

Judging MuayThai fights: Tony Myers

The author, Tony Myers, is an experienced referee and judge as well as an experienced MuayThai coach, training a number of domestic and world level champions over a number of years. He has judged and refereed at national, international and world level in Britain, Europe and Thailand. In 2002 he was selected to referee live on national Thai TV and in front of Thai Royalty in Bangkok. He holds World MuayThai Council (WMC) professional refereeing and judging qualification and an International Federation of MuayThai Amateur (IFMA) amateur refereeing and judging qualification. He has had strong links for many years with MuayThai in Thailand and is a partner in a gym in Bangkok. He is a university lecturer and has conducted research on MuayThai, his PhD research has examined judging in MuayThai and he runs MuayThai courses, coaching courses as well as refereeing and judging courses and seminars throughout the UK, Republic of Ireland and around the world.

MuayThai is increasing in popularity with an estimated one million participants worldwide. Like in every other sport is essential for the competitors and coaches, and very useful for fans to understand the rules and scoring of the sport they participate in or watch. It would be unthinkable for football players and spectators not to have at least a rudimentary and very often a detailed understanding of the rules of football, or know where and how players score but it does happen in MuayThai.

There are always going to be different opinions of who won a very close fight. There are a number of influences on our judgements in sport even when we try our best to be neutral. Decisions are influenced by a number of different factors: noise, expectation, position, memory, experience and even the colour of someone's clothing. However, the biggest influence by far is misunderstanding of the scoring criteria; if people are not using the same criteria to judge there is little chance of any consensus, even in fights that are potentially quite one-sided.

There is often real confusion, even amongst some people involved in the sport outside of Thailand, as to what scores and what doesn't score in MuayThai. There are a wide range of misconceptions aired by fans, coaches and even some officials regarding scoring. These misconceptions have ranged from "punches don't score", "leg kicks are the most important kicks for scoring", to "it's the variety of techniques that's important". All these statements are untrue and highlight the confusion that can happen over

scoring in MuayThai. So how are MuayThai fights actually scored? What are the fouls? What are the legal techniques? This article attempts to answer these questions.

I will never forget the first time I sat on the wooden bench seats in the humid atmosphere of Bangkok's Lumpinee Stadium. I was totally mesmerised by the unified chants of fans frantically willing on "their" fighter; this generally meant the one they had placed a bet upon. Having spent a lifetime involved in martial arts and boxing, I was enormously impressed with the toughness, speed, balance, agility and skill of the boxers fighting in the ring. However, I was also a little confused at some decisions awarded by the judges that evening. The sport fascinated me but having grown up on a diet of international boxing and Japanese martial arts, the scoring of some of these MuayThai fights baffled me a little.

After talking to other western fans of the sport, I soon realised I was not on my own; a number of non-Thai spectators didn't fully understanding how the MuayThai fights were judged. Since that time I have been lucky enough to have had my own fighters fight at Lumpinee and Rajadamnern stadiums, and have had the chance to referee and judge fights in Bangkok. Now that I understand the rules and how fights are scored my fighters fair better in international competition and my enjoyment of the fights has actually improved dramatically. So if you are a fighter or coach, I hope the article will contribute something towards your training, making it more focused on what scores and how not to get scored upon. If you are a fan or a recreational participant, I hope your enjoyment of fights will be enhanced a little by this article.

International competition

The article deals primarily with the rules and scoring of "A" or "open class" professional MuayThai fights using full rules, these rules are internationally established and generally the only rules used in all stadiums in Thailand. "B" class and "C" class fights in the UK can be fought under a wider variety of rules, depending on the association involved. For the purposes of

this article, where there is a general consensus between organisations these rules will be highlighted for “B” and “C” class fights.

In MuayThai an important distinction exists between amateur and professional competition, this distinction often has little to do with the experience or status of the athletes involved, but more to do with the rules and protective equipment worn by participants. Amateur fights are normally fought over four, two minute rounds with fighters wearing headguards, elbow pads, body protectors and shin guards. Although most of rules used in amateur competition are the same as “A” class professional fights, there are differences in scoring. The term professional in this article refers to fighters competing without protection (other than gum shield and groin protector) and doesn't refer to their experience or to the purse money fought for.

