sides of the ring, a tradition which comes from Krabi Krabong.

- **The Standing Sequence**

In this section, the fighters go out from the center of the ring in one direction, to perform the Dramatic Interlude. Some fighters imitate the motions of "Rama Shooting an Arrow" from the *Ramakien*, a hunter, a soldier, or an executioner. Some fighters use this ritual to attempt to scare their opponents, commonly by stomping around them. But in a deeper sense, the fighter is expressing religious devotion, humility, and gratitude. Transcending both physical and temporal limitations, he opens himself to the divine presence and allows it to infuse his heart.^[3]

Removal of the Head Circlet (*Pitee Tod Mongkon*)

After the *Wai Khru* is completed, the fighters return to their own corners for the **Removal of the Head Circlet Ritual** (*Pitee Tod Mongkon*). The fighter stands in his own corner, lowers his head and raises hands to his chest for *panom mue wai* pose, while *khru muay* standing outside of the ropes facing the fighter, raises his own hands to return the *wai*. A fighter maintains the posture while the teacher utters an incantation and blows three times on top of fighters' head before removing the *Mongkon*. On the completion of this ritual and after a review of the rules by the judge and a glove shake, the contest may begin.^[4]

Muay Thai techniques

In its original form, *Muay Thai* consisted of an arsenal of nine weapons – the head, fists, elbows, knees and feet - known collectively as *na-wa arwud*. However in modern Muay Thai, both amateur and professional, headbutting an opponent is no longer allowed. Muay Thai is unique in the way it uses all parts of the body, including the elbows and knees, for both training and competitions.^[5]

To strike and bind the opponent for both offensive and defensive purposes, small amounts of stand-up grappling are used: the clinch. Formal Muay Thai techniques are divided into two groups: Mae Mai or major techniques and Luk Mai or minor techniques. Muay Thai is often a fighting art of attrition, where opponents exchange blows with one another. This is certainly the case with traditional stylists in Thailand, but is a less popular form of fighting in the contemporary world fighting circuit. With the success of Muay Thai in mixed martial arts fighting, it has become the de facto martial art of choice for competitive stand-up fighters. As a result, it has evolved and incorporated much more powerful hand striking techniques used in western style boxing and the Thai style of exchanging blow for blow is no longer favorable. Note: when Muay Thai fighters compete against fighters of other styles (and if the rules permit it), they almost invariably emphasize elbow (sok) and knee (kao) techniques to gain a distinct advantage in fighting. Almost all techniques in Muay Thai use the entire body movement, rotating the hip with each kick, punch, and block. The rotation of the hips in Muay Thai techniques, and intensive focus on "core muscles" (such as abdominal muscles and surrounding muscles) is very distinctive and is what sets Muay Thai apart from other styles of martial arts.

Punching (*Chok*)

English	Thai	Transliteration	<u>IPA</u>
Straight punch	หมัดตรง	<i>Mud Trong</i>	mad tɔŋ
Hook	หมัดเหวี่ยงสั้น	<i>Mud Wiang San</i>	mad wiaŋ san
Swing	หมัดเหวี่ยงยาว	<i>Mud Wiang Yao</i>	mad wiaŋ ja ^o
Spinning backfist	หมัดเหวี่ยงกลับ	<i>Mud Wiang Glub</i>	mad wiaŋ glab
Uppercut	หมัดเสย (หมัดสอยดาว)	<i>Mud Seuy</i>	mad sɛy
<u>Cobra punch</u>	กระโดดชก	<i>Kra-dod Chok</i>	gra dod tʃɔŋ

Undercut	หมัดฮุก	<i>Mud Hook</i>	mad hug
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The punch techniques in Muay Thai were originally quite simple being crosses and a long (or lazy) circular strike made with a straight (but not locked) arm and landing with the heel of the palm. Cross-fertilization with Western boxing and western martial arts mean the full range of western boxing punches are now used (jab, straight right/cross, hook, uppercut, shovel and corkscrew punches plus overhand or bolo punches).

As a tactic, body punching is used less in Muay Thai than most other striking martial arts to avoid exposing the attacker's head to counter strikes from knees or elbows.

