Muay Thai Basics
Introductory Thai Boxing Techniques

Christoph Delp
# Table of Contents

Preface ix

## Part I: Background

Chapter 1: Development 3
Chapter 2: Tradition 21
Chapter 3: Rules 29
Chapter 4: Equipment 35

## Part II: Basic Skills

Chapter 1: Introduction 43
Chapter 2: Starting Position 45
Chapter 3: Steps 49
Chapter 4: Fighting Distance 53

## Part III: Attacking Techniques

Chapter 1: Introduction 59
Chapter 2: Fist Techniques (Chock) 65
Chapter 3: Elbow Techniques (Sok) 77
Chapter 4: Kicking Techniques / Kick (Te) 89
Chapter 5: Pushing Foot Techniques (Teep) 101
Chapter 6: Knee Techniques from a Distance (Khow) 111
Chapter 7: Clinch Techniques (Garn Goad Plum Tee Khow) 119

## Part IV: Combination of the Attacking Techniques

Chapter 1: Use in Training 133
Chapter 2: Sequence of Combinations 135
Part V: Defense and Counter Techniques 145
Chapter 1: Introduction 147
Chapter 2: Tactics to Counter Fist Attacks 151
Chapter 3: Tactics to Counter Elbow Attacks 157
Chapter 4: Tactics to Counter Kicking Attacks 161
Chapter 5: Tactics to Counter Pushing Foot Attacks 165
Chapter 6: Tactics to Counter Knee Attacks from a Distance 167
Chapter 7: Tactics in Clinch Situations 169

Part VI: Training 173
Chapter 1: Tips for Training 175
Chapter 2: Historical Training 177
Chapter 3: Training Contents 179
Chapter 4: Training Plans 201

Bibliography 207
Book Team 208
Photo Acknowledgments 210
Preface

I had been involved in full-contact sports for several years before I decided to travel to Thailand for training in 1995. I went to the Maha Sarakham province in northeast Thailand to learn Muay Thai. Master Decha accepted me in his camp and invited me to live with his family. Over a period of several months, I was in continuous contact and dialogue with my trainers Master Decha, Saknipon Pitakvarin, and Kenpet Luksilum, which provided me with the opportunity for an intensive study of Muay Thai. During that time, I developed the concept for my first book, *Muay Thai: Sport and Self-Defense*.

My enthusiasm for Muay Thai, and the affection of the Decha family and their friends, were the reason for my regular subsequent travels to Thailand for training. I maintain friendly ties with this gym to this very day. In the years following my initial training, I have revisited it on a number of occasions in addition to training in other gyms.

During one of these travels, I got acquainted with Ajaarn Somboon Tapina. He invited me to his camp in Suratthani, where he supported my in-depth studies. I am very grateful to him and his wife for welcoming me to stay with them on that occasion and during my subsequent training travels. Ajaarn Somboon Tapina always took the time to answer my questions on the subject of Muay Thai and prepared me successfully for a fight in Thailand.

In addition, I was fortunate to be trained by the several-time champions Apideh Sit Hiran at the Fairtex Gym and Master Chalee at the Muay Thai Institute. Some biographical notes on these fighters follow. In these two camps I had other

Author Christoph Delp in front of the Muay Thai Institute, Bangkok, 1999.
good trainers, such as Master Natchaphol, Master Noi, Master Gong, Jakid Fairtex, Kom Fairtex, and Paisitong Jorsambad.

At all the camps in Bangkok, in the provinces of Maha Sarakham, Buriram, and Suratthani, in Pattaya and Koh Samui, that I visited for training, I always enjoyed a warm welcome and respectful treatment. All my experiences with trainers and athletes at Thai gyms were positive. I am very grateful for the help and assistance given to me for the nine Muay Thai books I have published so far.

Muay Thai, a part of Thai culture, should be made accessible to the general public. Muay Thai has given me so much joy; through my books I would like to pass it on. I hope that all readers enjoy these books and that Muay Thai provides them with as much pleasure as it gives me. You will find further information on Muay Thai on the Internet at www.muaythai.de and www.christophdelp.com.

A heartfelt thank you to all who have helped me in the preparation of this book, particularly my family, Ajaarn Somboon Tapina, Master Decha, Oliver and Eckhard Glatow, Amnuay Kesbumrung, Nopphadol Viwatkamolwat, Peraphan Rungsikulpiphat, Songchai Ratanasuban, Colonel Somphob Srisiri, Menny Ossi, Thomas Letté, Daniel Gallus, Richard Delp, and the fighters shown in the photographs.

Trainers

Ajaarn Somboon Tapina. Fighter name Roongrit Tavesak, born 1940, 70 professional fights, for many years listed in the top 10 of the Rajadamnern Stadium, approximately 100 amateur fights in boxing and Muay Thai. Formerly, he was senior umpire of the Suratthani province and deputy president and professor at the University of Suratthani. Today he is President of the Muay Thai Martial Arts Academy, Suratthani (www.muaythaitraining.com). He taught in Canada and Australia.
Chitsanupong Nittayaros. Master Decha. Born 1960, 145 professional fights, many fights as an amateur. He studied sports and graduated in sports and health. He trained many successful Thai fighters and taught in Australia, Greece, Japan, the Philippines, and Brunei.

Chalee Khuntharee. Master Chalee. Fighter name Pharuhatlek Sitchunthong, born 1961, 219 professional fights, five-time champion in three different weight divisions. He studied sports and graduated in sports and health. Master Chalee is internationally known as the former head trainer at the Muay Thai Institute, Bangkok.