Fight Classifications

Professional fights in a number of other countries across the world are classified as “A”, “B” and “C” class. “A” class referring to open class fighters, “B” class referring to experienced fighters who have had reasonable fight experience and are technically and physically capable of competing over five, two minute rounds. “C” class fighters are less experienced fighters, relative novices, who are capable of fighting three rounds of two minutes or five rounds of one and a half minutes.

Most of the rules that apply to “A” class fights apply to “B” and “C” class fights with a few exceptions. In most associations in the west, “C” class “professional rules” fights are fought over three rounds of two minutes in duration with a minute break in between rounds or now more commonly in the UK, five one and a half minute rounds. In “C” class fights elbows or knees delivered to the head or face are not allowed. “B” class fights are usually fought over five two minute rounds, again with one minute rest intervals. In some associations knees to head are allowed, in others they are not. Generally elbows to the head are not allowed in “B” class fights, although, on occasion, they are used with agreement of both boxers. “A” class fights are

held over five three minute rounds with two minutes rest between rounds (this is sometimes reduced to one and a half minutes in some associations).

Differences between associations

Do different associations have different scoring criteria? The answer to this question is yes; how close this reflects genuine MuayThai scoring as used in Thailand depends on the MuayThai experience of the officials involved in the association. The rules and scoring discussed in this article reflect those used in Thailand. The reason for this is not only because Thailand is the birth place of MuayThai and has far more MuayThai fights than any other country, but also because with the formation of the World MuayThai Council in 1995 and more recently the Board of Boxing Sport, Thailand has set the international standard for rules which most countries are tending to follow. Confusion can arise when kickboxing organisations that use rules similar to MuayThai; kickboxing and K1 are legitimate but different sports to MuayThai with different rules and different scoring criteria. In addition, applied appropriately genuine MuayThai criteria offer unrivalled consistency.

Judging

When a judge is judging a MuayThai fight they view the fight as if it is a distance running race. This means that if they are judging correctly they will be trying to keep in mind who is ahead and how far they are ahead throughout the fight. In determining this, a judge considers the number of clean techniques a boxer lands on target and delivers on balance, along with the relative effectiveness of the techniques landing. While the boxer can deliver scoring techniques while moving forwards, backwards, sideward or against the ropes, balance is essential both before and after technique delivery. Although effectiveness can legitimately be defined in a number of different ways and could be interpreted by different people quite differently, in MuayThai effectiveness is a specific concept that refers to quite specific observable behaviours. It is important as a fighter and coach to know what these are.

Which techniques score?

The simple answer is all effective MuayThai techniques. It is possible to score with all MuayThai techniques; kicks, punches, knees, and elbows. However, this needs some explanation. All techniques have the potential to score equally in MuayThai, but to parody George Orwell; some techniques are more equal than others

Effectiveness in MuayThai

Using a baseball analogy, a player can hit the ball with the bat, but hits aren't equal; a hit could be a foul, a Fly out, Ground out, single, double, triple, or homerun. In a similar way "hits" in MuayThai are not equal either. Judges are looking to award the fight to the stronger boxer (in MuayThai terms) over the course of a fight. To do this they are looking for a boxer to show this mentally (in terms of composure), physically and technically (balance and position being essential). Judges are looking for which boxer's MuayThai is more effective. There are a number of things that determine what effective means in practical terms in MuayThai. Effectiveness in MuayThai is determined by the physical effect a technique has on a fighter; this often equates to a boxer losing position (being moved or losing balance). To put it another way when a boxer is moved by a technique rather than them moving under their own control; they could be hit with real force or they could just be off balance when they are hit. Effectiveness doesn't mean a kick or knee has to hurt an opponent to score (although a boxer who shows they are hurt will be at a serious disadvantage in scoring and may lose the fight as a result in some circumstances).

Although not strictly correct and not directly used in judging, for ease of explanation we will use a ranking or grading system for each technique to illustrate their relative scoring weight. An 'A grade' score will include the highest scoring techniques that own win the round; a 'B grade' score will include the next highest scoring techniques; a 'C grade' score will include techniques that score clearly but are not considered as effective as 'C grade' scores; and a 'D grade' score is one that only scores in the absence of any

other scoring techniques from either boxer (for example if there are no effective scoring techniques these could be used to determine a winner).

