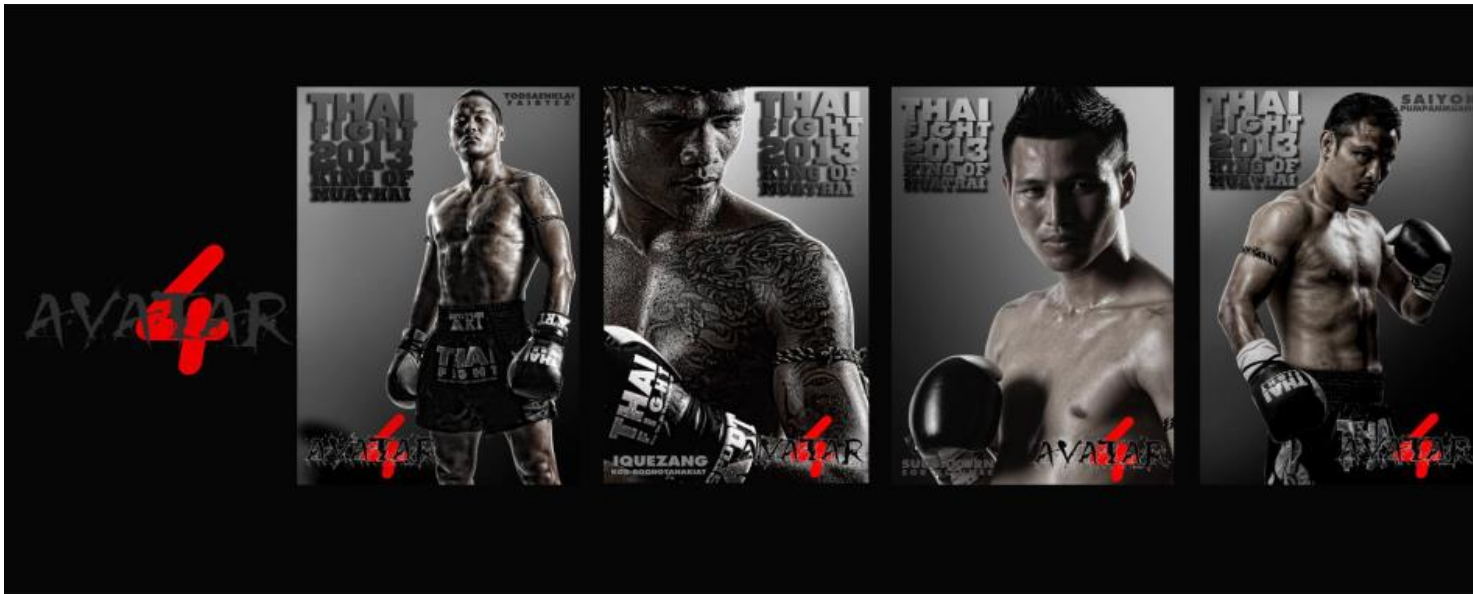


The Fight World is Turning on Thai Fight Extreme

Written by Steven Wright

Friday, 05 July 2013 13:28 - Last Updated Friday, 05 July 2013 17:06



Thai Fight aesthetically has it all, the lights, the promo screen, the manufactured sense of honor and history, the audience, the feel of watching a major production for a fight event. Despite every quality that it brings before the bell ring, there is a major problem once the bell does. The matches are one sided and uneventful. Fight fans have known this for a while, but it seems that now, the shift of the fighting public is moving towards not watching the product at all.

It started so well. August 29, 2010 the Isuzu Thai Fight Extreme had a 16-man tournament. It had solid international competition. The likes of Spain's Rafi Zouheir, England's Liam Harrison, Thailand's Petchmonkong Petchfocus, runner up Youssef Boughanem, and eventual champion Frenchmen Fabio Pinca. The tournament was like nothing we were use to from Thai shows. Pyro, rock music during entrances, large screens, and sporting event fan material like big hands, clappers, and streamers. It was as if K-1 Max was being reborn in Thailand. Adding to that was the fight product, which produced awesome KOs, smooth technique, and competitive match ups. Nasser Kacem product and champion Fabio Pinca was made an international star after that victory. Sure he had wins over Thai fighters Sigmanee, Sudsukorn, and Bovy before the Thai Fight championship, but all eyes were on the tournament and thus all eyes were on him. His performance against Youssef in the final was brilliant, producing one of the most proficient body attacks in the first round and then dropping Boughanem with a hook in the second. A star was made.