Narong Songmanee. Apideh Sit Hiran. Born 1935, approximately 300 professional fights, seven-time champion, challenger in boxing for the WBA and WBC title. Apideh Sit Hiran is considered a living Muay Thai legend and, to many, he is the best fighter of all time. He has also been very successful as a trainer at the Fairtex Gym, Bangkok, and worked outside Thailand in the United States.
Chorake Fard Hang (Spinning Heel Kick). This technique can be delivered successfully only by experts in Muay Thai.
Chapter 1

Development

The Thai national sport Muay Thai, also known as Thai boxing, thrills spectators with spectacular techniques, toughness, and the morale of the athletes. The martial art is practiced daily in numerous Thai stadiums. In the meantime, the sport has also attracted a large following outside of Thailand.

Prior to the start of the contest, the boxers perform a dance-like ceremony that is accompanied by music, as is the entire fight itself. The music and the screams of the fans and gambling spectators create an extraordinary atmosphere. In five rounds the athletes attack each other at the highest technical level, completely exhausting themselves. The techniques are carried out with feet, shinbones, fists, elbows, and knees.

The effectiveness of this martial art is demonstrated by the repeated visits to Thailand of masters of many diverse types of martial arts, who are forced to throw in the towel at an early stage of the Muay Thai contest.

Muay Thai: Martial Art and Sport

Muay Thai originated as a martial art that served the people of Siam (former name of Thailand) to defend themselves against invaders from neighboring countries. The Siam people fought their battles armed with swords, lances, and Muay Thai techniques. At the time, Muay Thai already showed its effectiveness, and the techniques can still be used for self-defense today.

Along with the further development of weaponry and their decisive influence on the success of war, the athletic aspect of Muay Thai gained in importance. Although sport events were organized in Siam centuries ago, the further development of the techniques for use in armed conflicts had been of greater importance than the
entertainment of an audience. The consequence was that rules and regulations for the events were standardized and stadiums were built in the 20th century.

Since the end of the 20th century more and more athletes have taken an interest in Muay Thai. By now, a large part of the public interested in sports is aware that Muay Thai is not only a means of self-defense, but also an excellent exercise to attain physical fitness.

Ajaarn Somboon Tapina prior to a fight, Thailand, 1960.

Questions and Preconceptions

Thai boxers are repeatedly faced with prejudice toward and misunderstandings about their sport. This is probably due to insufficient information, but also to the improper use of the sport. Martial art trainers frequently mixed other components of their martial art with what they conceived to be typical Muay Thai elements and then offered a new course in their club. In addition, Thai and Asian trainers in neighboring countries saw this as a good opportunity to make money by teaching this fairly unknown type
of martial art. However, it was not unusual for them to have no proper background in the sport, so that a particular type of training developed that appeared to be violent to many observers and that was apparently taught without rational explanation of the techniques. It was also noticed in Thailand that other types of martial arts had adopted an increasing number of Muay Thai elements. Thai boxing, however, did not enjoy a very positive reputation in the international community. Against this backdrop, the Thai government started to promote the real sport.

Are Muay Thai and Thai boxing identical?

Thai boxing is the internationally known name for Muay Thai. Muay Thai is the name of the sport in Thailand. Because of the questionable reputation attached to Thai boxing following the training methods of dubious teachers in some English-speaking regions, many supporters of the sport now prefer to call it Muay Thai.
Did Muay Thai descend from kickboxing?

Kickboxing dates back to the 20th century. In contrast, Muay Thai is a centuries-old martial art. Kickboxing originated in two different regions: in North America, by changing the rules of Karate contests, and in Japan. A Japanese amended the rules of Muay Thai (for example, the use of elbows and knees was forbidden), began to open schools in Japan, and started to organize contests. This is one of the reasons for today's K1 tournaments with rules similar to those of Muay Thai, which are televised live from Japanese stadiums with audiences of more than 60,000.

Promoter Amnuay Kesbunrungrung.

What about tradition in Muay Thai?

Muay Thai is a centuries-old martial art, and many traditions developed in the course of time. One important tradition is the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Muay Thai offers athletic advantages over the untrained. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that his student treat the environment with respect and that he use Muay Thai, if so required, for the public good. A student who wishes to learn Muay Thai only in the interest of his athletic superiority should not be trained. Even long ago, Muay Thai teachers considered it their responsibility to educate their students in the tradition of respect for their fellow human beings.

It was and still is customary in Thailand for former students to pay a number of visits to their teachers in the course of their lives.
Is Muay Thai an underground type of sport?

Many Thai boxers come from very poor social classes and try to improve the living conditions of their families with prize money. They leave school early. Some Thai managers exploit the situation and offer very poor living conditions in their gyms, and only successful boxers enjoy a reasonable existence. Some managers care little about the less fortunate fighters. That, however, is not the rule and the Thai government is taking steps to rectify the situation.

Bets are placed on all fights, and many spectators earn their living from the profits. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the results of fights are influenced as occurs in international boxing.

In some English-speaking regions, athletes frequently learned Muay Thai in order to test their newly acquired skills on the street. This was due to trainers who never studied the sport and never acquainted themselves with its tradition. For this reason they were unable to pass on important values of the sport to their students, such as respect for their fellow human beings.