Elbow (*Tee sok*)

The elbow can be used in seven ways: horizontal, diagonal-upwards, diagonal-downwards, uppercut, downward, backward-spinning and flying. From the side it can be used as either a finishing move or as a way to cut the opponent's eyebrow so that blood might block his vision. The blood also raises the opponent's awareness of being hurt which could affect his performance. This is the most common way of using the elbow. The diagonal elbows are faster than the other forms, but are less powerful. The uppercut and flying elbows are the most powerful, but are slower and easier to avoid or block. The downward elbow is usually used as a finishing move.

English	Thai	Transliteration	<u>IPA</u>
Elbow Slash	ศอกตี	<i>Sok Tee</i>	sòk tī
Horizontal Elbow	ศอกตัด	<i>Sok Tud</i>	sòk tàd
Uppercut Elbow	ศอกงัด	<i>Sok Ngud</i>	sòk ɲád
Forward Elbow Thrust	ศอกพุ่ง	<i>Sok Poong</i>	sòk p ^h uŋ
Reverse Horizontal Elbow	ศอกเหวี่ยงกลับ	<i>Sok Wiang Glub</i>	sòk wiəŋ klàb
Spinning Elbow	ศอกกลับ	<i>Sok Glub</i>	sòk klàb

Elbow Chop	ศอกลับ	<i>Sok Sub</i>	sòk sàb
Double Elbow Chop	ศอกกลับคู่	<i>Sok Glub Koo</i>	
Mid-Air Elbow Strike	กระโดดศอก	<i>Gra-dode Sok</i>	

There is also a distinct difference between a single elbow and a follow-up elbow. The single elbow is an elbow move independent from any other move, whereas a follow-up elbow is the second strike from the same arm, being a hook first with an elbow follow-up. Such elbows, and most other elbows, are used when the distance between fighters becomes too small and there is too little space to throw a hook at the opponent's head.

Kicking (*Teh*)



Low kick

English	Thai	Transliteration
Straight Kick	เตะตรง	<i>Teh Trong</i>
Roundhouse Kick	เตะตัด	<i>Teh Tud</i>

Diagonal Kick	เตะเฉียง	<i>Teh Chiang</i>
Half-Shin, Half-Knee Kick	เตะครึ่งแข้งครึ่งเข่า	<i>Teh Krueng Kheng Krueng Kao</i>
<u>Spinning Heel Kick</u>	เตะกลับหลัง	<i>Teh Glub Lang</i>
Down Roundhouse Kick	เตะกด	<i>Teh Kod</i>
<u>Axe Heel Kick</u>	เตะเข่า	<i>Teh Khao</i>
<u>Jump Kick</u>	กระโดดเตะ	<i>Gra-dode Teh</i>
Step-Up Kick	เขยิบเตะ	<i>KhaYiep Teh</i>

The two most common kicks in Muay Thai are known as the **teep** (literally "foot jab,"), and the **Teh**(kick)chiang (kicking upwards in the shape of a triangle cutting under the arm and ribs) or angle kick. The Muay Thai angle kick has been widely adopted by fighters from other martial arts. The angle kick uses a rotational movement of the entire body. The angle kick is superficially similar to a karate roundhouse kick, but omits the rotation of the lower leg from the knee used in other striking martial arts like Karate or Taekwondo. The angle kick draws its power entirely from the rotational movement of the body. Many Muay Thai fighters use a counter rotation of the arms to intensify the power of this kick.

If a round house kick is attempted by the opponent the Muay Thai fighter will normally block with his shin. Thai boxers are trained to always connect with the shin. While sensitive in an unconditioned practitioner, the shin is the strongest part of the leg for experienced Muay Thai fighters. The foot contains many fine bones and is much weaker. A fighter may end up hurting himself if he tries to strike with his foot or instep.

Muay Thai also includes other varieties of kicking, such as the axe kick, side kick or spinning back kick etc. These kicks, are only used in bouts by some fighters. It is worth noting that a side kick is performed differently in Muay Thai than the traditional side kick of other martial arts. In Muay Thai, a side kick is executed by first raising the knee of the

leg that is going to kick in order to convince the opponent that the executor is going to perform a teep or front kick. The hips are then shifted to the side to the more traditional side kick position for the kick itself. The "fake-out" almost always precedes the kick in Muay Thai technique.

