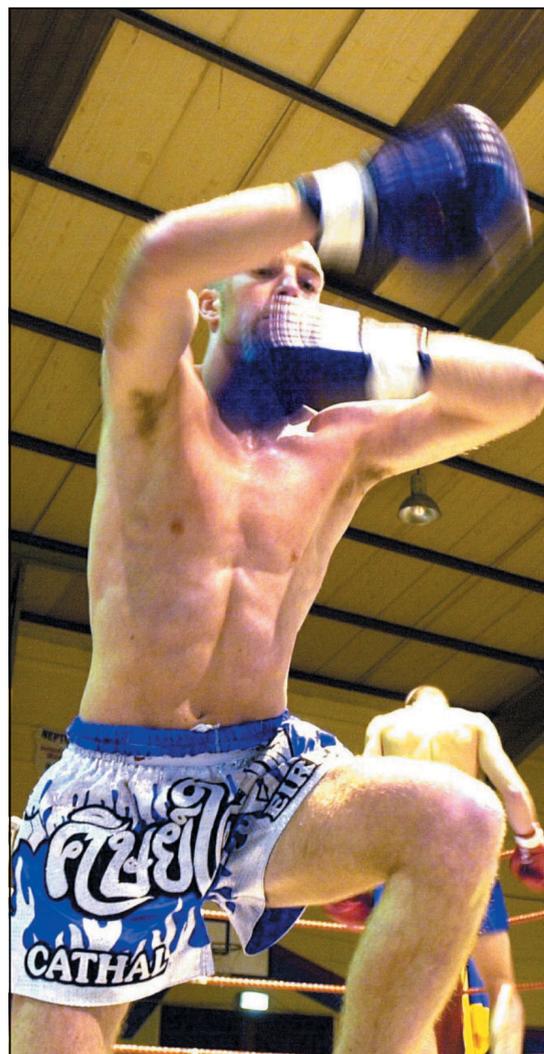


Thai get a kick out of you



Cathal Foley does his pre-fight ritual before his bout against Alan Jameson.



Cork's Andrew O'Brien (blue shorts) in trouble against Darran Dowdall of Dublin. Picture: Gavin Browne

Kickboxing makes a big impression in Neptune show

IN a couple of years of covering boxing for this paper I've never feared that one or both fighters might come over the ropes and fall on top of me.

Within 20 seconds of the first bell of Muay Thai boxing on Saturday, I was getting worried.

Several times over the four or so hours of fighting, the contestants teetered on the top rope and seemed ready to tip over. Sometimes, a ring-side seat ain't all it's cracked up to be.

Yet, there is a razzmatazz to Thai boxing that has definitely been lost in the sweet science itself. And maybe that, in part, accounted for the packed Neptune Stadium on Saturday.

There is the unremitting Thai drumbeat that played throughout each contest. Many of the combatants enter with multi-coloured leis and headbands (called mung kong) that look like bicycle locks — an outfit that makes them look like Hawaiian Hula girls.

Then there is the ritual (a sort of Thailand haka) before each fight: plodding around the ring to touch each post or crouching on the ground and summoning up the spirit of Geronimo.

Unlike boxing, where contestants will often try to stare down an opponent during the pre-fight time in the ring, Thai boxers seem almost oblivious that they will, in a few seconds, be fighting at all.

One fighter does some imaginary shovelling of snow; the other does an air-doggie-paddle less than a foot away.

This means that the fighters can be in the ring anything up to five minutes before the action gets underway. Another five minutes break between most contests means that 13 bouts is too many for one evening and the night can grow a little monotonous.

Which is a shame because the action itself is never dull.

Defence in Thai boxing is not the all-important creed that it is in boxing; it is difficult to be aware of all four of your opponent's limbs at any one time so attack really is the best form of defence.

In boxing, you don't take your gaze off your opponent's eyes so you can tell what he is going to do before even he knows what he is thinking of doing. If you do this in Thai boxing, before you know it your opponent's big toe is in your nostril. Outside of Riverdance I hadn't known that Irish people could lift their legs this high.

The opening fight saw first blood go to Cork. It lasted 39 seconds.

Denis O'Brien sent a flurry of



Cork Thai Boxer (red shorts), Stephen O'Connell kicks the leg of Dave McVickar from England in an International Thai Boxing bout at Neptune Stadium. Picture: Gavin Browne

By ROBERT O'SHEA
At Neptune Stadium

punches and kicks toward Galway's Colin Keady who went into a fetal position in the corner. As more blows from each of the Corkman's limbs rained down on him he crumbled and keeled to the canvas. The towel was thrown in and a dazed Keady had to be seen by the doctor.