However, the sport is becoming ever more popular. Many misunderstandings and preconceptions have been eliminated. Muay Thai has become a sport for the general public and is practiced by members of all social classes.

Joy after the bout for the title.

What are the rules in Muay Thai?

Muay Thai is a strictly regulated sport. Generally, no techniques to the genitals, no head butts, and no attacks to the eyes are allowed.
A fighter falling down or lying on the floor may not be tackled. In female contests no elbows are permitted to the head.

- **Is Muay Thai fought with broken glass on the bandages?**

  At the present time, fights are conducted with boxing gloves. The question, whether in former times fights were carried out with broken glass attached to the bandages with wax, cannot be answered. However, it is assumed that sports contests were carried out with bandages, while warriors may, indeed, have attached sharp objects to the bandages.

- **Do athletes receive serious injuries during training and contests?**

  The risk of injury can never be completely excluded from a contact sport. Therefore, the training must be designed so that the athletes practice with each other and do not attempt to inflict any injuries.

  In contrast to ball sports, such as soccer, the Muay Thai athletes can always see the opponent attacking. In contests between persons of a comparable athletic level the chance of injuries is rather low. However, there is a higher risk of injury in contests between athletes of different abilities, or in the case of insufficient preparation.

  Due to the many techniques in Muay Thai, attacks to the opponent’s head do not have the same significance as in traditional boxing. Consequently, Thai boxers are able to conduct a greater number of fights without grave injuries.

  The former champions Niyom Ratanasit and Apideh Sit Hiran, both over 60 years of age and with records of more than 300 fights, confirm that they are still active in sports and are not suffering from any injuries. They are convinced that their Muay Thai training has strengthened their bodies and did not cause them any harm.
Does Muay Thai training include tree kicking?

Some martial arts movies show Thai boxing being practiced on trees. At the present time, nobody practices this type of training. Centuries ago, in the absence of modern training equipment, the training method was applied to banana trees. These have been replaced by punching bags, whose contents vary in hardness in accordance with the stage of training.

Who can learn Muay Thai?

The training is suited for both women and men. From an international viewpoint Muay Thai is registering the biggest growth in the number of female athletes. Even in Thailand contests between women are attracting continuously growing popularity.

One does not have to be an athlete to learn Muay Thai. In comparison to other types of martial arts less demands are made on agility on account of the many knee, fist, and elbow techniques. The training involves all groups of muscles, so that general physical fitness can be achieved. Due to the high intensity of training the sport is also exceptionally well suited for weight reduction.

Muay Thai is not restricted to a certain age. It can be taught to children and senior athletes alike. Ajaarn Somboon Tapina gave lessons to children in Australia. The children participated in large numbers and practiced with enthusiasm. Master Decha also reports of success with senior athletes in Australia.
In competition, however, rules usually apply relative to the age of contestants. Major health deficits—for example, in connection with vision and hearing—will prevent participation in athletic contests. A medical examination prior to a fight is compulsory, as are regular controls between contests.

■ **Is it possible to learn Muay Thai properly only in Thailand?**

If the trainer was comprehensively taught, the training can be at any location. At the present time, in the English-speaking regions, many teachers have an extensive background in Muay Thai. Some so-called trainers, however, offer their services on the basis of photos taken during visits to Thai camps. Thus, it is necessary to question the athletic competence of the potential trainer.

Time spent in Thailand, combined with a training program, significantly improves performance. It is recommended as an addition to the training at home. The book *Muay Thai: Advanced Thai Kickboxing Techniques* (Delp, 2004) gives an extensive account of training in Thailand and provides advice on what must be taken into consideration.

Training in Thailand to improve performance.

■ **Can Muay Thai techniques be used effectively only by small individuals?**

Frequently the opinion is voiced that Muay Thai is not suited for tall people. After all, goes the erroneous conclusion, the martial art was developed by the Thais, who are usually of a smaller size.

However, the large number of heavyweight fighters from many different nations who compete in K1 contests in Japan at a high
athletic level show that Muay Thai can also be practiced successfully by tall athletes.

Athletes exceeding 7 feet in height also practice Muay Thai.

History

The Thais originally lived in southwest China. In the ninth century the Thais migrated in groups to the area now known as northwest Thailand. The slow emigration lasted until the 13th century, and many conflicts with neighboring tribes occurred. During the wars weapons such as swords, lances, and knives were used. This particular type of martial art in combination with weapons is still being taught under the name Krabi Krabong. If the weapons were lost during the conflict, fighting continued with hand, elbow, and leg techniques. It is assumed that this was the beginning of Muay Thai and that it was continuously perfected in military training. Muay Thai was also taught in the provinces for protection of the local communities against robbers.
The kingdom and the capital of the same name, Ayuthaya, were founded in 1350. The citizens were repeatedly faced with Burmese ambitions to occupy their land, which they were able to fend off successfully—also by the efficiency of the martial arts Krabi Krabong and Muay Thai—until 1569, when Ayuthaya was annexed as a Burmese province. After the Thai prince Narasuen defeated the Burmese successor to the throne in a duel in 1592, he drove the Burmese out of the country. A time of prosperity and peace followed. First contacts with the West were made. The Thai kings continued to be aware of the importance of Muay Thai and had intensive studies conducted at the royal residence. Many different types were compared and combined, in order to further improve the efficiency of Muay Thai. (At the present time, the techniques
of these traditional styles are taught under the name of Muay Boran.)

