NAI KANOM THOM CEREMONY, AYUTTHAYA, 17.03.09

The 17th of March is known in Thailand as ‘Boxers’ Day’ or ‘Wan Muay Thai’. It is believed to have been on this day in 1774 that the captured Thai soldier, Nai Kanom Thom, won his freedom by defeating 10 successive Burmese opponents. The Burmese King was so stunned by Thom’s performance which used pure Muay Thai technique that he made the rare clemency offer to mark his admiration and respect.

Around 300 enthusiasts of Thai Martial Arts from over 30 countries had been attending a series of special courses in Muay Thai, Muay Boran, Krabi Krabong and Muay Kah Chuak over 4 days in Ayutthaya. The courses were part of the 5th World Thai Martial Arts Festival organized by AITMA and KMA in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Sport, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Ayutthaya Provincial Authority.

important element of the sport and art of Muay Thai. One should always be aware and appreciate the knowledge, skills and teaching of his/her coaches and the generations of teachers who have gone before to allow the continued dissemination of these rare skills. Today this large group of Muay Thai practitioners has gathered to pay homage to one of the art's most important heroes, Nai Kanom Thom at the statue the Ayutthaya Provincial Authority has erected to honour their local hero.

There was a suitably epic sense of occasion as 6 modern day Grandmasters atop huge elephants led the lines of their adherents across a field to the statue of Nai Kanom Thom. Each person bowed and wai-ed in turn at the feet of Nai Kanom Thom to pay respect and to invoke his spirit to assist their own future teaching of Muay Thai.

As the ceremony concluded, a series of exhibition fights and displays was performed by participants in the Festival. Students from the Lebanon, Iraq, Italy and Sri Lanka to name just four showed not just great skill in performing various Muay Thai techniques but also a keen appreciation of the place the art has in Thai culture and history. Children from local schools similarly showed great control and fantastic technique as they gave exhibitions of traditional unarmed Thai combat, sword and staff fighting as well as contemporary adaptations such as Muay Thai aerobics. One sensed that Nai Kanom Thom would feel much pride in the inheritance and promotion of his skills by these people here today.

Later on, modern ring Muay Thai took centre stage with the organization of a programme of bouts featuring many of those who had participated in the Festival. The main event was a 57kg match between Jesper Jorgensen of Denmark and Surasit Poongarmngen of Thailand for the vacant IMC World title. Alas the bout proved something of a mis-match with the Dane having little response to the skill and aggression of the very determined Thai. His corner threw in the towel in the 3rd round to save their man from further punishment.

So, the day encompassed all facets of Muay Thai, ancient and modern. It would be remembered with pride by all in attendance as they go out into the world and continue to spread

the good word of Muay Thai.