

THE FIGHTER

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n the way home on the BTS, my friend Emma and I often make small talk together about many things. This was just another topic I had asked without expectations but her answer has stayed in my mind.

“What do you think about fighting on the street and in the ring?” I asked her.

“It’s quite different. In the ring there are rules, but on the street there aren’t any – you can do anything,” my lovely friend answered and smiled.

The different scales and types of street fighting is a subject that many Thais are reluctant to talk about. It varies from small-scale fighting, for instance arguments between inconsiderate motorbike riders with passers-by, or even among hawkers over trading areas. It includes fights between drunken people in pubs, to bigger fights such as protests. Fighting between the students of rival vocational institutes is another lasting problem that Thai society is bored with, but which still happens. Not long ago, the news reported that people were accidentally shot dead on a bus during a fight between disputing students. Not only do those students’ families suffer from their fighting, but also other victims’ families are forced to pay for the price. Why do they have to fight? What do they fight for? Do they have rules for fighting? Many questions popped up in my head like the foaming bubbles in a bath.

Away from those questions, I also wondered why my lovely friend was interested in Thai Boxing or Muay Thai. Actually, I really wanted to know why she put so much effort into such an extreme fighting sport, as she is just a young, cute foreign lady. Moreover, it makes her life tough, what with working hard as a teacher as well as training hard as a fighter at the same time. She told me that she loved it. She had fought in the ring twice and had won once and lost once. I spoke to her in August, before her third fight, with the Thai lady who had beaten her last time.

“What will you do if you lose to her again?” I teased her.

“Just keep going, never give up!” she said.

“You know, my name is Emma Thomas (ET for short). When I went home my family

welcomed me with a sign at the airport: ET come home! It was very funny!”

She laughed out loud. She sounded really warm when she talked about her family and herself and again made me even more surprised about her favourite sport.

Recently, it was reported on the news that The Royal Thai Army, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, have come up with the Vocational Gentlemen program, to turn 130 students with histories of violence into gentlemen. Those students will be trained in discipline, ethics, gentlemanly behaviour and self-devotion in a military based camp for three months. No one can guarantee if this will help resolve the problem. But at least, they will be in a limited area, a bit like a boxing ring, for a while. That means the platform has been moved from the street to a stage viewed by judges and an audience.

At the stadium people were shouting and cheering for their fighters – a Thai lady and a foreign one – in the ring. It was a fierce fight in my eyes and my first-experience of such an extreme sport. In the first three rounds of five, Emma was punched so hard, but she kept fighting with a great heart and hit her rival to make the scores very close at the final round.

How would you feel if you had to fight with someone five kilograms heavier than you? She finally lost her fight but won the hearts of the audience there.

“I have less experience. It is good to learn more,” she told me after her match. “Actually, one reason I love Muay Thai is that the fighters are more respectful to each other. They aren’t gonna kill each other.”

Emma has been an English teacher in Thailand for a few years, and training as a Thai boxer for about one year. Every morning she has to wake up early to warm up and practise her training program for a few hours before going to her teacher’s job by noon. And of course she trains hard on her days off.

I think that a student and a boxer have some things in common. You need to practice with a lot of discipline to be successful. Two months later, Emma had her forth match, and this time she beat her opponent by Technical Knock-Out (TKO) in the second round.

“Just keep going, never give up.” I really love my friend’s saying. The things I have learnt from her are that a fighter is not a killer and a good fighter never gives up. We are trying to end the violence of the students, however as long as they keep fighting on the street rather than in the ring, we can’t throw in the towel. One day, we can overcome this problem, in the same way as my friend overcame her opponent.



EMMA IN TRAINING



EMMA COMPETING



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