During this time period the Thai King Pra Chao Sua (King Tiger) appreciated the martial art to the extent that he himself also practiced it intensively. To test his skills he traveled to village festivities in disguise and defeated the best athletes in competitive contests.

Ayuthaya, one of the most thriving towns in the East, was conquered by the Burmese in 1767 and burned down to the ground. Nearly all the official archives were lost, which is why many details of Thai history and the history of Muay Thai remain somewhat vague. Subsequently, the Burmese enslaved many Thais. According to legend the Burmese king asked the captured Thais at a ceremony in 1770 which Thai wanted to fight Burma. The Thai Nai Kha Nom Tom volunteered and defeated in succession the 10 best Burmese fighters. The Burmese granted him one wish, after which Nai Kha Nom Tom was permitted to return to Thailand. Since then, March 17 has been celebrated as Muay Thai Day.

The deputy commander Phaya Tak (Taksin) escaped from Burmese captivity and started to re-form the dispersed army units. Within a short period of time he reconquered the old areas and chose Thonburi as the new seat of government. In 1781 Taksin had to be replaced by his officer Phraya Chakri, who ascended to the throne as Rama I in 1782. He relocated the capital and the seat of government from Thonburi to Bangkok. He was the first ruler of the Chakri dynasty, which still governs Thailand today.

Freedom and independence play a very significant role in Thailand’s entire history. Even though Muay Thai as a means of defense has decreased in importance due to the development of modern weapons in the 19th and 20th centuries, the position it takes in Thailand’s historical development cannot be denied. This is possibly another reason for the passion of many Thais for the sport.

The martial art Muay Thai, developed over centuries, is a very efficient form of self-defense to this day. The techniques used in training can be readily adopted for self-defense. The athletes learn
to defend themselves against attacks and to counter, which is why many military and police units are taught Muay Thai.

**Muay Thai Today**

Muay Thai is a traditional full-contact type of fighting, which gained ever-increasing importance by fixed regulations after World War II. Thailand features daily fights, which have thousands of spectators.

Athletic competitions have been carried out for centuries. They served as entertainment in honor of the king, and at village festivities for the enjoyment of visitors. Muay Thai continues to be part of festivities today, to which end a ring is put up on a large field. At the end of the event the ring is disassembled and transported to another festival. In this way it is possible to show the fights at small village celebrations.

![Champion Thongchai Tor. Silachai hits with a kick.](image-url)
In the last few years the worldwide interest in Muay Thai went up drastically, reflected by the clearly increased number of athletes attending courses and joining clubs. The development could be due to the staging of high-class martial arts events and the promotion of the cultural heritage of Muay Thai by the Thai government, as well as the increasing popularity of martial art movies and the improved public relations work of the Muay Thai organizations.

Athletes

Thailand has thousands of professional athletes. They usually come from small villages and grew up in poverty. Their athletic development starts in early childhood, frequently by training and due to encouragement from relatives. The athletes participate in village festivities to earn some money. Successful athletes are accepted into small camps, for which they compete in province stadiums and from where they can be transferred for a small part of the purse to big camps in Bangkok. The biggest part of the purse will be split between the promoter and the fighter. In turn, the fighter passes on a part of his share to his trainer. Despite the share arrangement good fighters can earn much money.

For a professional career the athletes subject themselves to hard training and a very disciplined life. In some camps, for example, the athletes have to sleep on the ring floor and successful fighters enjoy food privileges. Accordingly, only very few foreign athletes in the weight divisions up to welterweight are able to compete successfully with Thai opponents. It is only above welterweight that competitors from countries other than Thailand can be found in the ranking lists of the best Thai boxers. Starting from middleweight, the situation then changes in favor of the foreigners, as Thailand has few athletes of that stature. Against this backdrop fights above welterweight are rarely staged.

The large numbers of Thai supporters are familiar with nearly all the boxers and regularly place bets on their favorites. They follow the fights with great passion, either live or on TV, which features the
sport several times a week. Furthermore, nearly all male Thais practice Muay Thai at one stage or another.

The many Thai boxing world championship titles of the different associations can be compared to the titles of the many boxing associations. The government must sanction a valid world championship. Such championship contests are usually conducted in Thailand, which is why high-class contestants also fight in Thailand. Fighters who competed successfully in Thailand are, among others, Ramon Dekker, Danny Bille, Stephane Nikiema, and Rob Kamann. For a Thai boxer admission to and participation in a fight at one of the two principal stadiums, Lumpini and Rajadamnern, is a high honor, which proves the ability of the athlete. If he enjoys great popularity in Thailand, his fight will even be shown on Thai television.

**Events**

Thailand has professional fights every day. The leading Muay Thai promoter Songchai Ratanasuban stages the biggest events, which feature the best athletes and attract large audiences wishing to view the interesting fights. Once a year he organizes an open-air event, in honor of the Thai king, which has been attended by more than 100,000 spectators. In accordance with his slogan “Muay Thai—Thai Heritage—World Heritage” he supports the international spread of Muay Thai. At the present time, fights are also staged for women. These fights were established by the Thai promoter and owner of the Muay Thai Institute, Amnuay Kesbumrung.

