



# The Great

## Phuket Hope



Story by Brian Beavis Photos by Jirat Sarmkasat



Teenage boxer Tanawat Pinkaew has been flying the flag for Phuket in both national and international competitions. Tanawat, better known as James, just returned from the national amateur youth championships where he won a bronze medal.

This achievement was all the more remarkable given that James is still only 16 and was competing against boys who were three years older than him. His boxing prowess should come as little surprise given the identity of his father, highly decorated amateur boxer, Sawirin Pinkaew, known in boxing circles as Master Jay.

Master Jay started life as a Muay Thai fighter but discovered he was better with his hands than his feet and went on to become the two-time champion of Thailand in his weight class. James is already well on his way towards filling his father's footsteps, "I started boxing just for fun when I was 8-years-old and I started competing seriously when I was 13. Now I go to a specialist sports school in Nakhon

Si Thammarat," he says.

While the idea of being a successful sportsman might appeal to most teenagers James's grueling daily routine almost certainly would not, "I wake up at 5am to go training and then at 7am I have breakfast and go to school, then at 3pm I go training again. I train for a couple of hours on Saturday morning and then on Sundays I rest. Sometimes when the alarm clock goes off in the morning I don't want to get out of bed but I have no regrets, I love boxing."

James's dedication to the sport is clearly paying off. He came third in his weight class of under 54kg at the national championships, losing to a 19-year-old in the semi-final. He boxed in the Junior World Championships in Armenia earlier this year, where he made the

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Tanawat Pinkaew (*far left*) spars with his father Master, Jay, during a training session. Tanawat displays his victory medals (*above*).

The popularity of Muay Thai tourism in Phuket has brought with it an influx of fighters from all over Thailand but James is a relative rarity in that he is Phuket born and bred.



**Main photo:** Jake Orchard, Y7 student at British International School (immediate left), Daryl Orchard, formerly head of BIS Primary School (2<sup>nd</sup> left), Tanawat Pinkaew (middle left), sponsors Maple & Nick Anthony (middle right & second from right) Master Jay Pinkaew (far right).

last 16, and qualified for the first ever Youth Olympic Games in Singapore in August 2010 with the third place finish at the nationals.

Before that a trip to France is on the cards for the 2010 Youth World Championships in January. Like his father, James is an amateur boxer. The gulf between amateur and professional boxing is vast, both in terms of risk and reward and it is a distinction worth making. An amateur boxing match can immediately be distinguished from a professional boxing match because the participants will be wearing vests and head guards, whereas professionals do not wear any head protection or clothing on their upper bodies.

The way that amateur boxing matches are scored is also vastly different from

professional bouts. The knuckle area of the glove in an amateur match is coloured and every time a boxer lands a clean punch with the knuckle area of the glove he is awarded a point. Normally, there are three judges and for a point to be given two of the three judges need to award it. Knock outs are extremely rare in amateur boxing although if a boxer has been “outclassed”, meaning they are too far behind on points to have any hope of winning, the referee can stop the fight.

The emphasis in amateur boxing is more on technical excellence, and less on trying to cause damage to your opponent. Injuries are extremely aware and as the word amateur implies, financial reward vary from meager to non-existent. James is extremely content as an amateur boxer and has no aspirations to



become a professional, “I don’t want to box professionally, I don’t think I am strong enough, but boxing with the head gear is ok. I have never hurt myself boxing and amateur boxing is not dangerous because you wear head protection. I did do a professional Muay Thai fight when I was eight years old but I lost, I don’t think my body is suited to Muay Thai and I prefer boxing.”

James can win prize money through amateur boxing but his trip to Armenia was mainly funded through sponsorship. He has no idea what he wants to do for a career, but he wants to carry on boxing for as long as possible, “I think I can carry on boxing until I am 30, the maximum age at the Olympics is 34.”

James’s father retired at the age of 27 but things were very different in his day, “There was no head protection worn back then and I won 37 times via first round knock out, that wouldn’t be possible now,” he said.

Master Jay had nearly 200 fights and was two-time Thai national champion and also army boxing champion for southern Thailand. He moved to Phuket in 1988, after teaching in Europe and started his gym in Cherng Talay, the Surakit Gym, a couple of years later.

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