

# MUAYTHAI ONLINE มวยออนไลน์

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## Muaythai Judging Introduction

By Tony Myers

*The author, Tony Myers is an experienced referee and Judge as well as an experienced MuayThai coach. He has judged and refereed at national, international and world level, in Britain, Europe and Thailand; this year being 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, an International Federation of MuayThai Amateur (IFMA) amateur refereeing and judging qualification. He also runs refereeing and judging courses, as well as being a senior referee and judge for, the British Thai Boxing Council, the World MuayThai Organisation and Scottish MuayThai Federation. In addition he also referees and judges for some Showsport International events.*

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It is essential for fighters, coaches and officials to understand how their sport is judged. It would be unthinkable that football players would not have a rudimentary understanding of the rules of football, or were not sure where and how they score.

However, this is the case, on occasion, in MuayThai. When refereeing, I have often had blank looks from fighters when warning them not to trip an opponent, grab the ropes or grab the lower spine. I have had anger and disbelief from cornermen when their fighter has been disqualified for using a hip throw and injuring an opponent. There is often real confusion, even amongst those involved in the sport, 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

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"punches don't score", "Leg kicks are the most important kicks for scoring", "throws don't count", to "the scoring is the same as international boxing and kickboxing". All these statements are untrue and highlight the confusion 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, 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 European fans of the sport, I soon realised I was not on my own; a number non-Thai spectators didn't fully understanding how the MuayThai was 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 have refereed and judged 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. I hope your enjoyment of fights will be enhanced a little by this article.

### ***On to International Competition***

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The article deals primarily with the rules and scoring of "A" or "open class" 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 Great Britain 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.

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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. 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 Great Britain, "C" class "professional" fights are fought over three rounds of two minutes in duration with a minute break in between rounds and do not allow elbows or knees to be delivered to the head or face. "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. In Britain even some "A" class fights are fought without allowing elbows to the head, although the use of elbows is becoming far more common. "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).

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Thailand and internationally often depends on the MuayThai experience of the officials involved in the association. The rules and scoring discussed in this article will 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, Thailand has set the international standard for rules, which now most counties are tending to follow.

Confusion can arise when kickboxing organisations that use rules similar to MuayThai but whose officials who have little experience of MuayThai; kickboxing is a legitimate but different sport to MuayThai, with different rules and a different scoring system. Further confusion over rules and scoring has occurred because of Britain's strong links to Holland. Over the years the Netherlands have produced some tremendous fighters, with a number carving out very successful

professional careers in Thailand. However, Dutch Thai boxing rules and regulations have been dominated by kickboxing bodies like the NKBB and by gyms like Thom Harinck's famous Chakuriki gym that has a background in Knockdown Karate and kickboxing. This has resulted in the vast majority of fights in Holland being judged in a vastly different way to fights in Thailand. A clicker count system is often employed by judges in Holland, with judges counting the number of strikes each fighter delivers; this is vastly different than the scoring system employed in Thailand. Strong punching and low kicks tend to dominate Dutch MuayThai; less emphasis is given to the knee or body kicks (although there is some evidence this is changing), both primary scoring weapons in Thailand. In addition to differences in scoring, grabbing the ropes is a tactic regularly employed to escape clinchwork and hip throws are frequently employed; the use of both techniques in Thailand can result in disqualification. With a number of British fighters competing in Holland, and the wide availability of video tapes of top Dutch champions in action competing under Dutch rules, has had an influence on understanding and interpretation of rules.

### ***On to What Techniques Score?***

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strike from another form of martial art. To produce a good score the technique should have a visible effect on an opponent. If a technique strikes the opponent's arms or shin, then generally the technique doesn't score. However, there are exceptions. For example, if a kick makes contact with a fighter's arm and physically moves the person being kicked or causes them to lose balance, solely due to the kick's power, that kick would score; although not as highly as a kick that had the same effect but cleanly made contact with the body.

The most important or best scoring techniques in MuayThai are those that have the greatest effect on the opponent. In both amateur and professional competition it is not the number or variety of techniques delivered but their effectiveness that is important in determining the winner of a fight. Therefore, 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 very best scoring techniques include:**

There are a number of techniques that judges in Thailand consider to be the best scoring techniques. These are the primary techniques that win fights, they include:

- Knocking an opponent to the floor with a concussive blow (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)

- 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

  - Throwing an opponent to the canvas using a legal throw

- An attacking technique or combination that results in an opponent turning their back on the attacking boxer.

Although judges are looking for overall effectiveness and dominance, 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. 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.

Judges are looking to award the fight to the strongest fighter. 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, 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 (In Thailand turning away from a fighter would result in a fighter losing the fight and not only the round)

  - Run or dance away rather than standing and fighting

  - Committing repeated fouls on their opponent

- Use spoiling tactics or avoid fighting 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.