The Japanese concept of K1 events, in which the best heavyweight full-contact fighters compete, has been successful. The athletic competition fills the biggest Japanese sports arenas. The TV rights are sold internationally, so that the athletes can expect large purses and sponsorship deals. The events are carried out with rules similar to those of Muay Thai. However, hits with the elbows are not allowed, and clinch situations are also stopped at an early stage. Nevertheless, the fights are frequently won by Muay Thai athletes,
such as the Dutchmen Ernesto Hoost and Peter Aerts. Due to their small stature Thais do not play a prominent role in Japanese tournaments. The few appearances of Thai athletes in Japan were marked by their extremely hard leg techniques, which even shook opponents who were more than 60 pounds heavier.

Europe and the United States have events with large audiences—for example, in Amsterdam, Paris, Zurich, and Las Vegas. Whether it will be possible to organize regular Thai boxing events with more than 10,000 spectators depends on the level at which such fights can be staged. Muay Thai has the potential to attract all social classes with its thrilling fights over five rounds, in which the athletes use a great variety of spectacular techniques. The concept of a Super League is currently being considered in Europe. Many good fighters in the lower weight categories compete in Europe and excite the spectators with their performance.

Promoter Songchai Ratanasuban.

Promotion of the Cultural Heritage

The Thai government is intensifying its efforts to promote Muay Thai, the cultural heritage of Thailand. This has become necessary, as the last decades have seen a distinct trend toward a commercialization of the sport. Many managers are interested only in their part of the purse and urge trainers to prepare their fighters for the earliest possible contests. Against this backdrop the athletes no longer undergo comprehensive training but learn only basic techniques. The Thai government now supports the amateur
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are looking for ways to learn this martial art. The demand is satisfied by many sport studios and clubs, which offer many different courses tailored to the individual requirements of their members.
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Chapter 2

Tradition

Muay Thai has many traditions. The best known are Mong Kon, Pra Jiad, Whai Khru, and Ram Muay. Muay Thai also includes the students’ education to become respectful human beings—for example, in their respectful interaction with trainers, the training group, and opponents in the ring.

Mong Kon

The Mong Kon is a headgear worn by the athlete when entering the ring. It is given to him by his trainer, is meant as a good-luck charm, and should protect him against danger and injuries. Centuries ago the presentation was cause for a celebration, as it was not necessarily commonplace that a person interested in Muay Thai was actually taught. Rather, he was examined by the teacher for a lengthy period of time, and it was only after the teacher was convinced of the character and the physical preconditions of the person that he was given the Mong Kon, thereby being accepted as a student. The Mong Kon was carefully manufactured of white and red fabric, material softer than what is used today.

According to the legend it may never be kept on, held close to, or put on the ground, as it will lose its magic. It is also claimed that the loss of the Mong Kon will have far-reaching consequences for the fighter, because he will lose his self-belief and become sick out of mourning.

In the past the Mong Kon was also worn during the fight. If it fell down, the fight was interrupted until the athlete had put it on again. These days the athletes wear it only at Ram Muay and Whai Khru. After these ceremonies the trainer removes the Mong Kon from the athlete’s head.
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You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.
Once the teacher announced that he had made a decision, the boy presented him with some gifts and knelt down in front of him. The teacher expressed his willingness to instruct the new student by putting a Mong Kon on his head. The Mong Kon had to be—and still must be—carefully kept at an elevated position, because it means luck and magic for the student. The Mong Kon was carried in all fights.

After the student had acquired outstanding skills and a great knowledge in Muay Thai, so that his teacher considered him to be able to instruct by himself, a long Buddhist ceremony was conducted. In the process the attendants prayed for luck and protection of the student, who was given a second Mong Kon during the ceremony. Upon presentation of the Mong Kon the student became a teacher.

The Mong Kon was very important for magic and religious reasons. On some occasions, and as a particular honor, the student received the old Mong Kon of his teacher. In that way the new teacher was able to acquire the old teacher’s magic and charm. Without the ceremony it was formerly impossible to work as a Muay Thai teacher.

In the course of his life the former student tried to stay in contact with his teacher. Once a year, usually on Muay Thai Day (March 17) or on his teacher’s birthday, the student visited his former teacher and presented gifts for his well-being. Many former students are still practicing this today.

**Respect**

Muay Thai teaches athletes the respectful treatment of fellow human beings. Respectful dealings with other persons should be the aim of all people. Muay Thai offers a physical advantage in comparison to untrained individuals. The techniques may never be used to suppress others and are to be applied only in self-defense or for the protection of others. The Thais take much pride in their traditional martial art, which helped them to repel intruders in the
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Loud laughter and exclamations should not occur during training. Generally, discussions should only be held with reference to the training.

The trainer’s instructions are to be followed. Questions may, indeed, be raised during training but should not be followed up, as this disturbs the training session. The trainer has only a certain amount of time for the session and must also take care of other students. However, in the case of genuine communication problems the trainer will help. It must be understood that an athlete cannot be expected to know all after a few lessons. The learning of Muay Thai is a rather lengthy process, which the masters of the sport claim will never end.

The athletes must treat each other with politeness and respect. They enter training in order to learn the art of Muay Thai. Hurting the partner in training may never be attempted. It is also not the aim to demonstrate any superiority. The actual aim is for the athletes to cooperate, so that a higher performance level can be achieved. If the partner does not adhere to this principle, is more than hard in sparring, and even tries to consciously inflict injuries, you should discuss it with him. If he does not understand, change your training partner. If the trainer insists on a continued “brawl” with this partner, you have chosen the wrong club.

Professional Thai athletes rarely conduct their training at full strength, in order not to sustain any injuries that may prevent them from entering a competition. Otherwise, Thailand would not have active athletes with more than 300 professional fights.