Punch

- If a punch results in a boxer taking an 'eight count' it is equal to any other scoring technique that has the same effect. If the remainder of the round was even, this would result in a two point difference being awarded to the boxer who delivered the punch (scored 10:8). If the boxer taking the eight count otherwise won the round it could still be a round winning technique (10:9). In our rating system, this would be an 'A grade' score.
- If a punch hits its target cleanly and causes the boxer being hit to lose position (be forced to step backwards with its force or because they are off balance) it is a score. This would be a 'B grade score'.
- If a punch (or punching combination) hits its target cleanly but has no effect on a boxer's position (they are not moved) the punch doesn't really score (unless no other scoring action took place). This would be a 'D grade' score.
- If a punch is blocked it does not score at all.

Elbow

- In a similar way to the punch, if an elbow resulted in a boxer taking an 'eight count' it is equal to any other scoring technique that has the same effect. Again, if the remainder of the round was even, this would result in a two point difference being awarded to the boxer who delivered the elbow (scored 10:8) or, as with the punch, a one point difference if the boxer who had been counted otherwise won the round (10:9) . This would be an 'A grade' score.
- If an elbow hits its target cleanly and causes the boxer being hit to lose position (be forced to step backwards with its force or because they are off balance) or cuts them it scores. This would be a 'B grade score'.

- If an elbow hits its target cleanly but has no effect on a boxer's position (they are not moved) or doesn't cause visual damage (cut) the elbow doesn't really score. This would be a 'D grade' score.
- If an elbow is blocked it does not score at all.

Round Kick

- If a round kick lands anywhere on the body, legs or head and results in a boxer taking an 'eight count' it is equal to any other scoring technique that has the same effect. Once again, if the remainder of the round was even, this would result in a two point difference being awarded to the boxer who delivered the kick (scored 10:8). This would be an 'A grade score'. If the person who delivered the kick that caused the eight-count was otherwise losing the round, it would again be a single point difference (10:9).
- If a round kick lands on the legs and causes the boxer being hit to lose position (be forced to step backwards with its force or because they are off balance) or makes them show pain (perhaps limping afterwards) it scores. This would be a 'B grade' score.
- If a round kick lands on the legs and causes the boxer to fall to the canvas, this would be a 'B+ grade' score.
- If a round kick lands on the body (the torso) it scores. This would be a 'B grade' score.
- If a round kick lands on the upper arm and causes the boxer being hit to lose position (be forced to step backwards with its force or because they are off balance), this would be a 'B grade' score.
- If a round kick lands on the upper arm but causes no movement this would be a 'C grade' score.
- If a round kick lands on the neck and causes movement this would be a 'B+ grade' score.
- If a round kick lands on the neck this would be a 'B grade' score.
- If a kick is blocked it does not score at all.

Knee

- If any knee lands anywhere on the body, legs or head and results in a boxer taking an 'eight count' it is equal to any other scoring technique that has the same effect. Once again, if the remainder of the round was even, this would result in a two point difference being awarded to the boxer who delivered the knee (10:8). Like in other 'A grade' techniques, if the boxer landing the technique otherwise lost the round it would be a 10:9 round rather than 10:8. This would be an 'A grade' score'.
- If a straight knee or thrusting knee lands on the body, this would be a 'B grade' score.
- If a round knee lands on the body (the torso) this would be a C grade score.
- If a straight knee lands on the arms but the force pushes them onto the body it would be a 'C grade' score.
- If a knee hits the legs cause a boxer to show obvious pain this would be a 'C grade' score
- If a knee hits the legs it is a 'D grade' score
- If a knee is blocked by the legs it doesn't score at all.