Just because techniques make contact with a legitimate target doesn't mean they will score.

**Techniques don't result in a point difference if:**

- They are weak and not delivered with force and on balance

- They are immediately countered by an equally strong technique

- They can be walked through by the opponent with little effect (e.g. an advancing boxer looking to attack, walking through a series of combination punches to deliver a strong kick would result in no score for the boxer delivering the punches)

**Techniques that can result in a point difference include:**

Techniques that cause a boxer to stop advancing and where that boxer doesn't counter attack immediately

Techniques that cause a boxer to cover up and not attempt to fight back (e.g. a boxer covers their body with a cross arm guard to avoid getting kneed and takes repeated strong knees to the arms or covers up using an international guard without fighting back)

Although the rules suggest that all techniques have an equal chance to score, certain techniques are favoured by judges as being more effective than others. Judges generally consider:

strong body kicks and well timed teeps (pushing kicks) that cause a loss of balance to be more effective than leg kicks (unless the low kick knocks an opponent off their feet or causes them visible injury)

Strong knees as more effective than punches (unless the punch staggers or drops an opponent)

Straight knees to be more effective than circle knees

Elbow strikes as not being particularly effective, unless they cut, stagger or drop an opponent.

So a number of techniques are favoured over others by judges when scoring, and the techniques listed in the best scoring section are considered particularly important. Even if a fighter is fractionally behind in a round, and they deliver one of the techniques detailed in that section, they would clearly win that round. For example, if a fighter, slightly behind in round five of an otherwise equal fight, managed to throw their opponent off balance and follow with a strong knee, the technique would win the round and the fight for that fighter (unless the opponent countered later in the round with an equally good scoring technique).

**On to Fouls?**





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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 1. 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



fighters with this technique. It is no longer legal to 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. A kick is considered to be an action that uses the top of the foot and/or front of the shin. It is possible to hook the foot and kick as long as the top of the foot and/or shin, and not the side of the foot, make contact with the opponent's leg.

Grabbing the lower back, forcing an opponent's spine to hyperextend

Grabbing the ropes to kick, knee or punch an opponent

Deliberately using the ropes to defend or counter attack

Using the ropes as a weapon, for example pushing an opponent's face across the ropes in an attempt to cut them

Attempting to 'pile-drive' an opponent's head into the canvas

Catching an opponent's kick and pushing an opponent for more than three steps without attempting to deliver an attacking technique

Not fighting; this includes a fighter turning their back on an opponent, running away and dancing backwards away from an opponent

Biting, eye gouging, spitting, or head butting.

Deliberately falling on an opponent.

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 (A boxer, who the referee considers to have been hit in the groin 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

In amateur fights intentionally losing the mouth guard (gum shield)



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Firstly it is important to note that the professional and amateur fights are scored differently; professional fights are scored

using what is called a "ten point 'must' system" and amateur bouts are scored using a "twenty point 'must' system". There are also more fundamental differences in the scoring used in the professional and amateur sports, so the article will first explore scoring in the professional ring and then note any differences in the amateur system.

### Professional Fights

Wonchai, considered by many to be one of the best referees at Rajadamnern stadium, uses the analogy of a marathon race to explain the scoring in professional MuayThai. He explains 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 and rounds don't have equal emphasis, emphasis is given to a fighter finishing strongest over the last three rounds. Round one is generally scored 10:10 in a five round contest, although judges make a mental note of the boxer who edged the round for later reference. This is usually the case unless one boxer has very clearly dominated that round with a knockdown, eight-count or the use of a number of very good scoring techniques

The second round in a five round contest can also be scored

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10:10, if it is deemed to be a close round, or if the boxer who was behind in round one wins by a small margin. Rounds three, four and five are the most important rounds in determining the fight's result. Clear decisions are therefore 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 would only lose the round by one point (10:9).

The winner of the fight on an individual judge's score card will be awarded the greatest number of points. It is usual practice in scoring professional contests in Thailand for a judge to avoid awarding a total score of 50 points for one boxer; the maximum score for a fight usually being 49 points (although it is possible for a fighter to score 50). This means where there is a very clear difference between fighters, the fight is usually scored 49:47 and fights that are closer are scored 49:48. It is usual for judges to make notes during a fight and complete the scoring for rounds after the fight has finished. This is not the case in championship bouts in Thailand where score cards are collected after each round.

#### **Amateur Fights**

Amateur bouts are competed over four two minute rounds. In amateur bouts, unlike scoring in professional fights, each round is scored equally and is equally important. It is possible for a fighter to win an amateur bout and lose the final two rounds; this is extremely unlikely to happen in a professional fight. Most rounds in amateur bouts are scored 20:19. Only one point is deducted for a knockdown and not two as in professional fights.

