This fight is part of a series discussing changes in K-1's clinch rules. I'll be posting fights that demonstrate what fights in different eras of the clinch rule had the potential to look like. The next fight will be post-2005, when "one strike in the clinch" was enforced.

In 2004, the clinch was essentially unchanged from Muay Thai. Fighters could throw as many strikes/ knees as they wanted and it was often used to avoid distance fighting by fighters like Takayuni Kohiruimaki and Yoshihiro Sato. Sato, before joining K-1, had a great career in Muay Thai and full rules Japanese Kickboxing in the AJKF where he utilized knees and elbows to great effect. His build looks similar to that of famous knee fighters of old, like Dieselnoi Chor Thansukarn, who was 188 cm, 6' 2", and fought at 63.5 kg, 140 lb.

In Thailand, Buakaw Por Pramuk had climbed the Lumpini rankings at 135 lb lightweight to no.2 before stopping in deference to a stablemate who held the belt. He competed at 140 lb in Thailand before being invited through Ingram Gym connections to fight in K-1 MAX. Because he moved directly from 63.5 kg to the MAX, he regularly weighs in at 69 kg or 70 kg without cutting weight, while other fighters in the MAX cut the usual 5 to 10 kg. Buakaw was only in the promotion for one year before the rules changed.

Takayuki Kohiruimaki, in 2004, was an up and coming prospect in Japanese K-1, having wins over Kozo Takeda, Hayato, and Mike Zambidis, and Masato (This was very early in both their careers, being both of theirs second bout.). Kohiruimaki changed his name to Taishin in 2008 after coming back from a long, injury-related layoff. He currently has not competed since 2009, the year he won his third J-MAX title. Kohi debuted in 1999 in K-1 and used the clinch and knees as a mainstay of his style.

Keep in mind that most K-1 fights of this era did not look like this. In fact, this is one of very few examples where offensive clinching is decisive. The rules merely allowed matches to *potentially* look this this. This was the semi-final of the 2004 K-1 MAX Final Tournament. Buakaw wears blue gloves in this bout, Kohi wears red.

Thanks to medvedav01 for this video. This fight is a classic destruction. Buakaw Por Pramuk would reign dominant in the K-1 MAX until 2007. His kicking game is widely lauded, but it was his clinch game in the beginning that helped him be as dominant as he was. Many fighters in K-1 tended to rely on their punching skills to win them bouts, and the top fighters at the time, Masato and Albert Kraus found it difficult to maintain punching range with Buakaw because he either kept them at bay with kicks or tied them up in the clinch.

Kohi is the rare fighter who relied on kicks and knees to win bouts, having very explosive leg techniques. He does have a very apparent issue with wilting when under heavy fire, though, which is less obvious here because Buakaw seems to be entirely outclassing him. But you can see it in the way he just gives up when Buakaw takes the clinch and turns away from the punishment.

He put up a strong fight at the beginning of both rounds, scoring on Buakaw with a brutal sweep that looked to really incense him. The fight seemed over once Buakaw opened up with vicious knees, throws, and low kicks. At one point, he lands six or seven kicks and Kohi seems to want out of the fight before long.

This is Buakaw's second fight of the night. He beat John Wayne Parr by extra round decision before and then went on to beat Masato in their rather infamous 2004 bout where the judges awarded an extra round after Buakaw teeped and kicked Masato around for three rounds while Masato landed about one punch combination. In both his bouts with Parr and Masato, Buakaw was able to successfully nullify their advantage in boxing by asserting clinch range.

I must emphasize again that bouts rarely played out like this. Even with permissive clinch rules, bouts tended to play out at kickboxing range. Western fighters did not readily incorporate offensive clinching. After the rule change, certain fighters like Semmy Schilt and Buakaw Por Pramuk had to adjust their styles, some more successfully than others, and fighters stronger outside the clinch benefited greatly. At the time, rumors swirled that the rule change came about when Buakaw Por Pramuk entered the K-1 MAX and displayed such a strong dominance in the clinch. The timing seems to support this, since the rules came the year after he won his first K-1 MAX belt, but no one really knows and, to my knowledge, K-1's stance is that limiting the clinch makes bouts more exciting.

The next bout in the series is Buakaw Por Pramuk vs Virgil Kalakoda in the K-1 2006 final 16. I feature Buakaw again to show how a strong clincher brings in other tools after clinching is limited.