Teep (pushing kick)

- If any teep lands anywhere on the body, legs or head and results in a boxer taking an 'eight count' it is equal to any other scoring technique that has the same effect. Once again, if the remainder of the round was even, this would result in a two point difference being awarded to the boxer who delivered the teep (scored 10:8 or 10:9) . This would be an A grade score
- If a teep lands anywhere on the body or leg and cause the boxer being teeped to fall to the floor it would be a 'B+ grade' score.
- If a teep lands anywhere on the body and cause the boxer being teeped to lose position, this would be a 'B grade' score
- If a teep lands anywhere on the body but causes the boxer being teeped not to move, this would be a 'D grade' score

As highlighted above, as well as causing an opponent to move physically, the target hit can also determine how well a technique scores. As described above, kicking and kneeing the body and head tends to be considered more effective than kicks and knees striking other targets; given the same physical effect on an opponent. While punches, low kicks and elbows do score, to score well they have to cause a physical effect (or get an opponent to show they are hurt). For example, if a boxer was kicked to the floor, that is considered an effective technique. However, as suggested above, if a boxer can land clean kicks and knees to the body (or kicks to the neck) these are considered strong techniques (if they are delivered on balance) even without visual effect or obvious injury (if they do manage to cause a boxer to lose position they score even better). Another example of the target of an attack being important is when kicking or kneeing an opponent's back. If you can hit their back with kicks or knees it is considered a good score as it shows your opponent can't protect him or herself.

Other than when fights are too close to call, Elite Thai fighters in Thailand clearly know 'the game' of MuayThai well enough to gauge how clearly they are winning or losing the fight and what they have to do to maintain their lead or reverse the situation and take over the lead. Knowing this, I thought it might be informative to ask a top Thai fighter how they went about doing this. I thought it would not only be useful for my own fighters when competing but also may provide a simplified system for others to understand judging. I asked a good friend of mine Duwao Kongudom, a former champion who had beaten a number of top fighters including the famous Anuwat Kaewsamrit on two occasions what system he used. Duwao said he gave points in his head to particular strikes and used that as a basis for determining how far ahead or behind he was. In the system he uses, he gives 1 point for a punch and leg kick, 2 points for a round knee to the body, 3 points for a round kick or straight knee to the body and 4 points for a neck kick that lands cleanly. He doesn't actually add the points up in his head but uses

it as a guide. For example, if he gets hit with a round kick he knows to equal the score, he either has to score back with a round kick or straight knee to the body, or hit with two round knees or three clean punches or strong leg kicks. It is important to note that this is not how scores are actually recorded and it also presumes that all techniques are delivered with power and on balance:

So who wins the fight?

The World MuayThai Council identify four criteria in their published rules; correct boxing style combined with hard accurate strikes, aggressive and dominating MuayThai, active domination of an opponent, and using a traditional style of defence and counter attack. The published rules of Lumpinee Stadium identify two criteria important to determine the winner of a round; a boxer striking with more weapons than an opponent, and delivering cleaner, stronger and more damaging blows, However, the hierarchical criteria outlined recently by the Sport Authority of Thailand, through the Board of Boxing Sport, perhaps offers the best insight.

Before detailing the specific criteria, it is important to put them into context. Although the criteria detail scoring at a round level, fights are actually judged more holistically than merely by accumulating points round by round; judges judge the fight as a whole and not round by round. Sometimes it is difficult to determine who the most effective boxer is until the later rounds when accumulative damage can be better assessed and tiredness has set in showing which boxer is the strongest over the whole fight. However, the hierarchical criteria do offer a good insight into what is important in scoring.

1. The boxer who strikes with more clear MuayThai weapons on target wins the round

An oversimplification but still a useful rule of thumb: The boxer who lands more clean kicks and knees on their opponent's body wins the round. If you move your opponent with your kick or can unbalance your opponent first and follow with a technique, that is better still. It is important to note these can be delivered while moving forwards,

backwards or sideward. Balance after delivery is important (Punches, elbows and leg kicks do score but as detailed earlier you have to really show effect with these weapons).

2. The boxer who scores more heavy powerful attacks wins the round

Again, an oversimplification but also a useful rule of thumb: If boxers don't land cleanly with kicks but hit the arms and show effect, they score equally to kicks landing on target but not showing an effect. Punches and leg kicks can score well if they show real effect on the opponent.

3. The boxer who does more damage to his opponent wins the round

Another oversimplification but yet again another useful rule of thumb: If everything else is close judges look for real differences in the damage caused by blows. For example, if the same number of kicks and knees to the body landed by both boxers, judges may award a fight to a boxer who made his opponent very tired through being hit with strong weapons or cut their opponent with an elbow or some similar damage.