**Conduct during a Fight**

The athletes prepare themselves for competition in a long and abstinent process. They welcome each other before the fight, to show respect for their performances as athletes. However, the aim is to win, which is why the athletes may now start to do whatever serves the purpose, provided it conforms to the rules. This may involve intimidation—for example, with aggressive stares. Certain
provocations are not acceptable, though. These include insults, spitting, and the conscious use of forbidden techniques—for example, attacks to the genitals. If these are repeatedly carried out by a fighter, he will be disqualified.

After the fight the athletes say goodbye to each other. Both have given their best, and that must be respected.

The athletes conduct their fight at full power.
After the fight they say their goodbyes in recognition of the performance.
Chapter 3

Rules

Thai boxing contests are subject to strict regulations that vary slightly depending on the venue. Some of the most vital rules are dealt with in this book with reference to the internationally most important stadiums, Lumpini and Rajadamnern Stadiums in Bangkok. More detailed information about these stadiums is found in the book *Muay Thai: Advanced Thai Kickboxing Techniques* (Delp, 2004).

**Important Early Rules**

In sports competitions centuries ago the athletes initially used no hand protection. Subsequently, the hands were bandaged. To determine the length of a fight, a small hole was drilled in a coconut shell, and the shell was then put into a container filled with water. The fight was conducted without a break and lasted until such time that the coconut went down. The fight could be decided only by the opponent's technical knockout or knockout; otherwise, the fight would end in a draw. At the beginning of the 20th century the rules were standardized—for example, boxing gloves were used, and a solid ring floor and fixed time periods were prescribed. Furthermore, weight divisions were determined. In the middle of the 20th century the stadiums Rajadamnern and Lumpini were erected in Bangkok. From that time forward, the events could be held at regular intervals and were no longer dependent on weather conditions. At the present time, the stadiums feature daily fights. It is a great honor to compete in these stadiums, which are reserved only for the best athletes.
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You have either reached a page that is unavailable for viewing or reached your viewing limit for this book.
Legal Techniques and Scoring

The opponent may be hit, kicked, and pushed, to which end all parts of the body can be used, with the exception of the head. The use of elbows is not allowed in fights between women; otherwise, the same rules apply. The amateur area has different performance classifications with varying rules.

Fights are decided either by a knockout, or by three umpires in accordance with a point system.

Foul

An attack may not be directed toward the genitals, the back, or the eyes of the opponent. Should the opponent fall or the umpire intervene, the technique must be stopped. Holding on to the ropes or deliberately turning one’s back in the direction of the opponent,
in order to obtain a break, are not allowed, nor are wrestling or Judo throwing techniques. Unfair conduct, such as biting, spitting, and swearing, will be penalized in the ring. Infringements will be punished with a warning, the loss of points, or disqualification, depending on the type of violation.

Medical Support

All athletes must undergo regular medical examinations in order to obtain a license for fights. In addition, shortly before the fight, a doctor examines the athletes for injuries. These checks should also include tests for drugs and infectious diseases, although this is not always done in Thailand.

During the fights, the doctor must be right next to the ring in order to ensure the safety and health of the athletes. If blood is dis-
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Chapter 4

Equipment

The following equipment is used for Muay Thai training. Under normal circumstances each club has a basic assortment of equipment, which is offered to the athletes for training. If you have decided to practice Muay Thai for an extended time period, it is worthwhile to acquire your own equipment. The products suited for your training aims should best be discussed with your trainer. Frequently the trainers have good ties with dealers and are able to obtain products at favorable prices.

Equipment of the Athletes

Clothing

Muay Thai training is carried out while wearing a short T-shirt made of cotton or with bare chests. In competition, however, no outerwear may be used. Special shorts, made of nylon or satin, are worn as trousers. These shorts are available in specialized shops, starting from approximately $25. The exercises are carried out with bare feet, as shoes would be a hindrance to the kicking techniques.

Bandages

In competition and training the hands must be bandaged as prevention against injuries to the hand and finger joints. In competition it is normal to use long bandages, the fitting of which the trainer closely examines. In this way it is ensured that the fighter enjoys the best possible protection and a comfortable fit. For training purposes two short standard tapes from a specialist dealer will suffice. They cost approximately $9.
Gloves for Sandbags

Sandbag gloves are worn for training on sandbags, punching balls, and pads. These are available at acceptable quality in specialist shops, starting from approximately $40. You can, in fact, also use boxing gloves; however, as these are considerably more expensive, sandbag gloves are normally used for equipment training. One reason to acquire both sandbag and boxing gloves is that in training with a partner and in competition only practically new boxing gloves may be used. The use of damaged gloves entails the danger of injuries to your partner or opponent.

Boxing Gloves

Training usually requires 16- or 18-ounce gloves as the best possible protection for the athlete and his partner. Small and light boxing gloves are worn in sports contests. Depending on the weight division of the athlete 8- or 10-ounce gloves are prescribed in the rules. In competition the boxing gloves are subject to stricter regulations than in training. This is the reason why the production of gloves for competitive fights is more expensive, which, in turn, is reflected in the price. Boxing gloves for competition are sold starting from approximately $80, and boxing gloves for training from approximately $60.

Gumshield

In contact training a gumshield is required. For optimum protection it must be adapted exactly to the shape of your teeth. For self-adaptation the least expensive shields are available from approximately $20; however, far more expensive shields are on the market. You can, for example, obtain a gumshield from your dentist after a dental impression for a cost of $300 or more.