Knee (*Tee kao*)

English	Thai	Transliteration
Straight Knee Strike	เข่าตรง	<i>Kao Trong</i>
Diagonal Knee Strike	เข่าเฉียง	<i>Kao Chiang</i>
Curving Knee Strike	เข่าโค้ง	<i>Kao Kong</i>
Horizontal Knee Strike	เข่าตัด	<i>Kao Tud</i>
Knee Slap	เข่าตบ	<i>Kao Tob</i>
Knee Bomb	เข่ายาว	<i>Kao Youwn</i>
Flying Knee Strike	เข่าลอย	<i>Kao Loi</i>
Step-Up Knee Strike	เข่าเหยียบ	<i>Kao Yiep</i>

- *Kao Dode* (Jumping knee strike) - the Thai boxer jumps up on one leg and strikes with that leg's knee.
- *Kao Loi* (Flying knee strike) - the Thai boxer takes step(s), jumps forward and off one leg and strikes with that leg's knee.
- *Kao Tone* (Straight knee strike) - the Thai boxer simply thrusts it forward (not upwards, unless he is holding an opponents head down in a clinch and intend to knee upwards into the face). According to one written source, this technique is somewhat more recent than Kao Dode or Kao Loi. Supposedly, when the Thai boxers fought with rope-bound hands rather than the modern boxing gloves, this particular technique was subject to potentially vicious cutting, slicing and sawing by an alert opponent who would block it or deflect it with the sharp "rope-glove"

edges which are sometimes dipped in water to make the rope much stronger. This explanation also holds true for some of the following knee strikes below as well.

The clinch version of this move was scientifically proven recently to be the strongest blow using the legs in martial arts. The test subject delivered the strike to a high-tech dummy. On a person the blow would have fragmented the ribs, caused two inches of chest compression, and caused severe internal bleeding in the organs.

- *Kao Noi* (Small knee strike) - the Thai boxer hits the inside upper thigh (above the knee) of the opponent when clinching. This technique is used to wear down the opponent or to counter the opponent's knee strike or kick.

Foot-thrust (*teep*)

Foot-Thrusts also known as Push Kicks or literally "foot jabs" are one of the most common techniques used in *Muay Thai*. *Teeps* are different from any other *Muay Thai* technique in terms of objective to use. Foot-thrusts are mainly used as a defensive technique to control distance, block attacks, and get an opponent off balance. Foot-Thrusts should be thrown quickly but yet with enough force to knock an opponent off balance.^[7]

English	Thai	Transliteration	<u>IPA</u>
Straight Foot-Thrust	ถีบตรง	<i>Teep Trong</i>	tʰib̚.tròŋ
Sideways Foot-Thrust	ถีบข้าง	<i>Teep Kang</i>	tʰib̚.kʰâŋ
Reverse Foot-Thrust	ถีบกลับหลัง	<i>Teep Glub Lang</i>	tʰib̚.klàb̚.làŋ
Slapping Foot-Thrust	ถีบตบ	<i>Teep Tob</i>	
Jumping Foot-Thrust	กระโดดถีบ	<i>Gra-dode Teep</i>	kràʔ dòd̚.tʰib̚

Clinch

In Western Boxing the two fighters are separated when they clinch; in Muay Thai, however, they are not. It is often in the clinch where knee and elbow techniques are used. The front clinch should be performed with the palm of one hand on the back of the other. There are three reasons why the fingers must not be intertwined. 1) In the ring fighters are wearing boxing gloves and cannot intertwine their fingers. 2) The Thai front clinch involves pressing the head of the opponent downwards, which is easier if the hands are locked behind the back of the head instead of behind the neck. Furthermore the arms should be putting as much pressure on the neck as possible. 3) A fighter may incur an injury to one or more fingers if they are intertwined, and it becomes more difficult to release the grip in order to quickly elbow the opponent's head.

A correct clinch also involves the fighter's forearms pressing against the opponent's collar bone while the hands are around the opponent's head rather than the opponent's neck. The general way to get out of a clinch is to push the opponent's head backwards or elbow him or her, as the clinch requires both participants to be very close to one another. Additionally, the non-dominant clincher can try to "swim" his or her arm underneath and inside the opponent's clinch, establishing the previously non-dominant clincher as the dominant clincher.