4. The boxer who shows more attacking techniques wins the round

Yet another oversimplification but useful rule of thumb: if two boxers are equal in all of the above respects; perhaps because they are very equally matched or are not skilful enough to score with appropriate techniques, judges should award the fight to the boxer who attacks more or who tries to make a fight of it.

5. Better offensive, defensive, evasion or counterattacking skills wins the round

6. The boxer who fouls less wins the round

So variety of technique doesn't come into judging a fight?

No, variety is not a consideration for judges at all. It is possible for one competitor to use one type of technique exclusively and win, if the use of that technique results in that competitor delivering more, effective techniques than their opponent. For example, one competitor may win by only kneeing their opponent the whole fight.

What are the very best scoring techniques?

There are a number of techniques that are considered to be the best scoring techniques. These are the primary techniques that win fights and include:

- The primary scoring criteria and the most effective technique is a legal technique of any type that 'knocks out' or 'stops' an opponent so that they are unable to continue the fight.
- The next best scoring technique is any legal technique that either knocks an opponent to the floor with a concussive blow or causes the referee to give an 'eight count' (if the referee gives an eight count, two points are initially be deducted from the counted boxer's score card, if the boxer fights back strongly or has previously dominated the round, a one point difference may be awarded). (the 'A grade' techniques detailed earlier).
- Unbalancing an opponent with kick or throwing action and immediately following with a strong striking technique
- Knocking an opponent off their feet with a strike or kick (The 'B+ grade' techniques detailed earlier)
- Continually throwing an opponent down showing domination
- An attacking technique or combination that results in an opponent turning their back on the attacking boxer.

Although judges are looking for overall effectiveness, dominance and ring generalship, the successful delivery of any of these techniques, without a similar or equivalent response from an opponent, would result in a fighter winning that round and in some cases the fight. Maintaining physical and

mental composure is the essential for a fighter if they are to win a fight. This is the reason fighters in Thailand place such emphasis on stance, footwork and balance. It is also important for a fighter not to look too tired; gasping for breath and looking exhausted can cost a boxer the fight.

Judges are looking to award the fight to the strongest boxer in MuayThai terms. They are looking for evidence of the effect of techniques, mental strength, physical condition and technical ability. If a fighter is forced by his opponent to show weakness, extreme tiredness or any evidence of not wanting to fight, the judges will award the fight to their opponent.

Fighters will normally lose a round if they:

- Turn their back on an opponent showing fear (In Thailand turning away from a fighter would result in a fighter losing the fight and not only the round)
- Avoiding fighting – this does not include protecting points when a boxer is ahead in the last round, which is a legitimate tactic
- Commit repeated fouls on their opponent
- Use spoiling tactics or avoid being hit using fouls this includes, dropping to the floor when their leg is grabbed or in the clinch to avoid being countered and grabbing the ropes with intention of getting the referee to break the clinch.

I recently interviewed a good friend of mine and top Rajadamnern referee Wan Chai Prowsee. One of the discussion points was the very point I made above, regarding the effectiveness of different MuayThai weapons. Initially he repeated the usual and official response given by officials in Thailand; every technique scores the same. However, knowing that is not the full picture, I pressed him again. In the end he conceded that it is easier to score with effective kicks and knees to quote his words because “punch is international [boxing] “ but “kick is the logo [sic] of MuayThai”.

Scoring

Scores are recorded by awarding ten points to the winner of the round and proportionally less for the loser (usually nine points in practise). Points are often awarded as follows:

- 10-10: Can't pick a winner
- 10-9: One boxer clearly wins a round
- 10-9: Both boxers are knocked down but one clearly wins the rest of the action
- 10-8: A knock down (8-count)
- 10-8: Total domination throughout the round by one boxer
- 10-7: Two knock downs (8-count)

(It is possible for different point allocations to be awarded, depending on other action in the round)

Who wins the fight?

