

## Thailand's son fighting for his country's pride

### Shannon wants MMA to get recognition

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MMA fighter Shanonpatr "Shannon" Wiratchai is not a typical Thai athlete in a "bloody" sport as he is a university graduate and comes from a well-to-do family with his father being a doctor and mother a nurse.



Shannon Wiratchai trains in Phuket ahead of this week's MMA fight in Manila.

The 23-year-old is preparing for his third professional mixed martial arts (MMA) fight at "ONE FC: Pride of a Nation" in Manila on Friday with his trainer Roger Huerta.

"I want people, when they think about Thailand, to know that here is a place with resources for MMA," said Shannon (2-0).

His opponent Mich Chilson (3-1) is fresh from beating AJ Vaa at "ONE FC: Destiny of Warriors" two months ago in Kuala Lumpur.

Shannon, of Phuket, is considered one of Thailand's top MMA prospects and a win over Chilson will catapult him to international recognition.

Shannon will not only be fighting for himself but for his country where MMA has been banned.

"Many Thais think that MMA is not a gentleman's sport. They think it is like a dog fight \_ just putting two people in a cage," he said.

"I want them to look at MMA just like another sport. We have Muay Thai but sometimes you need a different flavour."

As a child, "One Shin", as he is known, wanted to practise Muay Thai as a hobby but his parents disapproved the move.

He then turned to judo when he was 8 years old.

"When I started competing in judo, I got hurt so my parents wanted me to quit. They were also very concerned when I entered MMA," Shannon said.

His parents have never seen him fight live.

"My dad often sees my fight with me on TV but it's too much for my mother," he said.

Eventually, Shannon earned his brown belt in judo and helped create a club for the sport at his high school. Local competitions became boring, as he kept facing the same opponents every time.

The lack of excitement forced One Shin to take up MMA and planned to compete in the new amateur promotion NAKSU in Bangkok.

"I was 16 when I started training in MMA, and 20 when I fought for the first time in NAKSU. I made it to the semi-finals that year then lost," he said.

The next year was different, however, as Shannon won the 75kg amateur tournament, earning him an invitation to fight in Thailand's first and only professional MMA promotion, DARE FC.

Before the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) outlawed MMA earlier this year, DARE FC held their events in a nightclub in Bangkok with spectators mainly foreigners.

After defeating fellow judo practitioner DK Panjabutra and then DK's brother TDR Panjabutra, Shannon was offered a contract from ONE FC.

Shannon will be stepping into the same arena that Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier had their "Thrilla in Manila" clash over 40 years ago.

"When I watch MMA, I think 'where are all the Thais?'," Shannon said.

"I'm happy to represent my country and want more Thais in the cage."

## About the author

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