Muay Thai has several other variants of the clinch, including:

- arm clinch, where one or both hands controls the inside of the defender's arm(s) and where the second hand if free is in the front clinch position, this clinch is used to briefly control the opponent before applying a knee strike or throw
- side clinch, one arm passing around the front of the defender with the attacker's shoulder pressed into the defender's arm pit and the other arm passing round the back which allows the attacker to apply knee strikes to the defender's back or to throw the defender readily
- low clinch, with both controlling arms passing under the defender's arms, which is generally used by the shorter of two opponents
- swan-neck where one hand around the rear of the neck is used to briefly clinch an opponent (before a strike).^[citation needed]

Defense against attacks

Defenses in Muay Thai are categorised in 6 groups:

- Blocking - defender's hard blocks to stop a strike in its path so preventing it reaching its target, (eg the Shin Block described in more detail below)
- Redirection - defender's soft parries to change the direction of a strike (eg a downwards tap to a jab) so that it misses the target
- Avoidance - moving a body part out of the way or range of a strike so the defender remains in range for a counter-strike, eg defender moving the front leg backwards from the attacker's low kick: then immediately counter-attacking with an angle kick: or defender laying the head back from the attacker's high angle kick: then immediately counter-attacking with a side kick from the front leg:

- Evasion - moving the body out of the way or range of a strike so the defender has to move close again to counter-attack, eg defender jumping back from attacker's kicks
- Disruption - Pre-empting an attack. eg with defender using disruptive techniques like jab, teep or low angle kick (to the inside of the attacker's front leg) as the attacker attempts to close distance
- Anticipation - Defender catching a strike (eg catching an angle kick to the body) or countering it before it lands (eg defender's low kick to the supporting leg below as the attacker initiates a high angle kick).

Punches and kicks

Defensively, the concept of "wall of defence" is used, in which shoulders, arms and legs are used to hinder the attacker from successfully executing techniques. Blocking is a critical element in Muay Thai and compounds the level of conditioning a successful practitioner must possess. Low and mid body roundhouse kicks are normally blocked with the upper portion of a raised shin. High body strikes are blocked with the forearm/glove, elbow/shin. Mid section roundhouse kicks can also be caught/trapped, allowing for a sweep or counter attack to the remaining leg of the opponent. Punches are blocked with an ordinary boxing guard and techniques similar, if not identical, to basic boxing technique. A common means of blocking a punch is using the hand on the same side as the oncoming punch. For example, if an orthodox fighter throws a jab (being the left hand), the defender will make a slight tap to redirect the punch's angle with the right hand. The deflection is always as small and precise as possible to avoid unnecessary energy expenditure and return the hand to the guard as quickly as possible. Hooks are most often blocked with a motion most often described as "combing your hair," raising the elbow forward and effectively shielding the head with the forearm, flexed biceps, and shoulder. More advanced Muay Thai blocks are usually counters, used to damage the opponent to prevent another attack being made.

Conditioning



A fighter doing some heavy bag work in a training camp in Thailand.

Like most competitive full contact fighting sports, Muay Thai has a heavy focus on body conditioning. Muay Thai is specifically designed to promote the level of fitness and toughness required for ring competition. Training regimens include many staples of combat sport conditioning such as running, shadowboxing, rope jumping, body weight resistance exercises, medicine ball exercises, abdominal exercises, and in some cases weight training.

Training that is specific to a Muay Thai fighter includes training with coaches on Thai pads, focus mitts, heavy bag, and sparring. The daily training includes many rounds (3-5 minute periods broken up by a short rest, often 1-2 minutes) of these various methods of practice. Thai pad training is a cornerstone of Muay Thai conditioning which involves practicing punches, kicks, knees, and elbow strikes with a trainer wearing thick pads which cover the forearms and hands. These special pads are used to absorb the impact of the fighter's strikes and allow the fighter to react to the attacks of the pad holder. The trainer will often also wear a belly pad around the abdominal area so that the fighter can attack with straight kicks or knees to the body at anytime during the round.

Focus mitts are specific to training a fighter's hand speed, punch combinations, timing, punching power, defense, and counter-punching and may also be used to practice elbow strikes. Heavy bag training is a conditioning and power exercise that reinforces the techniques practiced on the pads. Sparring is a means to test technique, skills, range, strategy, and timing against a partner. Sparring is often a light to medium contact exercise because competitive fighters on a full schedule are not advised to risk injury by sparring hard. Specific tactics and strategies can be trained with sparring including in close fighting, clinching and kneeing only, cutting off the ring, or using reach and distance to keep an aggressive fighter away.

