

# He's a knockout



He finished his opponents with a powerful left hand, and as **Somporn Suphop** writes, this tough southpaw is one of the greatest Thai boxers ever

**S**ura Saengkham, a 47-year-old from Petchabun, was a world champion in the sport of Muay Thai in the early 1980s, and as with actors in the West, it is not unusual for a Thai athlete to change his name.

Sura also did as many of his famous countrymen did and adopted a "catcher" name, and has been widely known as Khaosai Galaxy since.

Managed by Niwat Laosuwanawat, Khaosai began his career in contact sports as a kick boxer.

In December 1980, he stopped using his feet and switched to the more orthodox ranks. In his sixth fight at the Thailand bantamweight title on July 29, 1981, he lost a decision to Sakda Sakruee, the only man ever to defeat the Thai legend.

"Sakda was tough and never-say-die. To match him was not an easy job. After eight rounds, I learned that he was a tough nut and was impossible to crack. It was no surprise when his arm was raised to mark him as the eventual winner after an exhausting 10 rounds. It was the only loss I suffered in my career," Khaosai recalled.

As the saying goes, a past mistake is the best teacher, and for Khaosai this rings true. As a result he trained much harder for subsequent matches.

His greater determination and intensive training proved worthwhile when Khaosai won his next three fights, including a knockout in a rematch against Sakda. He claimed the Thai bantamweight crown early in 1982.

Khaosai now seemed to be riding a wave of success, going on to win five consecutive fights

by knockout. Consequently he shot up the world ranks, and by the summer of 1984 had become super flyweight World Boxing Association (WBA) world champion Jiro Watanabe's mandatory challenger.

When Watanabe failed to defend his title against Khaosai, the WBA stripped him and matched the Thai fighter against the hard-punching Eusebio Espinal for the vacant title on November 21, 1984. In one of his best displays, the Thai put in superb form, peppering his Dominican opponent with a series of powerful jabs and stingy hooks to beat Espinal by a sixth-round kayo and win the WBA crown.

"I think life is a great challenge. I try to give every problem my best. My loss to Sakda did not dampen my enthusiasm and spirit to come back again. I just thought at all times that

where there's life, hope is also out there. I never give up easily in life. This determination has given me success in my career and my life alike. I think everyone has the same point of view about these things as me," he said.

Khaosai defended his WBA title an incredible 19 times over the next seven years, winning 16 of his title fights by knockout.

In the mid-80s, when world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson was in his prime and scoring knockouts over everyone, boxing fans awarded Khaosai the nickname The Thai Tyson for his own propensity for knockout wins.

Khaosai fought only once outside the Orient, when he put the gloves on against the unbeaten, and future WBA bantamweight title-holder Israel

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