Groin Protection

A blow to your genital area, intentional or unintentional, can result in serious injuries. This is why groin protection must be worn in
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Chapter 2

Tactics to Counter Fist Attacks

2.1 Counterpunch

Opponent’s Technique: Jab using the same stance

Execution:
Block the opponent’s punch with a strong open rear hand, to which end you firmly press the thumb into the cavity at the beginning of the biceps of your front arm. At the same time, counter with a jab. Ensure that you stretch your hitting arm to the front and that you shift your weight in the opponent’s direction.

A–B: Somchok (right) attacks with a jab. Christoph blocks the technique and counters with a jab.
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2.5 Uppercut Elbow

Opponent’s Technique: Side hook, swing

Execution:
As soon as you detect the beginning of the technique, turn the upper part of your body sideways. At the same time, deliver an uppercut elbow with the opposite arm. In the process you must not deliver the elbow too far to the top—as is normal for an uppercut elbow—but you must shift the elbow joint from the starting position to the front. Otherwise, you are in danger of being hit. Subsequently, you can carry out a rotating elbow with the other arm.

A–C: Somchok (right) attacks with a side hook. Christoph defends himself with an uppercut elbow. In the process, he does not initially drop his arm, but carries out the technique from the starting position to protect his head.
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3.3 Step Forward and Elbow

**Opponent’s Technique: Spinning elbow**

**Execution:**
As soon as the opponent starts his turn, you take a step to the front, turn your upper body to the side, and deliver an elbow to the back of his head. Deliver the elbow and move the leg forward, which is farther away at the beginning of the opponent’s attack. If the opponent turns in a clockwise direction, you hit with the left elbow and move the left leg forward, and vice versa. Ensure that you shift your weight to the front. If you move your body sideways for extra distance from the opponent’s attack, you will become slower and achieve little impact.

**A-C:** Patiphan (right) attacks with an elbow technique from a clockwise rotation. Chawan defends himself with an uppercut elbow of the left arm. If Patiphan were to attack from the other side, Chawan would have to hit with the right elbow and change his stance in the process.

If the opponent’s technique makes first contact, block it with the raised arm without interruption of your own elbow technique.
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Chapter 6

Tactics to Counter Knee Attacks from a Distance

6.1 Step to the Side and Side Hook

Opponent's Technique: Straight knee kick from a distance

Execution:
As soon as you notice the beginning of the opponent's technique, take a step with the outside foot to the side. For a step to the right, fighters with an orthodox stance must change their stance; left-handers must change their stance for a step to the left. Simultaneously, deliver a side hook to the opponent's head. Promptly follow up and deliver a rotating elbow with the punching arm.

A-C: Patiphan (right) attacks with a knee kick from a distance. Chawan defends himself by taking a step with the right leg to the right, thus changing his stance, and promptly delivers a side hook.
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The muscles were trained on a coconut tree. The student had to climb up by holding on to the tree with his stretched arms. In this way he developed his arm, shoulder, back, and leg muscles.

Lemons were also used for training. They were attached neck-high to pieces of string. The student moved along the row of lemons delivering punches, elbow techniques, and defense and counter techniques. This training method taught timing and vision. The trainer was thus in a position to ascertain whether his student was instinctively able to defend himself correctly.

Swimming and jogging knee-high were done in the ocean and in lakes and rivers. Another training method was for the student to practice punches and elbow techniques with the water at chest level and to hit the water from above. In the process, he tried to avoid blinking and practiced defense techniques against the splashing water. He also put a coconut into the water and followed it with punches and elbow techniques, until holes appeared in the nut, water flowed in, and it eventually went down. This was initially practiced with bandaged hands, while advanced students used their bare hands.

A banana tree was chopped head high and put into the sand. The student had to punch, push, and kick the tree from different sides until it broke.
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Warm-up Exercise

You start with an activity that warms up your body and prepares it for training. Select an exercise that can be carried out at a constant pace. You should feel comfortable and must not overexert yourself. Avoid extreme situations and do not carry out any quick and abrupt moves. This phase is meant to prepare your body for training and not for performance. Choose a level at which you are still just able to hold a conversation. The moves should be carried out for a period of five to ten minutes, best until such time that your body produces the first drops of sweat. You will now be in the best possible shape for the stretching exercises.

Slow jogging and skipping are well suited for the warm-up. In the early phase of skipping you should not do any high or difficult skips—for example, double skips—to avoid injury. “Boxing on the spot” is also suitable for the warm-up. The exercise is carried out with the legs shoulder-width apart, and you deliver uppercuts, head-high straight punches, and straight punches high up into the air without interruption. In the process, repeatedly bend your knees somewhat, but do not leave the standing position. The exercise should last a few minutes.

Stretching

Now that you have warmed up your body, you can start with the stretching. Stretch all your muscles, particularly the weak points. Stretching lessens the tensioning in the muscles, and the body becomes flexible. Without stretching you are in danger of injury when carrying out the techniques. The body will also not be properly prepared for the next activities and cannot produce optimum performance.

Stretch yourself as often as you like. If you notice any tension in your muscles, stretch these and feel how the tension disappears. Stretching exercises must be carried out regularly, even though you interrupt your training. After some months with many stretching exercises you will be able to perform “extreme” moves, such as high kicks.
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D: Stretching of the chest and front upper arm muscles. You are in a lunge step position, arms raised in a U-shape. Push your chest forward and, at the same time, move your arms to the back until you feel a slight tension.