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Thai Fight then moved into a strange season of what could only be compared to the Harlem Globetrotters. They began to tour the world with a cast of popular internationally known Thai Fighters and the tournament winner Fabio Pinca, looking to best international kickboxers in they're backyard. To name a few, this group consisted of Fight Code's Sudsakorn Sor Klinmee, The Contender Asia champion Yodsenklai Fairtex, and what can only be described as the crowning jewel, K-1 Max superstar kickboxer Buakaw, who jumped the sinking ship of K-1 Max early. With the exception of an elbow cut loss to Pinca, which he avenged later in the year, and a Yodsenklai upset, it was a series of dominate performances by the Thai Fight team.

The performances led to another tournament field, this time doing both a 67kg field and a 70kg. They were solid fields. 67kg saw the likes of returning champion Fabio Pinca, Dutch-Moroccan fighter Mosab Amrani, Frenchmen Houcine Bennoui, and Thailand's Khem Sitsongpeenong, ex 130lbs Lumpinee Champion and King's Cup tournament winner. The 70kg field brought rising star Abraham Roqueni from Spain, Australia's Frank Giorgi, and Frenchmen Mickael Piscitello where in a field with the mighty Buakaw. We got upsets, competitive match ups, and memorable stoppages. Plus, to Thai Fight's delight, the guys they wanted to win did, crowning Khem and Buakaw their 2011 Champions.

Then came the year that changed it all. In 2012, for whatever reason, they figured they would lessen the talent of the competition and thus present the stars of the promotion as invincible and far superior to the rest of the world. Sure there was Gilma China, Tomoaki Makino, and others of that level getting one sided beat down treatment before 2012. But they weren't in the tournament field. Thai Fight decided to allow Buakaw and others to dress in ancient warriors gear, lights flashing, booming entrance, then murder job fights against guys like Mauro Serra. Liverkick writer Rian "Riankapedia" AKA "Stream Master" Scalia once said on my podcast show that the Thai Fight version of Buakaw seems to neglect his defense. In summery of that thought, he feels zero threat of being hurt by his foes and thus walks them down and finishes them. Buakaw is no longer part of the organization, but the legacy holds true. No one sits down to watch Thai Fight expecting high level competition. They watch it to see blowouts and now they aren't even wanting to do that anymore.

There are three things that makes the Thai Fight promotional tactic a problem. First and foremost is timing. I truly believe that if Thai Fight had started in 2005 people would not be in such an uproar. With K-1 still running consistent shows, there would not be as much of an eye on what would be considered circus Muay Thai. People would always rest in the idea of a dominate product of kickfighting and thus have fun with the Thai Fight promotional antics. Yet with K1 going away and Glory slowly moving forward, we are still very much in a time of uncertainty. If there is a major fight production, we want them to have major fighters. People

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don't look at the Thai Fight product for what it is, they look at it for what it should be, another decent paying, exposure promoting opportunity for the best Muay Thai fighters in the world, and its not that.

The second crime is Thai Fight is tricking the public. Rob Cox (Muay Thai writer, photographer, and sport ambassador) once said on my podcast show that the Thai people where starting to catch on to the match making and skill level at the events. Yet kickfighting fans know and promote each kickboxing event of notoriety and people head to youtube in hopes of finding the bouts. So instead of them seeing wonder kid Yodwicha tear up the major stadium circuit at the age of 17, they are shown Sudsukorn landing some crazy spinning elbow against a guy who he is superior too. Thai Fight has the potential to give stadium guys an international forum, which will only happen if the worlds best are brought in for the likes of the best 130 pound Stadium guys to prove themselves against. That is not happening at all in Thai Fight. The stadiums still produce the highest level of elite vs elite competitors in the world. However, they have so many shows that people seem to miss when a major event happens. Thai Fight could be an opportunity for them, but it chooses to be David vs Goliath with a house full of Goliath fans.

Finally the kickfighting public has a problem with Thai Fight not taking responsibility for growing the sport. Say what you want about the UFC, but if you look at the efforts they are putting in to get MMA sanctioned in various states and countries all over the world, it is clear that they are taking responsibility for the growth of the sport. Thai Fight is aimed at a Thai audience and their tactics are to continue having ratings success in that market. However, the fight world doesn't care. If you are putting on an awesome promotion, we want to see awesome fights. If Thai Fight did what Glory is doing now, they would have an avenue for international eyes. Whether through online streams or delayed runs in various countries, they have put no effort in growing the product. In truth, no one would care as long as they put on a competitive product for us to watch on youtube delay. The problem is the product is far from competitive.

In conclusion it appears that Thai Fight isn't going anywhere. As Rob Cox told me on twitter one time, "Its a badge of honor just going the distance for these international guys." I could never blame a fighter who isn't close to being on the level of his opposition, but jumping at the opportunity to perform on what would be for him, the biggest stage of his life. However, the fight community is just in their critique of the product and its only right for them to stop getting excited when they hear a Thai Fight card is coming.

Hit me up on twitter for rebuttals or agreements twitter.com/stevenhewarman