Due to the rigorous fighting and training regimen (some Thai boxers fight almost every other week) professional Muay Thai fighters have relatively short careers in the ring. Many retire from competition to begin instructing the next generation of Thai fighters. It is a common myth that Thai boxing causes arthritis, this is not true and is in no way more damaging to the body than other sports such as karate or even running. Most professional Thai boxers come from the lower economic backgrounds and the fight money (after the other parties get their cut) is sought as means of support for the fighters and their families. Very few higher economic strata Thais join the professional Muay Thai ranks; they usually either don't practise the sport or practise it only as amateur Muay Thai boxers.

Rules

Muay Thai is practiced in many different countries. There are different rules depending on what country the fight is in and under what organization the fight is arranged. These rules, however, are gathered from the rules section of the World Muay Thai Council's web site. This is not the complete rulebook, but it contains a selection of the most important or most interesting rules.

Weight divisions

Category	Weight (up to)
Super Heavyweight	209 lb+ (95 kg+)
Heavyweight	190 lb+ (86 kg+)
Cruiserweight	190 lb (86 kg)
Light Heavyweight	175 lb (79 kg)
Super Middleweight	168 lb (76 kg)
Middleweight	160 lb (73 kg)
Junior Middleweight	154 lb (70 kg)

Welterweight	147 lb (67 kg)
Junior Welterweight	140 lb (64 kg)
Lightweight	135 lb (61 kg)
Junior Lightweight	130 lb (59 kg)
Featherweight	126 lb (57 kg)
Junior Featherweight	122 lb (55 kg)
Bantamweight	118 lb (54 kg)
Junior Bantamweight	115 lb (52 kg)
Flyweight	112 lb (51 kg)
Junior Flyweight	108 lb (49 kg)
Mini Flyweight	105 lb (48 kg)

According to rule 8, section 2, the minimum weight to compete is 100 pounds (45 kg).

Boxing gloves

Category	Weight (up to)
Junior Middleweight and upwards	10 ounce (284 grams)
Featherweight - Welterweight	8 ounce (227 grams)
Mini Flyweight - Junior Featherweight	6 ounce (132 grams)

Dress code

A. BOXER'S ATTIRE

5.1. Only boxing shorts are to be worn, the colour of which depending on the corner; red, pink, or maroon or with a red stripe for the red corner; blue, bright blue, black for the blue corner. The dressing gown will be as specified by the World Muay Thai Council.

5.2. To ensure the boxer's safety, a groin protector must be worn and tied only at the back.

5.3. Long hair and/or beards are prohibited. A short mustache is allowed but the hair must not extend over the lip.

5.4. The Mongkol should be worn when performing the Wai Kru (paying respect to one's teacher), prior to the match start. Amulets are only to be worn on the arm or waist and covered by material to avoid injury.

5.5. Single elastic bandages are allowed to be worn on the arm or legs to prevent sprains, however insertion of a shin guard, etc, is not allowed.

5.6. No metalized material, decoration or jewellery are allowed to be worn.

5.7. The use of Vaseline, fat or any similar substance by the boxer to gain unfair advantage is not allowed.

5.8. Boxer may wear elastic ankle bandages to protect his feet.

B. Any infringement to the dress code may result in the fighter's disqualification. In the case of any problem with the boxing gloves themselves, the referee may temporarily halt the match until they are corrected.

Wai kru, ram muay and round definition

Prior to the start of the first round, both fighters shall perform the Wai Kru (paying respect to the teacher), and Ram Muay (boxing dance), accompanied by the appropriate Thai traditional music, incorporating the Ching (cymbal), Klong khaek (tom-tom) and pi Java (Thai reed pipe). A Muay Thai match shall consist of five rounds, 3 minutes per round with a 2 minute break between each round. Any stoppage during the match for any reason, will not be counted as part of the 3 minute round time.

Scoring

The standard scoring practice is as follows :

A: A strike either by a punch, kick, knee or elbow.