Another fearsome display by Darren Dowdall from Dublin stopped local Andrew O'Brien in the second contest of the night.

The first international fight was also the first to go the distance. Cathal Foley from Cork took the majority decision on the scorecard from Scotland's Alan Jameson, but the judges had a hard time separating these two in a very close contest. Their weary and pock-marked bodies after the five rounds were evidence that this had been a slugfest.

Stephen O'Connell won the next international contest with Dave McVickar from England in what the Cork team's coach Anthony Corkery thought was the best performance of the night. The Corkman was well ahead when it came to the scorecards.

work throughout and the reluctance of the Corkman to mix it at times, even when the Dubliner seemed to be tiring.

Next up was the no-holds-barred multiple martial arts contest that pitted Stephen Koepmann from Cork against Francis Heagney from Dublin. And by no-holds-barred multiple martial arts, I mean kama sutra.

Seriously, a few punches were exchanged in the opening few seconds, but the Dubliner then threw Koepmann to the canvas and for the next two and a half minutes the Corkman had his legs wrapped around Heagney's torso as they wrestled into various uncomfortable positions.

The referee broke them up, they got up, exchanged another couple of punches and were promptly back on the floor again.

This time Heagney managed to get Koepmann in a guillotine choke and the Corkman submitted 4:35 into round one of the scheduled 2x5 round contest.

Alan O'Mahony had a terrific result for his first time stepping in the ring. The young Cork man forced Dubliner Jimmy Vahey's corner to throw in the towel in the second round after he had winded his opponent with a knee to the stomach, having controlled the first round.

Thady Condon's opponent from Carlow, Brendan Byrne, wore a headguard, but it didn't do him much good when he received an eight-count after a kick to the ribs. Cork's Condon was an easy winner.



Denis O'Brien from Cork celebrates his win as the paramedics examine his opponent Colin Keady from Galway. Picture: Gavin Browne

Conor O'Regan let his bout slip away from him in the third round against Alan Flynn from Galway, but having taken the first two rounds well — delivering a powerful right punch to knock down his opponent in round one — the Corkman never looked like losing.

Shane Cadogan didn't have things all his own way in his fight against Englishman Nick Taylor, losing the third and also the final round, but he took a close decision and his ring savvy style, going to the ropes when in trouble, swung it in his favour.

The heavyweights Andrew Manning and Tommy Maher, from Cork and Dublin respectively, both had their substantial frames hit the canvas but a split decision rightly went the way of the Dubliner.

Brendan O'Shea made it four wins from four for Cork in the international contests when he ended a game Andrew Henderson's hopes with a painful kick to the calf in round four.

The second Irish title up for grabs saw the experienced John Gallagher from Cork taking on Galway's Robert Duffy in the final contest of the night.

Duffy ended the fight in the first round of the scheduled five. The killer blow came when Duffy bounced off the ropes and caught Gallagher (whose guard was dropped) with a peach of a right hook.

Gallagher can take great credit from getting of the floor from that punch, but the game was up and when Duffy piled on the pressure in the seconds that followed, a knee to the ribs ended it.



Cathal Foley celebrates his win by points over Alan Jameson from Scotland. Picture: Gavin Browne



Stephen O'Connell from Cork and Dave McVickar from England fall to the canvas during the International Thai Boxing Night at Neptune Stadium. Picture: Gavin Browne



Cork's Cathal Foley (blue gloves) pins Alan Jameson from Scotland against the ropes. Picture: Gavin Browne



ABOVE: Cork Thai Boxer (in blue shorts) Andrew O'Brien and Darran Dowdall from Dublin prepare mentally before their bout. Picture: Gavin Browne

Results

(Cork fighter and a points win unless stated)
64kg: D O'Brien bt C Keady (Galway) (towel thrown in); **57kg:** D Dowdall (Dublin) bt A O'Brien (towel); **International 67kg:** C Foley bt A Jameson (Scotland); **International 67kg:** S O'Connell bt D McVickar (England); **Irish title:** E Murphy (Dublin) bt W Murphy (towel); **75kg:** B Boyle (Galway) bt A O'Flaherty (Galway); **73kg:** A O'Mahony bt J Vahey (Dublin) (towel); **67kg:** Thady Condon bt B Byrn (Carlow); **59kg:** C O'Regan bt A Flynn (Galway); **International 58kg:** S Cadogan bt N Taylor (England); **85kg:** T Maher (Dublin) bt A Manning; **International 64kg:** B O'Shea bt A Henderson; **Irish title 67kg:** R Duffy (Galway) bt J Gallagher.