

## **Muay Thai – The Art of Eight Limbs**

Sounds magical doesn't it? The Art of 8 Limbs. Almost mythical. Well, in a way it is.

Muay Thai is an ancient form of martial art derived from Muay Boran, which translated to English quite literally means "ancient boxing." The term itself is a generalization, a blanket idea for the various styles of Thai boxing that existed throughout Thailand. Each province developed their own version of Muay Boran, emphasizing different techniques, but utilizing the same weapons. Muay Boran goes beyond the 8 limbs of Muay Thai with joint locks and head-butting. You could think of Muay Boran fighters as the wild west; a little unpredictable stylistically, but still all cowboys. Muay Boran was taught to the Thai army for combat and self-defense. Eventually, fighters started wrapping their hands and forearms with ropes, matches grew in popularity, and the sport of Muay Thai was born. Head butting was eliminated leaving just elbows, punches, knees, and kicks. Somewhere along the line, during the 1800s-1900s, Muay Boran was modernized, westernized; a ring was introduced, western-style gloves, rules, and referees.

So, what makes Muay Thai not kickboxing? Besides the points of contact? (Muay Thai – 8, Kickboxing – 4) What makes Muay Thai not MMA? (Muay Thai- stand up striking, MMA- striking and ground work, grappling) What makes Muay Thai not boxing? (Muay Thai- elbows, knees, and kicks, Boxing- no way) Besides all these differences, Muay Thai has a certain confidence. Watch really good fighters, and no matter how they are feeling on the inside, they exude confidence- a keep it coming, no holding back, I can take anything you throw at me, kind of attitude.

After Muay Thai became a celebrated sport in Thailand, it developed into a huge source of revenue for families all over the country. The fighters each fight for money from the match as well as for the bets being placed on the fight itself from spectators. Young boys were and still are sent to camps to train with the hope that one day they will make it to Bangkok and fight in the big stadiums for big money. As they strive to reach that point, they fight all along the way to send money home to their families.

Muay Thai isn't just a sport. It's a culture, a way of life. It goes beyond the 8 limbs and into the heart of the fighters. From a young age, Thai fighters are taught discipline and respect through their training. They live together, eat together, train together, fight together. They support each other. Therein lies the secret. The important piece of the puzzle that makes Muay Thai, together. Muay Thai is family, in so many ways, but mostly in the way we live and breathe for this sport, together.