As 2011 started, I embarked on a new personal mission - to train Muay Thai. It's been a personal goal of mine for some time now, and with the site taking off and more of my time committed to writing about the world of kickboxing and Muay Thai, I figured there was no time like the present. And so I've found my gym, signed up for classes, and I am on my way. But I'm still a writer, so, as I train, I'll present some thoughts on my experiences here. I don't mean this to be a definitive tale of Muay Thai training - far from it. I know there are many regulars here who have far (***FAR***) more experience than me. But I'm sure there are also some who have not yet taken that plunge. So perhaps this little online diary will provide a glimpse into learning more about Muay Thai and kickboxing the best way you can - by getting out there and doing it. And if you're on the fence about taking classes yourself, maybe I can help nudge you into that local gym.

As I prepared for classes the first step was obvious - I needed a gym. On the plus side for me, I live in Chicago, and as a major metropolitan area, there's no shortage of gyms around. After hunting around a bit online and in the city, I opted for Conviction Fitness - a newer gym with an ever expanding martial arts program and a friendly, locally owned kind of vibe. It's the kind of place where, if you are trying to buy a drink but realize you're short a dollar (and I was) the owner just waves a hand and says "Get us back next time." It's the little touches.

Of course, I'm not here for the drinks or the vibe - I'm here for the training. And so far, that training is working. One month in, and to date I've worked on kicks, punches and knees. No elbows. Yet. A few random observations so far:

-Our instructor, Andre Madiz, is vigilant about keeping your hands tight to your chin and your elbows tucked to protect your ribs. This is a constant point for him. As a result, I've noticed that, quite frankly, a lot of professional fighters suck at this. It's amazing how often fighters fail to get their guard up, and how often they pay for it. You see this more in K-1 style kickboxing than in Muay Thai, but there is a trend to give up on your defensive posture when you start throwing more punches - a move that often costs you the fight.

-The front kick is a criminally underutilized technique. Particularly in MMA, I can't think of more than a handful of fighters who consistently use this strike effectively (Josh Thomson comes to mind as an excellent front kick practitioner). MMA enthusiasts - any thoughts on why this is?

-While checking out the front kick online I came across this gem on Wikipedia : "The modern incarnation of the front kick was perfected by Steven Seagal, who was taught a primitive version circa 1970 in Japan. The exact date is unknown. He secretly developed the technique over several decades before teaching it to UFC Middleweight champion Anderson 'The Spider' Silva". Wow.

-My conditioning is not bad (which is a surprise to me) but my technique so far is... lacking. If I could have a fight with nothing but right front kicks and superman punches, I'd be fine. But until I can get someone to agree to these rules, I'm in trouble.

-Things to work on: left kicks, inside kicks, throwing multiple knees.

Next time, the hunt is on for some quality, but affordable gear. Until then, I'd love to hear any experiences you have in training. Let's share and get the discussion going.