This is my second post on clinch rules in K-1 and how they've changed. Post I featured Buakaw Por Pramuk's utter destruction of Takayuki Kohiruimaki via clinch knees.

In 2005, K-1 made its first major change to its clinch fighting rules. Fighters could now only throw one knee per clinch. Pre-2005, extended clinching with knees had been allowed, in the fashion of Muay Thai. People speculated as to why K-1 made this change, most citing Schilt's dominance with knees in the WGP, others citing the clinch skills of a fighter newly arrived in MAX, Buakaw Por Pramuk. No one really knows and, to my knowledge, K-1's explanation that it made fights more exciting was not readily taken up by the K-1 community.

This is from the 2006 K-1 MAX Final 16. Notice how Buakaw, very aggressive in the clinch against Kohi, now limits himself to one knee in the clinch, in accordance with the rule change in 2005. Until 2006, referees seemed unsure as to how to enforce the rule, but by this point they were quicker in breaking clinches and warning fighters, as they do in the third.

Virgil Kalakoda, a South African boxer, turned to K-1 in 2005. He was slow to add weapons to his repertoire and, facing Buakaw the year after his debut, he employs mostly hands in a bullying, smothering style.

Watch Virgil's attempts to shut down Buakaw's traditional kicking game and how Buakaw responds to Virgil's strategy. Virgil actually has a large weight advantage over Buakaw, being as he moved down from 78 kg, 170 lb, in boxing to fight K-1 at 70 kg, while Buakaw moved from 63.5 kg, 140 lb, to fight in the MAX. The mass likely makes his tactics more effective. Buakaw wears the red gloves in this bout, Virgil the blue.

Part 1

Part 2

Thanks to medvedav01 for the uploads. My main motivation for making these posts was to compare fights played out differently under new and old rules and, also, to see how fighters' styles evolved. This performance featured Buakaw's proficient head movement and ability to blend punching and boxing movement with his other Muay Thai weapons.

Buakaw does very well in the first, slipping Virgil's punches with almost preternatural speed. It's a beautiful round to watch, as he almost drops Kalakoda with a right knee to Virgil's chin in combination with a right hand over the top. He exerts strong control over Kalakoda's movement in the clinch and opens up with kicks and knees when Kalakoda comes in for the smother.

Where Kalakoda is successful is in closing the distance. Buakaw's long range weapons are limited to single shot usage because Virgil bullies in, protecting his body well. Buakaw tires and the second to fourth rounds do not resemble the first. After two regulation rounds where neither fighter deals meaningful damage, Buakaw is visibly tired, necessitating the adaptation of style we see in the extension round. His corner must have impressed on him to need to do something differently for the judges, so he comes out punching. This turns out to be a much better counter to Virgil's strategy.

Surprisingly, Buakaw has a slight edge in landed punches, perhaps because Virgil is watching out for knees and kicks while Buakaw isn't. Buakaw also shows himself very adept at boxing on the inside with a low stance to deliver and avoid hooks. His evasion in the first round makes something of a return as Virgil shows signs of tiring, too. Kalakoda has a problem in K-1 with low output. He has good boxing technique, but is slow to open up, which loses him fights on points and sometimes gets him overwhelmed by more aggressive fighters. This bout was a low scoring one anyway, with both fighters clinching often, and his decision to pick shots while Buakaw threw hooks aggressively may have lost him the fight. Buakaw ate some punches from Virgil for his decision to switch to punching, but the few visibly damaging shots of the extension round came from Buakaw, as well. Note that he seems downcast during the decision, and is

very relieved when he gets the nod. I could see the match going to Virgil on the basis of constant forward aggression, and it is rather difficult to gauge what K-1 judges are looking for on any given night.

Pre-2005, this match would likely have been far less competitive. Buakaw would have had the option of latching on to Virgil and pummeling him with knees while never going into punching range until the referee separated them. In light of this, however, K-1's rule changes are somewhat understandable, as clinch fighting is hard to follow from a distance and can be boring for a new audience, unless extremely one-sided like Buakaw vs Kohi.

The next fight in the series is Alistair Overeem vs Ewerton Teixera, also from the 2005-2010 period of "one strike per clinch," and one of the last fights before the rules K-1 has now.