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17th Annual Pacific Northwest Muay Thai Camp

Written by Dawn Schuldenfrei • Photographs by Scott M. Schuldenfrei

One hundred twelve people punched and kicked heavy bags, Thai pads, and each other under the supervision of Ajarn Surachai "Chai" Sirisute at the 17th Annual Pacific Northwest Muay Thai Camp. The camp, held near Rainier, Oregon, provided the kind of all-day full-immersion training rarely found outside of Thailand.

Ajarn Chai, the founder and president of the Thai Boxing Association (TBA) of the USA, has promoted Muay Thai in the United States since 1968. He has created a heritage of discipline, respect, and skill for students all over the world. He started the camp at the suggestion of his students, and it has become an important part of his legacy as a place for people to develop their full potential as martial artists.

Some of the TBA's top instructors helped him create and develop this legacy at the camp. Khun Kru Greg Nelson, Khun Kru Bryan

Photo 1



Photo 1: Instructors and students at the 17th Annual Pacific Northwest Muay Thai Camp.

Photo 2: Ajarn Chai keeps a close watch on his students.

Photo 3: From front to back: Khun Kru Bryan Dobler, Ajarn Dan Inosanto, Ajarn Chai, and Khun Kru Greg Nelson evaluate instructors testing for their next level.

Photo 4: Ajarn Dan Inosanto helps with timing drills.

Photo 2

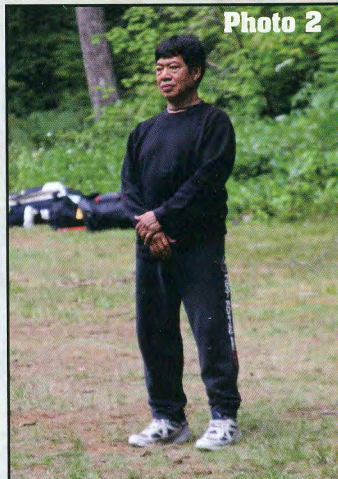
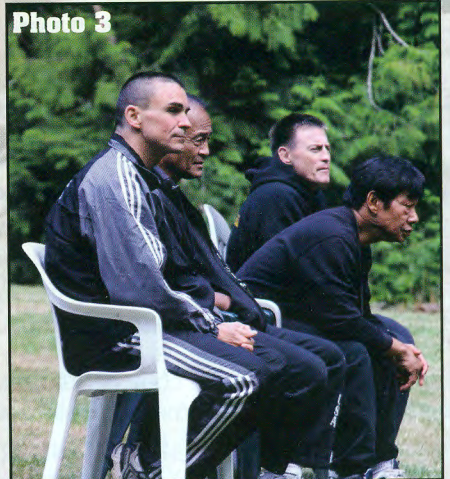


Photo 3



Dobler, and Punong Guro Leonard Trigg led daily technique classes. Khun Kru Nelson has trained with Ajarn Chai for many years and taught at the camp for the last several years. Besides his Muay Thai training, he has trained extensively and fought in Shoot Wrestling and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Khun Kru Dobler has practiced Muay Thai since he was a child and is a Muay Thai champion who has trained in Thailand. Punong Guro Trigg, the TBA's Northwest regional director who coaches both professional and amateur fighters in Western boxing, also is president of Lameco Eskrima International and an accomplished instructor of several martial arts.

Hundreds of martial artists apply to train at the camp each year, but attendance is limited to approximately 100 people in order to ensure quality instruction for everyone. Those selected this year, including twenty women, possessed a variety of skill levels. Some, such as Ajarn Dan Inosanto, have trained for decades; others, just a few months. As Khun



Kru Dobler said, "One of the benefits of camp is that you get to see so much of great instructors and great fighters."

Camp attendees who ran their own schools or taught elsewhere also refined their instructional methods. They experienced firsthand how others taught, and discovered what did and didn't work when teaching people with different learning styles. "This is a training ground for instructors," said Khun Kru Nelson.

Students arrived on a Thursday and settled into their accommodations—tents or six-bunk lean-tos called Adirondacks. Hundred-foot high evergreens surrounded a large grassy field where training took place. Up the short hill at the top of the field, a large open air building housed both the kitchen and heavy bag station. Two dozen heavy bags, a couple as soft and light as pillows, others as hard as

cement, hung from the building's immense rafters.

Weather always is a factor in any outside training, and summer temperatures in Oregon can reach into the 100s. Summer rains always are possible, as well. This year, though, campers were fortunate to have relatively mild days in the 80s and frequent clouds to block out the worst of the sun's heat.

At a meeting Thursday night, Ajarn Chai informed attendees that swearing would result in 500 pushups, and failing to bow to show respect would result in 100 pushups. Also, Ajarn Chai announced he would administer a written test at some unknown time, covering Muay Thai history and technique, and Thai vocabulary. Anyone failing the test would have to run three miles and do 100 pushups, 100 squat jumps, and 100 crunches.