1. Scoring from a strike:

1.1. Points will be awarded for a correct Thai Boxing style, combined with hard and accurate strikes.

1.2. Points will be awarded for aggressive and dominating Muay Thai skill.

1.3. Points will be awarded for a fighter actively dominating his opponent.

1.4. Points will be awarded for the use of a traditional Thai style of defense and counter-attack.

1.5. Points will be deducted from a boxer who fouls or breaks the rules.

2. Non scoring strikes:

2.1. A strike which is against the rules.

2.2. A strike in defense against the leg or arm of an opponent.

2.3. A weak strike.

B. Fouls.

1. The judges will deduct points for any foul as directed by the referee.

2. Any foul observed by the judges but not by the referee, will be penalized accordingly.

C. Method Of Scoring

1. The maximum score for each round is 10 points, the loser scoring either 9, 8 or 7.
2. A drawn round will be scored as 10 points for both boxers.
3. The winner and loser in an indecisive round, will score 10:9 respectively.
4. The winner and loser in a decisive round will score 10:8 respectively.
5. The winner and loser in an indecisive round with a single count, will score 10:8 respectively.
6. The winner and loser in a decisive round with a single count, will score 10:7 respectively.
7. The boxer scoring 2 counts against his opponent will score 10:7.
8. Any boxer who commits a foul will have points deducted from his score.

Fouls

- 18.1. Biting, eye gouging, spitting, or head butting.
- 18.2. Wrestling, back or arm locks or any similar judo or wrestling hold.
- 18.3. Deliberately falling on his opponent.
- 18.4. Holding the ropes for any reason.
- 18.5. Swearing or the use of abusive language during the match.
- 18.6. Knocking out or injuring his opponent after the referee has ordered the match to stop for any reason.
- 18.7. Deliberately striking the groin area.

To be penalized by the deduction of 1 point for each time committed.

A boxer who has been hit in the groin may request a 5 minute break before continuing the match.

Medical Inspection

22.1 All boxers will be certified by the doctor prior to the start of any fight and must not be suffering from any sickness or exhibit any prohibited symptom or disease, as specified in the medical manual of the Council.

22.2 Any boxer due to fight in a foreign country, will be physically examined by a doctor appointed by the Council Committee. He must also conform to the medical regulations of that country.

Procedure After Knock Out or Technical Knock Out

23.1 If a boxer is knocked unconscious or injured, only the doctor and the referee are allowed in the ring. Any others may only enter at the doctor's discretion.

23.2 A boxer losing by a K.O. or T.K.O. will be immediately treated and undergo a physical examination by the doctor.

23.3 Recovery Period - After a match, a boxer is required to rest for a minimum of 21 days prior to fighting again, with the following exceptions:

23.3.1. A winner in the first round is required to rest a minimum of 7 days prior to his next fight.

23.3.2. The winner in the third round is required to rest a minimum of 14 days prior to his next fight.

23.3.3. A boxer losing by T.K.O. or K.O. must rest for a minimum of 30 days prior to his next fight.

23.3.4. A boxer specified under Items 23.3.1 - 23.3.3, must be examined by the doctor at the end of each fight, who will then specify his rest period.

Drug usage

The use of drugs or stimulants, either before or after the fight is strictly forbidden. Any user will be disqualified. The sole drug allowed for the prevention of bleeding is epinephrine 1:1000 topically and must be administered under doctor's directions.

Use in other martial arts

Kickboxing

Muay Thai, along with savate, karate, and taekwondo heavily influenced the development of kickboxing in Japan, Europe, and North America. However, unlike Muay Thai, many kickboxing competitions do not allow elbow strikes, knee strikes, or kicks below the waist. These rule changes have led some martial artists to consider kickboxing a 'watered down' version of Muay Thai.

Mixed martial arts

Starting in the 1990s, Muay Thai has enjoyed a boost in popularity worldwide as it has been very effective in mixed martial arts training and competition. MMA artists such as Mauricio "Shogun" Rua, Wanderlei Silva, and Anderson Silva have combined many striking elements of Muay Thai with grappling, wrestling and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu into a hybrid synthesis that has been highly effective in their fights. Other fighters that have used Muay Thai as their primary style in mixed martial arts include Duane Ludwig, Mirko Filipovic, Norifumi Yamamoto, Thiago Alves, Rob McCullough, Melvin Manhoef, Alistair Overeem and Gilbert Yvel. Shoot-fighters and professional wrestlers who have trained and been influenced by Muay Thai include Satoru Sayama and Yoshiaki Fujiwara.

Notes

1. "The Story of Nai Khanom Tom"
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3. http://www.wmtc.nu/html/wmc03_mtwaikru.html "Wai Khru - Origins and Explanations of the Ritual"
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More photos:



Muaythai match in Bangkok, Thailand. Praying before the match.



Muaythai match in Bangkok, Thailand.



A Thai boxer praying during the Wai Kru before match.