

Press release

The fight of the century is about to take place here in Singapore on July 6th in Cineleisure, a shopping mall located on Grange Road. Held by a mixed martial arts gym called Equilibrium, one of the most popular gyms in the nation, the event is to occur on the ground floor of Cineleisure that night at 8 p.m.

As fighting fans, you may have already heard these two biggest names in the professional fighting sphere in Singapore: Johnson Lee and Yuji Wong. Both experts and hardcore fans express that the two are arguably the most dangerous fighters in the flyweight division. As the two clash on Saturday night, we are expecting a display of highly-skilled athleticism as well as fighting spirit and tenacity.

The fight came about due to two reasons: expectations from the fans and the personal history between the two fighters.

After Equilibrium wrapped up its 2024 first quarter survey of Singaporean fighting fans, the results indicated an overwhelming call for a fight between Lee and Wong this year. The marketing director of Equilibrium said, "It is the fight everybody wants to see. Surely, we have to take promotion factors into account, but most of all, we want to let our supporters know that we sell fights not only based on monetary gains but also on what they genuinely want to see."

The strong demand for the fight also stems from the two having history outside the ring. Wong has dominated the flyweight division for over a decade before being forced to retire in 2020 due to sustaining an injury mid-fight. This resulted in him being stripped of his flyweight championship title and the top contender taking over. Soon after that, in 2023, Lee defeated the contender who was granted the championship belt in 2020, becoming the champion himself. Wong, who was in the audience at that fight, said, "I'm going to make the biggest comeback in the sport's history, taking back what was robbed of me from this kid who has no business fighting here."

This calling out consequently led to exchanges of words on Twitter between the two. In December 2023, Lee's team ran into Wong at a fight event, and the initial verbal exchanges turned into a public brawl, in which Wong knocked down several of Lee's teammates and injured his wrist. Both sides were detained at the police station for several hours.

Outside the police station, Lee refused to make a comment while Wong said: "I want this kid dead and everyone who stands in the way of me regaining my belt. There will be a fight between me and him, and just watch how I pick this kid apart in the ring."

The verbal conflict and brawl surely contributed to the heightened level of expectation among the fans, but the experts and hardcore fans have expressed that it is the fight

itself that is the most exciting. Wong, a seasoned veteran and the former champion, is coming back for vengeance. Lee is currently the pound-for-pound flyweight king in Singapore and also the younger fighter of the two. Both are eager to prove and inflict damages, which, combined with the things that happened leading up to the fight, makes the fight a critical one.

Personal narrative by a sports commentator and reporter

The first time I saw Yuji Wong compete in a ring was in 2010, when he fought for the flyweight championship title against the current champion at the time. To me at first, it was just another day of my sports reporting life as a fighting commentator and a reporter. But Wong's performance was just, for lack of a better term, jaw-dropping. 14 years later, after experiencing victories and retiring because of an injury, Wong is scheduled to fight again, bringing the sensational performance we have seen before, hopefully. Now, to paint a fuller picture of why some say that the fight between Yuji Wong and Johnson Lee is the fight of the century, please allow me to start over from 14 years ago.

In 2010, I just started my career as a martial arts competition reporter and commentator. I had my source at and established partnerships with various martial arts gyms in Singapore, one of which was the Equilibrium. In September, they told me a fight was scheduled, and there I was on the day of the fight, by the ringside, ready to take my best shots of photos and transcribe them into well-written stories. Little did I know how effortless that proved to be because Wong's performance made

everything about the fight and him an epic tale already, so much so that anyone attempting to write about it was just going along for a wild ride.

The fight only lasted 30 seconds, with Wong constantly throwing the most vicious kicks and punches at the opponent, who, despite being a well-established flyweight champion at the time, was unable to defend, eventually knocking out the champ cold with one mean left hook to the jaw. Everyone was silent. I was, too. I even forgot to take photos after the knockout because it just transpired so quickly and so surprisingly. The fight made Wong a superstar in the fighting sphere in Singapore. He then continued to polish his fighting style and cement his dominance in the division for the next ten years.

Every story comes to an end, as did Wong's dominance, at least in the last few years. In 2020, Wong fought his toughest fight ten years into his reign. The opponent was a European world champion who came to Singapore for a money fight held by Equilibrium. The two fought relentlessly for four five-minute rounds. In the fifth round, as Wong threw a leg kick in an attempt to incapacitate his opponent, the opponent brought his elbow to meet Wong's ankle, resulting in the fracture of Wong's shinbone. The fight ended there, with Wong lying on the canvas and screaming in pain. Consequently, Wong was stripped of his championship title. It was the biggest upset in the history of Singaporean combat sports. Wong then retired and virtually went off the grid until he made an appearance at a fight event in 2023.

Without Wong, the sport continued to evolve. New generations of fighters emerge every year, and they all have brought their own unique skill sets to the ring,

contributing to the ever-evolving tapestry of combat sports in Singapore. Among these new generation fighters stands the most prominent of all: Johnson Lee. Lee's dad trains various martial arts himself, including Muay Thai, wrestling, Ju Jitsu, and boxing. He had also made the junior train with him as early as Yuji Lee was four years old. In other words, Lee was immersed in an environment where training is his dearest friend. Lee did not disappoint his dad, carrying his training to commercial fight events, and acquired his first victory in 2023 against the European fighter who dethroned Wong three years earlier.