E: Stretching of the shoulder and upper back muscles. Move your hands crosswise in the direction of the shoulder blades. The upper arms remain in a horizontal position. Experts take a hold on the edges of the shoulder blades.

F: Stretching of the shoulder, chest, and arm muscles. The right lower arm is pointing down behind the head, which will leave the upper arm in a vertical position. Use the left hand to apply pressure to the right elbow, thereby lowering the arm. Subsequently, slowly move your left lower arm behind your back from below to the top, until your hands meet. Then carry out the exercise to the other side.
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Main Section

In the main section of Muay Thai training you learn attacking techniques, combinations, and defense and counter techniques. The session includes shadow boxing, training on sandbags and pads, and training with a partner. You must first study the techniques by shadow boxing into the air, after which you can deliver these against an object. Advanced students add sparring and clinching to their training sessions.

Shadow Boxing

In shadow boxing the techniques and tactics are practiced into the air. Deliver the techniques swiftly, but not with full power or to completion, to protect your joints.

Beginners initially practice the techniques slowly, then swiftly, and, finally, in combination. The trainer closely monitors these steps, so that the athlete does not get used to mistakes. Many athletes, for example, tend to lower their guarding hand in the course of swift combinations. (When learning on your own, you can practice the techniques in front of a mirror and monitor their execution with the help of this book.)

Advanced students perfect their shadow boxing by acting as if they had a real opponent in front of them. They move toward him, step away, and escape to the side (see pages 49-51). In the process, they use their entire repertoire of techniques, defend themselves against the techniques of their imaginary opponent, and carry out counter attacks.

In preparation for a fight the shadow boxing will be tailored to the future opponent. The athlete imagines the typical style of his opponent and practices his own tactics in shadow boxing.

Sandbag Training

In sandbag training the techniques are practiced on an object for hardening of the body, and in order to develop power and stamina in their execution. You should, therefore, try to deliver each
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The punches to the front, from the side, or from below particularly train your chest muscles, the front shoulder muscles, and the inner rotators, which is why you should carry out some remedial exercises. You may either plan training sessions for strengthening of the muscles on Muay Thai sports-free days, or integrate some exercises into the cool-down phase of your Thai boxing training.

If you add strengthening exercises to your Muay Thai training, you should practice in accordance with the power-stamina method, which means 15–30 repetitions per set. However, using the muscle-building method with 8–10 repetitions is not recommended, as your body is already tired. Muscle build-up training should be practiced only in separate training sessions.

Strengthening exercises after the main training phase should preferably be those that strengthen the muscles of the upper back, the central and rear parts of the shoulder, and the chest.

**Cool-Down Exercises**

For relaxation of the muscles you should cool down after the main training phase. This will also help in a quicker regeneration of the body. The moves should be carried out at a slow pace for approximately five to ten minutes, without physical exertion. Slow jogging or cycling at low intensity are particularly suitable cool-down exercises.

**Stretching**

At the end of training you stretch the muscles once more. Do not use any extreme stretch positions, as the muscles are tired and prone to cramp. Stretch your body only in the first stretch phase and do not extend the position any farther. Stretching at the end of training serves to relax tense muscles and to prevent shortening of the muscles.
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Competitive Training at the Amateur Level

Your performance will quickly improve with three Muay Thai training sessions per week and extra fitness training. Fitness training has the effect that the improved staying power facilitates longer sport-specific training and that the techniques can be delivered with more power.

In the amateur area good results are accomplished with six training sessions per week. This can be the basis for the attainment of high competitive aims, provided you do not have to lose too much weight prior to a fight. Against this backdrop, more than six training sessions will also be required in the amateur area.

You must frequently amend your training plans for new demands to your body. If your body gets accustomed to the demands, and training becomes monotonous, your performance will stagnate. Therefore, you should determine continuously new training cycles to cover periods of 6–12 weeks, with somewhat different training aims, as shown, for example, in the 10-week cycle on the next page. After the conclusion of a cycle you practice with a slightly altered plan. It is recommended that you make notes in regard to your training plans and performance in a training diary, so that you are able to monitor the long-term development of your physical performance.

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This ultimate guide to the basics of Muay Thai (also known as Thai boxing) addresses fitness training, self-defense, and competition. Muay Thai is popular world-wide not only because of its exciting competitions but also because it develops power, stamina, agility, coordination, and speed. In this hands-on manual, renowned trainer and author Christoph Delp presents fundamental technique and strategy sections along with corrections for the most frequent mistakes made by both beginning and advanced martial artists. Thai champions from the famous Sor Vorapin gym in Bangkok present techniques step-by-step, showing readers the fine details of each one.

In this book you will find:

- History, rules, and equipment for Muay Thai training and combat
- Correct starting positions, footwork, and fighting distances
- Powerful punch, kick, knee, and elbow techniques
- Instructions for fighting in close proximity and clinch positions
- Effective attacking, defensive, and counterattacking strategies
- Comprehensive training regimen content and planning

Suitable as both a self-training guide and a supplement to club training, *Muay Thai Basics* offers authoritative instruction for Thai boxers and other martial arts enthusiasts.

**CHRISTOPH DELP** is a qualified management expert and a Thai boxing instructor who was trained in Thailand and has extensive experience in competition. His broad knowledge of martial arts and fitness is available to a world-wide audience through his many publications. Delp lives in Germany and Thailand.