In interviews with a number of top MuayThai officials in Thailand - conducted for PhD research- all senior officials have been very consistent in their description and application of scoring criteria. Interestingly both Radom Na Bangchang, Associate Professor and Technical Director over referees (in Thailand the term referee is a generic term that refers to an individual who referees and judges) at Lumpinee Boxing stadium and Wan Chai Prowsee, who I mentioned earlier is a top referee from Rajadamnern (and who teaches referees), both used the analogy of a running race or marathon to explain the scoring in professional MuayThai. They explain that although one boxer may begin strongly and dominate early in the fight, it's the finish that is important and a boxer behind early can be overtaken. Unlike amateur fights and international boxing or kickboxing, professional fights are judged as a whole emphasis is given to a fighter finishing "the race" ahead.

Although all rounds are scored, often when both boxers are fresh the early rounds can be close and not involve one boxer dominating. As such, round one is often scored 10:10 in a five round contest - although still judges make a mental note of the boxer who edged the round for later reference. This is the case unless one boxer has very clearly wins that round with an

eight-count or the use of a number of very good scoring techniques. Rounds three, four and five are often the most important rounds in determining the fight's result. This is where the accumulative effect of shots can start to become clear. Clear decisions are therefore generally made for these rounds. In indecisive rounds, or where the fight "swings" from one boxer to the next, the mental notes made in the first, or first and second rounds are used to help determine the outcome. Again, it is important to understand that the whole fight is judged to decide the outcome of a fight. If a fighter gets knocked down by a concussive blow or takes a count at any time during the fight, they will lose two points (10:8) on all judges score cards. If the knocked down fighter otherwise dominated the round or fought back strongly after the knock down they might only lose the round by one point (10:9).

The winner of the fight on an individual judge's score card is awarded the greatest number of points. However, it is usual for judges to make notes during a fight and complete the scoring for rounds after the fight has finished; although this is may not be considered to be good practice by some associations and is impossible in championship bouts in Thailand where score cards are collected after each round.

Having the experience to anticipate what might happen is a valued judging skill; it requires real experience and knowledge to be able to assess early on which fighter might eventually win and so not to award points "too easily early in the bout".

Fouls

It can be argued that the strict rules and regulations that now govern MuayThai can be traced back to the death of Jia Kaegkhmen at Lak Muang Arena in 1926. Jia died because no clear rules existed that allowed the referee to intervene when he clung to the ropes dying but refusing to give in. At that time international style boxing gloves were not the norm, fighters bound their hands with hemp rope (Kaad Chuek) and fought until one fighter gave up or was not able to continue. There were few rules; kicking, punching, kneeing, throwing, head butts, gouges and chokes were all freely used. Although Kaad Chuek fights continued after Jia's death, the introduction of

international boxing gloves and the removal of the more dangerous techniques began with that tragedy. With the adoption of international style boxing gloves and timed rounds, out went head-butts (still legal in Burmese boxing), chokes, gouges and bites. Since this time, often as a result of safety concerns, other techniques have been phased out. For example, when the legendary kneeing specialist Diesel Noi competed in the 1980s, it was legal to knee the groin area. The knee to the groin was in fact his most effective weapon winning many fights with this technique. It is no longer legal for a boxer to knee their opponent's testicles.

Fouls include:

- Throwing an opponent using the hip, shoulder or leg (as used in Judo)
- Wrestling, back or arm locks or any similar judo or wrestling hold
- Using trips and sweeps. It is legal to kick an opponent off their feet. It is possible to hook the foot and kick as long as it's a kicking action
- Grabbing the lower back, forcing an opponent's spine to hyperextend
- Grabbing the ropes to kick, knee or punch an opponent
- Using the ropes as a weapon
- Attempting to 'pile-drive' an opponent's head into the canvas while taking more than two steps
- Catching an opponent's kick and pushing an opponent for more than two steps without attempting to deliver an attacking technique. However, there is no rule on the number of steps a fighter can take stepping backwards.
- Not fighting; this includes a fighter turning their back on an opponent, running away and dancing backwards away from an opponent and avoiding fighting (although when a boxer has clearly won they can be seen not to fight only backing off and teeping to protect their points lead. additionally boxers sometimes chose not to punish their opponent further if their opponent has conceded the fight).
- Biting, eye gouging, spitting, or head butting.
- Swearing or the use of abusive language during the match.