Workouts began at 6:30 a.m. with a 1.5 mile run and thirty minutes of shadowboxing. Afterward came breakfast, then a break before the day's real training began.

Morning sessions, lasting three to four hours, focused primarily on technique. First, the whole camp practiced combinations with Ajarn Chai; then, it was split into two groups that took turns working with Khun Kru Nelson and Khun Kru Dobler.

Khun Kru Nelson instructed students on the plum, providing them the opportunity to repeatedly work the clinch, an important part of any Thai boxer's repertoire. "This is something that has to be worked continually," he said. "You have to systematically and progressively develop to the point where you're doing it because it's a reflex."

Khun Kru Dobler gave detailed instruction on stance and footwork. "There are so many great techniques in Muay Thai," he next person became "it," and the drill continued. Finally, everyone lined up on the hill, facing downward, for 30 eight-count bodybuilders, a conditioning exercise that is part pushup, part squat thrust. Only after all this, camp was dismissed for lunch.

Afternoon training started around 3 p.m. and lasted another four hours. Punong Guro Trigg started off with a Western boxing class, covering everything from range drills to punch combinations, and the strategy behind those combinations. He discussed learning techniques and developing a strong mental defense against other fighters' psychological tactics.

"I think [Western boxing] complements Thai boxing," said Punong Guro Trigg. "The foundation of boxing is beneficial. The fundamentals of a jab, straight right, or left hook, and footwork, all are very beneficial to Thai boxing, or any other art."

The campers then divided into groups that rotated through five different stations: heavy bags, shadowboxing, Thai

Photo 5

Photo 5: Working knees at the Thai pad station.

Photo 6
Photo 6: Ajarn Chai and Ajarn Inosanto at the certificate awarding ceremony.

pads, timing, sparring, and Khun Kru Nelson's clinch class. Each station lasted four three-minute rounds. They did two to three circuits of the stations.

The intensity really picked up during the circuit training. Students dodged pinecones, sticks, and gullies as they maneuvered around the field. Yells filled the air as the Thai boxers let fly with resounding kicks on the Thai pads and heavy bags. Meanwhile, from the main hall, drummers beat out a loud rhythmic accompaniment.

Afterward, Ajarn Chai directed more drills, such as additional timing sparring. Finally, there was another set of thirty downhill bodybuilders before dinner.

Such hard training helped students prove to themselves that they could succeed. It also helped them develop the discipline needed to reach their goals. "When they have discipline," Ajarn Chai said, "they can do anything they want."



Photo 7: Khun Kru Greg Nelson demonstrates the clinch.

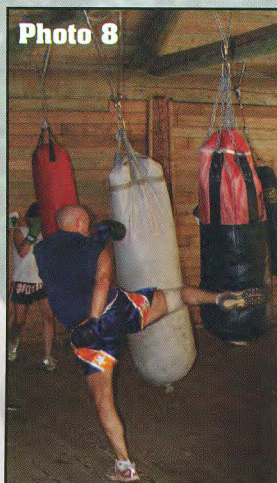


Photo 8: Hitting the heavy bags in the main hall.



Photo 9: Punong Guro Trigg holds the focus mitts to demonstrate a punch combination.

All instructors also practiced their teaching skills. They led small groups in basic technique training, and taught the ceremony traditionally performed by Thai boxers before a fight. "I want to make sure the instructors keep up discipline, and also that they have good form," explained Ajarn Chai, "and to see the way they teach."

"It's easy to be a teacher, but hard to be a good teacher. It takes a lot of time; it takes a lot of experience." Accordingly, instructors are required to test to be certified by the TBA. On Sunday afternoon, thirteen instructors tested for their next level; all passed. Everyone watched as they demonstrated the results of their practice and conditioning.

When not working out, students compared training notes and crammed for the upcoming test over plates piled with curry, larb, pad Thai, and other dishes prepared by Thai chefs. "For me," said Punong Guro Trigg, "the most important aspect of it is the camaraderie. There are literally people there from all walks of life, from all types of educational backgrounds, as well as different countries. I think it's very important to see that and to cooperate...and realize that you're all seeking the same outcome."

Training together and sharing meals, ibuprofen, and a variety of liniments created ties that will last beyond a few days in summer. As Khun Kru Dobler said, "I think it's really great to be around a lot of people who have the same passion that you do for the art of Muay Thai, and I think when you have that passion and those people surrounding you, it does nothing but grow more people with more passion."

At the Pacific Northwest Muay Thai Camp, Ajarn Chai helped his students acquire a better understanding of their goals and how to achieve them. He taught them how to push their limits, and how to pass on the art to which he has dedicated his life. He has created a network of people and schools committed to the promotion of Muay Thai. All who attended the camp returned home with improved form and technique, greater discipline, and increased passion for Muay Thai, which they carry with them whenever they interact with another martial artist, spreading the legacy ever onward. ➡

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