

Denise Vs Nattaya, WBC World Title match



MUAY THAI

WORLD SERIES LAUNCHES

MAI reports on the premiere event of a new Muay Thai fighting promotion that saw the **WBC** and **Songchai** join forces for the **Muay Thai World Series**.

A **WBC** world first crowned off the launch of one of the UK's most significant Muay Thai events. **The Muay Thai World Series** launched with a resounding success and not only showcased world class Muay Thai in a top venue, but managed to bring together some big names in the sport. Firstly, the venue being an old opera house now converted into an **O2 Academy**, offered probably the best setting in the country - with lighting and sound on par with prime TV events. The venue also boasted three floors for spectators to view from, giving everyone a prime view. The event was filmed for a mainstream

sports channel and, in this setting, will certainly help showcase the sport.

Muay Thai World Series is an evolution from promoter **Lorne Castle**'s previous events, **Fighting Force**, which have been shown regularly on **Sky Active Channel** and proved a great success. However, with the success of the main fighters growing year on year, it was realised that every event was featuring foreign fighters and Lorne even managed to bring the **WBC** to the UK, initially to enable **WBC** national belts to be awarded in the UK. With this evolution it seemed apparent that a clearer name was needed and, as the rules were Muay Thai, the



fighters were worldwide and there always was a series of events - **Muay Thai World Series** seemed obvious.

Gaining sponsorship from **Chang Beer** was a major step and so the **Chang Cup** was created as a stepping stone towards **WBC** titles. The **WBC** rules and regulations require all fights to be 5x3 mins of all weapons for any title bout - this was a great opportunity to follow **WBC** scoring, but create a B-Class step which is 5x2 mins with no elbows - this is the **Chang Cup**. All weight divisions are the same as **WBC**, as is the scoring, so it is a great way to work up.

This launch event was highlighted by the christening of a new weight category for **WBC** - the female **Minimum Weight World Title** was being contested for the first time ever with the UK's international champion, **Denise Mellor**, facing Thailand's **Songchai** champion, **Nattaya Kantasit**. This was of such importance for the Thai promoters that Songchai's daughter, **Pariyokorn Ratanasuban**, came to the UK for the first time ever to enable this to work. **Songchai Promotions** have been Thailand's biggest promotion for years, with crowds of thousands attracted to the events outside the palace so any



Denise Mellor and Nattaya Kantasit trading kicks, blows and elbows



Songchai champion is going to be a tough fight. **WBC Muay Thai**, in comparison, is smaller in Thailand, but with its growth and new weight categories **Songchai** is now looking to work together with **WBC** for events - with this UK event being the magnet that brought them together for the first time.

The main event was eagerly anticipated and was a true fight to remember, with both girls fighting until the end of the final round, showcasing world class Boxing and Kicking with dangerous use of elbows and knees. With nearly four times the fight experience and half the age Thailand's Nattaya was an unknown quantity, with not much video available on her - she brought 44 wins from Thailand, Japan and China with her... This was in contrast to UK super-athlete, Denise Mellor, whose Muay Thai career only started at 29, but since then she has fought in Bangkok, Tokyo Dome, Abu Dhabi, USA and all around Europe, gaining the **WBC International Champion Belt** and various others along the way. She has been given the title of **'Hardest hitting mother on Earth'** by the national press. The question of whether Mellor's athleticism from her

Denise Mellor performs her Wai Kru



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☛ Sally McCarthy evading a Jo Zebela low kick



☛ UFC striking coach, Phil Nurse

The co-main event was a **WBC International Challenge** between USA's **Brett Hlavacek** (coached **Phil Nurse**) and UK's **Harry Baker** from **Champions Gym** (also home to Denise Mellor). Both fighters being known for their skillful striking techniques, this was shaping up to be an exciting Super-Middleweight match.

The fighters stood at a similar height, toe-to-toe, with Hlavacek looking the heavier, having cut more to make the limit to 76.2kg - but with Baker looking the more toned and athletic. The first round started well for both fighters and it became clear from a couple of quick exchanges that both had the ability to stop the fight with high kicks after they both fired off a couple of warning shots that were evaded well. Hlavacek seemed the more confident as the fight

The undercard saw five **Chang Cup** matches, fought under slightly modified Muay Thai rules. First up was a female match between **WBC** flyweight and multiple junior champion, **Sally McCarthy (Champions Gym, Bournemouth)** and KO sensation, **Jo Zebela (King Gym)**. Although newer to the sport, Zebela comes from a strong gymnastics background and has KO power in the bantamweight division, winning by KO in her previous fight. McCarthy had a height and reach advantage from the face-off, but the muscle tone in Zebela was a clear danger. From the bell, McCarthy stamped her authority with sharp and accurate Boxing, knocking Zebela back in an early exchange. However, the Southampton fighter was not put off and smashed in low kicks to McCarthy's front thigh. The fight continued like this, with McCarthy dangerous at range, but when Zebela managed to draw her in to a close exchange, she was constantly dangerous, landing strong hooks and low kicks. At the end of the fight, McCarthy had managed to control the majority and won points by

years of professional distance running, fitness competing and Muay Thai would overcome a born-and-bred fighter from the mother-nation was about to be answered.