- Knocking out or injuring an opponent after the referee has ordered the match to stop for any reason.
- Deliberately striking the groin area (although this is still a contentious issue; the World MuayThai Council rules state it is a foul but it is not identified in the Boxing Board of Sport rules). After considerable debate and questioning of top officials in Thailand they conceded it is not a foul in the rules, but is not in the spirit of the sport to deliberately attack the groin with the real intent. However, teeping the groin area or an accidental kick hitting the groin is not a foul and requires no consideration to be given to the fighter who has been kicked. For example, by a kick that hits the groin but was intended as an inside thigh kick is not a foul and would be forced to continue or be counted. A boxer, who the referee considers to have been kneed in the groin deliberately with force, may request a 5 minute break before continuing the match. A boxer considered by the referee to be faking an injury from a groin kick would be asked to continue to fight and may receive a warning or a count.
- Any aggressive act by the boxer or seconds against the referee

Decisions

Professional

A Knock-Out (K.O. but perhaps better described as a count out) is awarded:

- When the opponent is knocked down and unable to continue within the 10 second count and the referee actually counts to ten.

A Technical Knock-Out (T.K.O.) is awarded:

- When a boxer is seriously hurt or weakened
- When the referee stops the contest before 10 is counted due to the condition of the counted boxer. For example, if a fighter is knocked immediately unconscious and the referee considers their condition too serious to start to count.
- When a boxer cannot continue the match after the break.

- On the doctor's recommendation, when the referee is unsure whether a boxer can continue the match due to injury or being seriously weakened.
- Receiving a count three times in the same round or five counts in the whole fight.

Winning due to the opponent's retirement because of injury

- If a fighter is injured, by anything other than a deliberate foul, and they can't carry on their opponent wins. This is not a 'no decision' it is a TKO to the boxer who can carry on. If the injury is the result of a deliberate foul, the boxer committing the foul loses by disqualification.

Winning due to the opponent's violation of the rules

- A serious foul can result in immediate disqualification as can continuous breaches of the rules.

Winning on points

- The fighter with two or more judges scoring the fight to them wins on points.

No decision is awarded:

- As a result of both parties colluding to cheat or not fighting properly.

No contest is awarded:

- As a result of the ring being damaged and the match not being able to continue, or if an external event occurs during the fight, causing it to be stopped

Equal Score - a draw

- When both boxers' scores are equal
- When both boxers receive a count of 10

Technical implications for fighters and coaches training in MuayThai

The way in which MuayThai fights are judged does have a number of implications for training if you are fighter or a coach. Maintaining position and balance are so important in preventing your opponent scoring well and in your own scoring that correct stance and footwork can be considered to be

the foundations of MuayThai. It is important that the use of a good balanced stance and guard position becomes automatic, and when you deliver a technique you always return quickly and efficiently to your guard position. This is important to protect yourself, because your opponent will look to counter attack as you finish your attack, without quickly and automatically returning to a guard position you are unlikely to be in a position to be able to block and may well be caught off balance by your opponent's technique resulting in a good score for your opponent.

Good footwork allows you to use the weapons and defences in MuayThai very quickly and efficiently. It is important to be able to deliver a technique in a balanced and effective way, always controlling your body before, during and after delivery. A good stance allows your movement to be economic and allows you to smoothly deliver a series of techniques, as necessary, one after the other as targets present themselves. It can be a real disadvantage to dance around if you have poor balance, as some boxers do in western style amateur boxing, if a boxer doing this is caught even by a glancing kick it can score really well as the fighter can be easily off balanced. Dynamic balance is also a really essential skill to prevent being unbalanced, thrown or kicked down easily. In MuayThai it is a foul to throw yourself on the floor when your leg is caught so you need to practice how not to get kicked to the floor and try to avoid going down; remaining on your feet when your kick is caught and not getting thrown to the floor is an important skill to cultivate. Footwork and balance are also essential when in the clinch. Training should always involve clinchwork where footwork and balance are a priority but also where you practice locks and knees against your opponent along with counters to arm, neck and body grabs and locks. If you can't counter these or are not able to maintain your balance when grabbed you are likely to get thrown down by your opponent.