I was there as well, which I have to say with gratitude, because the fight was no less jaw-dropping than Wong's performance 13 years ago. The European fighter came out in full-on attack mode, burying tremendous knees and roundhouse kicks into Lee's body, leg, and head. Everyone thought Lee was going to lose in the face of machine-gun-like, vicious combinations, including me. However, Lee stood his ground, covering up his weak points and observing his opponent. He was calm, and this calmness in the most disadvantaged situation is what makes him stand out and come out on top. After two rounds of defence, Lee quickly gained momentum, intercepting his opponent's fast combinations and countering with his own attacks, which were mostly simple jabs, crosses, and occasional leg kicks.

Lee was losing by points at this point, but I saw how the tide was turning with his opponent getting winded, becoming slower in throwing punches and kicks, and getting hit with the most calculated and accurate counterattacks from Lee. Lee was biding his time, I thought. This has been seen in the last few fights of Lee, in which he

stalked his prey, bid his time, and then slowly took apart the guy who just consumed all his energy in the hope of knocking out the seemingly timid opponent. The fight went exactly like that, only in a more dramatic fashion. Right before Lee's win, Lee's opponent threw a fast combination of a right cross, a left hook, and a roundhouse kick to Lee's head. Lee intercepted the last movement, successfully dodging the kick while coming back with a straight punch to the head, knocking the opponent down. Lee then gained a full mount, raining down a rapid sequence of left and right onto his opponent's head, showcasing his masterful ground and pound skills. The fight ended there, with his opponent knocked out cold. The rest is history, as the saying goes. Lee successfully executed his strategy, dethroning the fighter who defeated Wong and becoming the flyweight champion in Singapore.

Wong was spotted by the ringside during the fight. When he came out of the arena and was interviewed by one of my colleagues who asked him what his plan was regarding his career, he said, "I'm going to make the biggest comeback in the sport's history, taking back what was robbed from me from this kid who has no business fighting here." The statement in turn resulted in Lee responding on Twitter, saying, "I don't see how a 39-year-old man who broke his shinbone throwing a kick constitutes a threat to me." Wong countered in his Twitter by saying, "Fear an old man in a profession where men usually die young, kiddo. I'm coming for you, and this time it won't be easy." The exchange on Twitter slowly built up, with both sides using slightly harsher words each time. And a few months later, the verbal conflict turned into an actual brawl at one of the fight events.

I was also there, which I have to say with less gratitude, given how the brawl turned out. I sat two rows behind Wong, who was sitting by the ringside. Twenty minutes after Wong sat down, Lee and his teammates came into the arena and made their way in Wong's direction. It remains unclear whether their seats were near Wong's, but they came across Wong. Both sides stared at each other hard. Wong and a few of Lee's teammates exchanged insults. One thing led to another, Wong threw the first punch aimed at the person by Lee's side, knocking him down, and the brawl started, during which I had no idea what was going on. All I remember was hearing the crowd screaming, seeing people fall, mostly Lee's teammates, and security personnel rushing towards the scene. Eventually, Wong and Lee and Lee's team were separated and escorted outside the arena, where they were picked up by police officers who detained them at the police station for several hours. Clearly, Wong has injured several of Lee's teammates, and he also suffered a wrist injury. When interviewed by my colleague outside the police station, Wong said: "I want this kid dead... There will be a fight between me and him, and just watch how I pick this kid apart in the ring." Lee, on the other hand, refused to make a comment.

Seeing how the drama plays out is one thing we perhaps all want. More importantly, it is the clash of two highly skilled fighters that endows the fight with its status. Is Wong going to regain and continue his legacy? Or will it be Lee who proves that the seasoned, middle-aged veteran does not belong to the sport anymore? Let us wait and see.

Social media posts

1. Come and watch how the biggest fight in flyweight division plays out.

See you at the ground floor of Cineleisure on July 8th at 8pm.

2. Wong has showed tremendous punching power in his sparring sessions, based on a recently leaked footage. Is Lee's quintessential patient stand-up strategy going to be able to hold up to Wong's power? Experts have given the fight a 50-50.

3. Lee's recent leaked sparring session showcases outstanding ground-and-pound techniques. Given that Wong had showed weaknesses in grappling and wrestling, what do you think happens when Wong is taken to the ground?

4. Lee's team has brought in the world's greatest Ju Jitsu coach to prepare him for the fight against Wong. Meanwhile, Wong's team has responded, "Prepare those crotch-sniffing techniques all you want, but at the end of day, you are going to be knocked out on your foot".

5. The biggest fight of the century is taking place on July 8th at 8pm in the Cineleisure mall. Come and grab a ticket now, fighting fans!

6. Wong said on Twitter this morning, "I've never felt so fresh, agile, fast, and powerful. I'm really suggesting the kid to pull out out this fight, or he's going to get

his head taken off. I mean it.”.

7. Lee appears to be quite nonchalant amidst all the threats created by Wong. He responded on Twitter this evening, “Action speaks louder than words. I respect him as a fighter but not as a person, because he talks too much. Save all that gas for the fight, wouldya?”.

8. The fight between Yuji Wong and Johnson Lee is scheduled to take place on July 8th at 8pm. Tickets are available on Equilibrium’s website as well as at the front desk of the gym.