

Prison Fight Round 4 - press conference

Written by Administrator

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Last Friday, Bangkok's Klong Prem Prison opened its doors for arguably the strangest fighting event in all of Asia

, if not the world.

Thai prisoners, many of them hardened by years of incarceration, were pitted against free foreign fighters in both Muay Thai and traditional boxing bouts. Both sides were competing for a little cash, but the Thai prisoners were also fighting for their lives, literally.

Prisoners who win a championship and thereby bring glory to the prison have a realistic shot at having their sentences commuted. The organizer said this goes for any prisoner regardless of the magnitude of their crime, but he was also quick to point out that prisoners are judged from a

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holistic perspective that incorporates their behavior outside of the ring. That said, it doesn't diminish the gravity of what's at stake.

View the Coconuts slideshow of the Prison Fight below. Click the expand button second from left for an optimized fullscreen viewing experience. Photos: Alexander Hotz

The tradition of holding tournaments in Thai prisons started in 1767 when thousands of Thai soldiers were taken prisoner by the Burmese after the downfall of Thailand's then capital Ayutaya. While incarcerated the best Thai boxers had to then fight against Burmese boxing champions. The ultimate champion, as legend tells it, was a Thai fighter, Nai Khanomtom, whose win so astonished the Burmese king that he granted him his freedom.

The incorporation of foreigners is a new concept dreamed up by an independent organization [Prison Fight](#)

. The first prison fight was on January 6, 2013 at Pak Chong Prison and, like all of its events, was put on in partnership with Thailand's Department Of Corrections.

Prison Fight brands itself as a charity organization and its fights as charity events. Organizers told us they provide prisoners with sport equipment, some cash, and, of course, a serious chance at having their sentences reduced.

The event itself was nothing if not utterly surreal. Held in one of the prison's courtyards, the fighting took place in a traditional elevated ring situated under a tin roof. In the battered bleachers sat a couple hundred prisoners. Boisterous and chummy, they were in good humor despite the brutal heat. The best seats, close to the ring and out of the sun, were reserved for the wardens, senior officials and doe-eyed press. A luk thung band provided the music and three dolled up ladyboy prisoners reveled in their role as ring girls.

Frankly, this spectacle is best seen rather than read about. The experience of stepping into a maximum security prison with over 20,000 inmates to watch fights with ruthless consequences is just as uncomfortable as it is utterly thrilling.

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Put it on your bucket list.

And the results? Every fight was won by a Thai inmate apart from one of the Muay Thai matches, which was won by Marco from Sicily, and one of the boxing matches, which was won by a Frenchman named Muhammed.