It is also important to manage your energy levels closely in a fight. If you attack continuously without monitoring how deeply you are dipping into your anaerobic reserves too early in the fight you could well not be able to recover fully in the rest period and not be able to maintain your position towards the end of the fight. Practice in doing this is essential. Practice in monitoring how tired you are when delivering techniques is important.

Attacking while you feel strong and then using defensive techniques such as teep while you recover is an important skill if you want to be able to maintain strength throughout the fight.

Looking for openings and testing your opponent's responses to techniques is an important skill to practice. Noticing how your opponent holds their guard, looking to see if their weight is evenly distributed or more on their back foot making it difficult to block etc. Testing an opponent's defences for example, by throwing a jab or a quick low kick to see if they escape or stand and block and counter is also a useful skill to cultivate. Taking advantage of your opponent's weaknesses is important and so is an ability to create an opening for your techniques. When selecting techniques to deliver the techniques you choose should be dictated by your own strengths and the scoring criteria. If you have knockout power in your hands and are able to deliver very effective low kicks that can hurt or move your opponent a punching and low kick strategy may well be appropriate. However, it is often easier to score with knees and body kicks and so practicing creating openings for these techniques can be very useful.

This notion is supported by data I collected for a study conducted on the technique application and delivery of elite Thai boxers. Although there were differences in styles used by boxers with some favouring technique that suited their particular strengths, there were some important similarities in a number of things associated with the boxer's technique delivery and balance after technique delivery – things that reflect important scoring principles. The study suggests that the frequency of particular attacking techniques closely followed scoring criteria. More than half of all attacking techniques delivered by the elite Thai boxers were kicking techniques (55.72%) or kneeing strikes (14.4%) with a large percentage of these kicks and knees (84.33%) used to attack the head and body. This reflects the importance of these techniques and targets in MuayThai scoring criteria. The importance of balance both before and after technique delivery was also highlighted by the results. A high proportion of techniques (99.80%) were delivered on balance with boxers generally returning to a balanced stance immediately after technique delivery (94.7%).

An additional skill that is not practiced that often outside of Thailand, but worth cultivating, is the skill of 'protecting your points' when you are ahead in the closing stages of a fight. This means being able to defend well so your opponent can't turn the fight when you are clearly ahead. If you are ahead you need to prevent your opponent using scoring with any really effective techniques and winning the fight. You need to practice preventing your opponent kicking you to the ground or repeatedly scoring with body kicks for example. Practice in protecting points should be included as part of sparring where you practice fighting moving backwards, fighting off the ropes. Closely monitoring your opponent's footwork along with blocking, evading and teeping are key techniques in this.

Overall match decision

In professional fights the outcome of a match is determined by considering the majority of decisions given by the judges and not by adding the judges' point totals together. This is the case even if the judges award a draw. Therefore, if two out of three judges' award the fight to the blue corner, the blue corner would be awarded the match; if two out of three judges award the match a draw, a draw would be declared.

Finally...

To sum up, scoring in MuayThai is different to kickboxing and some other combat sports. The number of clean techniques that land combined with their relative effect that is important in determining the winner of a fight. 'Effective' is only a useful concept in scoring if it is easily defined and agreed upon, in MuayThai it generally refers to causing an opponent to lose their position or balance or show they are hurt. A number of techniques are considered by judges to be more effective than others. MuayThai fights are judged as a whole and it is important that a boxer finishes strongly.

If you are a coach or fighter, it is important to have a clear understanding of MuayThai scoring and rules and this should inform your training or coaching. Understanding what techniques score and how to score well is essential for a fighter and coach. It would be unthinkable for a football

player and coach not to understanding how to score in football and it should be equally unacceptable in MuayThai. You are at a serious disadvantage if your opponent knows how to score and you or your coach do not. There are hundreds of excellent gyms in Thailand who welcome westerners with open arms and will teach all the necessary skills required to be successful in scoring as well as a growing number of gyms elsewhere. Make sure you a well informed fighter or coach and are not just left guessing what it takes to win.

If you watch a fight on TV, at a show, or judge a fight yourself and want to judge it accurately as it is done in Thailand, you need to be very familiar with the rules of MuayThai, have an understanding what good MuayThai technique looks like, and look objectively at what happens in the fight and not be influenced by the crowd. Hopefully this article will have help clarify some of the mystery that can surround MuayThai judging.