On first comparison at the weigh in, it was clear Denise had the height advantage and that Nattaya had very strong kicking legs. Both fighters performed a fantastic Wai Kru and Ram Muay before the fight, showing the crowd that both had



☛ Denise Mellor and Raymond Dekkers

great composure, balance, agility and strength. As this fight was about to start the commentary team was joined by guest commentator, **Phil Nurse (UFC striking coach to John Jones and GSP)**, along with Muay Thai superstar, **Ramon Dekkers**, who was presenting the belt.

From the first round it was clear that Kantasit was devastating with her right kick, which she threw fast and hard with perfect technique. However, this was expected by Mellor and her game-plan to put Kantasit on the back foot worked well. Denise beat Nattaya to the shot 8-out-of-10 times by closing the distance and countering with Boxing accurately - and when the kick did get through it was blocked with perfect technique. As the rounds progressed, Mellor became more aggressive and worked elbows into her combinations and attacks which Kantasit took like the seasoned pro she is. Switching tactics in later rounds, Kantasit started to attack the lead leg of Mellor as she closed the range, but this did not faze the UK athlete who has an elite level of conditioning and, as Kantasit tired, Mellor managed to manipulate her clinch position to deliver some strong knees to the head. Nattaya came straight in from the bell on round 3 with her most aggressive attack of



☛ Harry Baker fires a high kick at Brett Hlavacek

the fight, showing that she is always dangerous - not even waiting to touch gloves. Denise blocked and remained unfazed and waited for the time to re-take the fight her way which she did, again with Boxing and a strong clinch. At the end of the fight Denise was granted the win by unanimous decision, winning every round in all judges eyes. She managed to dominate and control in every area and utilize every weapon to greater effect. In winning this **WBC World Title Belt** against **Songchai's** strongest challenger, Denise Mellor became the undisputed champion at -45kg and now is looking at where to go from here. Pro-Boxing may be on the cards, with an interesting fight already offered, subject to the **BBBoFC** license.



☛ A kick exchange between Harry Baker [UK] and Brett Hlavacek [USA]

progressed, often putting Baker on the back foot, which negated his power, but when Baker did engage, he was effective with both Boxing and kicking. By round 3, it was apparent that the USA champion had worked out an effective strategy of staying out of range until he saw an opening to advance and work Baker to the ropes, where he could use his advantage in weight and strength. However, Baker was able to work strong side elbows to Hlavacek's temple, making him keep in closer and less effective. By the final bell, the crowd had witnessed another world class five rounds of full Thai rules but, with a clear points victory, Hlavacek took the **WBC** belt back to the USA.

making it her fight. A great performance from Zebela though, who will prove a great fighter with more experience.

Another exciting fight that was a crowd pleaser was between **Bernie Mendieta (Champions, Bournemouth)** and **Richie Harding (LokBor Aye, Southampton)**. After a hard hitting first round, the fight was stopped early in the second due to a cut on Mendieta above the left eye, giving Richie the win via cut stoppage - a great fight that needs a rematch.

The nights only KO was seen between slick striker **Liam Barker (Thaiworks)** and **Simeon Elliott** from Portsmouth. Elliott came

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Hlavacek lands a low kick



KO shot by Liam Barker to Simeon Elliott for the Middleweight Chang Cup



USA victory for the WBC International Challenge



(www.Muay Thaiworldseries.com) along with **WBC champion workshops** and martial arts superstar seminars. For details, or to put a fighter forward, call promoter **Lorne Castle** on **07414003001**.

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UK Bantamweight Chang Cup Champion Sally McCarthy

to the fight right off his own KO of Barker's team-mate, **Turland**, but this match ended the other way. Barker is a slick and dangerous striker who had Elliotts number from the first bell. Within the first exchange the ref was forced to step in after a crisp Boxing strike dazed Elliott, who didn't make the standing count.

A very close **Chang Cup** was fought between **Alex Thomas** and **Ross Smith**, who had a good height advantage against Thomas, the stockier fighter. Round 1 showed that Thomas had the higher work rate and he put Smith on the back foot with crisp Boxing combinations, ending with a heavy low kick that showed great effect by being thrown so hard it turned Smith. Smith kept great composure though throughout the fight and showed moments of great skill - especially on catching Thomas's kick and taking down. In the end, though, a split decision gave Thomas the win for greater effect for the duration of each round.

The final **Chang Cup** match saw another split decision between **Planet Combat's Ryan Nash** and Dorchester's **James Freeman**. Nash had some great knee work and even threw some perfect jumping knees,

but Freeman was striking with strong and wild Boxing. Kick-for-kick, both guys were pretty even, so the decision was very close and a hard one to split, but Freeman received the win in another great fight.

The opening half of the show showcased some great newer talent and also a few junior fights, giving all levels of fighter a chance to appear on this event.

The launch of **Muay Thai World Series** was a great success, bringing together **WBC** and **Songchai** for the first time. Future events will be announced via the website