### ***On to Decisions***

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## Muaythai Judging: Decisions

By Tony Myers

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**Professional A Knock - Out (K.O.) is awarded:**  
when the opponent is knocked down and unable to continue within

the 10 second count

**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  
 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 and unable to continue the match

**Winning due to the opponent's retirement because of injury**  
**Winning due to the opponent's violation of the rules**  
**Winning on points**

**No decision is awarded:**  
 as a result of both parties colluding together 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**  
 when both boxers' scores are equal  
 when both boxers receive a count of 10

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**Amateur** In Amateur competition the terms detailed above are also used to record the outcome of amateur bouts with a few exceptions, these are:

***Referee stops the contest (RSC) due to:***

a boxer being "out-classed" or is losing by a very wide margin.

a boxer receiving an injury so that they are unable to continue. The site of the injury is detailed on the score card (head or body)

a boxer receiving their "count limit"; three standing eight counts in one round or four in the span of the bout.

a boxer is being severely punished and unable to defend themselves

***A boxer wins by "withdrawal" when:***

their opponent intentionally withdraws from the contest due to injury or other reason.

***A boxer wins by "walk-over" when:***

their opponent doesn't show for the contest.

***A "draw" can be awarded in friendly competition or single elimination bouts but not in tournaments***

**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. Amateur matches are also determined by the majority decision of judges. However, in international competition a jury panel, made up of a number of senior officials, make the final decision after examining the judges score cards.

***On to Some common mistakes made when judging Muay Thai bouts, and how to avoid them***



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If you have to judge a fight yourself, it is worth being aware of the following common mistakes. Being

aware of these mistakes can help you avoid making them.

**Mistake 1: Your decision is influenced by the shouts, cheers and comments of others.**

It is easy to allow the crowd's cheers or a corner-man's praise to influence to your decision on whether a technique landed on target or not.

**Example:** A good kick is delivered and then you hear the cheers of the crowd and the congratulations from the corner. You presume the kick to has landed on target when it actually missed

**How to avoid this mistake:**

· Totally ignore the sounds at ringside and focus on looking carefully at each technique.

**Mistake 2: Presuming a technique scored, but not actually seeing it land.**

Marking a technique you saw being delivered and what seemed like an effect but which you didn't actually see land.

**Example:** A boxer has his back towards you when his opponent grabs his neck and delivers a series of knee techniques. Although you can't actually see the knees land the body of the boxer being attacked moves back as if it had taken a strong impact. You see what looks like an effect on the

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boxer being attacked; however, the fighter was merely pulling his body back to allow the knee to miss its intended target.

**How to avoid this mistake:**

· Only score techniques which you actually see land. If you are sitting at the wrong angle to see a technique actually land on target, don't presume it landed. Remember if it was a good scoring technique the other judges who are sitting at a different position will score it.

**Mistake 3: Being influenced by spectacular techniques**

Scoring a technique because it was spectacular but without really assessing it's effect.

**Example:** A boxer performs a jumping round kick and makes some contact with the opponent's face. You consider the technique to be a good because of the level of difficulty in delivering such a technique, when really the technique had no effect on the boxer being kicked as only the toes made weak contact.

**How to avoid this mistake:**

· Focus on how effective a technique is and not just on the technical quality or difficulty of delivery.

**Mistake 4:** Scoring a round based on the action which occurs in only at the beginning or end of that round.

Human memory is such that we tend to remember the first thing that happens (primacy effect) and the last thing that happens (recency effect). Humans also have a tendency to remember things which are out of the ordinary, among other things. It is therefore easy for high action which happens for a short period at the beginning or end of the round to influence scoring.

**How to avoid this mistake:**

Keep an ongoing mental record of the actual scoring as the round progresses.

**On to Summary**



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that are important in determining the winner of a fight. A number of techniques are considered by judges to be more effective than others; unbalancing an opponent and following up with a strong technique, knocking down or throwing an opponent onto the floor, hitting with clean hard kicks or knees to the body. In professional fights, the fights are judged as a whole and it is important that a boxer finishes strongly; the later rounds (3, 4 and 5) are the most important. In amateur fights each round is scored equally but judges are still looking for the dominant and most effective fighter. If you have to judge a fight yourself you need to be very familiar with the rules of MuayThai, have an understanding what good MuayThai techniques look like, look objectively at what happens in the fight and not be influenced by the crowd.

A final point, fighters train very hard for fights putting in many hours of training, they deserve to be judged by individuals who also train... to judge MuayThai. There are judging courses available both nationally and internationally. Internationally the

World Muaythai Council (WMC) and the International Federation of MuayThai Amateur (IFMA) offer courses in Thailand on judging. Nationally some associations also offer courses; the British Association of MuayThai officials (BAMTO), the United Kingdom MuayThai Federation (UKMF), Scottish MuayThai Federation, The World Muay Thai Organisation (WMTO) and the British Thai Boxing Council (BTBC).

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