

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) is a martial art and combat sport that focuses on grappling and especially ground fighting with the goal of gaining a dominant position and using joint-locks and chokeholds to force an opponent to submit. The art was based on early 20th century Kodokan Judo,[2][1] which was itself then a recently-developed system (founded in 1882), based on multiple schools (or Ryu) of Japanese Jujutsu.

It promotes the principle that a smaller, weaker person using leverage and proper technique can successfully defend themselves against a bigger, stronger assailant. BJJ can be trained for self defense, sport grappling tournaments (gi and no-gi) and mixed martial arts (MMA) competition.[3] Sparring (commonly referred to as 'rolling') and live drilling play a major role in training, and a premium is placed on performance, especially in competition.

History

Beginnings

The art began with Mitsuyo Maeda (aka Conde Koma, or Count Combat in English), a Japanese expert judoka and member of the Kodokan. Maeda was one of five of the Kodokan's top groundwork experts that Judo's founder Kano Jigoro sent overseas to spread his art to the world. Maeda left Japan in 1904 and visited a number of countries[2] giving "jiu-do" demonstrations and accepting challenges from wrestlers, boxers, savate fighters and various other martial artists before eventually arriving in Brazil on November 14, 1914.[4]

Since its inception, judo was separated from jujutsu in its goals, philosophy, and training regime. Although there was great rivalry among jujutsu teachers, this was more than just Kano's ambition to clearly individualize his art. To Kano, judo wasn't solely a martial art: it was also a sport, a method for promoting physical fitness and building character in young people, and, ultimately, a way (Do) of life.[5][6] To a very large extent, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu has also encompassed these philosophies.

It is often claimed that BJJ is a development of traditional Japanese jujutsu, and that Maeda was a jujutsuka. However, Maeda never trained in jujutsu. He first trained in sumo as a teenager, and after the interest generated by stories about the success of judo at contests between judo and jujutsu that were occurring at the time, he changed from sumo to judo, becoming a student of Kano's Kodokan judo.[2] He was promoted to 7th dan in Kodokan judo the day before he died in 1941.

Hélio Gracie himself had already risen to the rank of 6th dan in judo by the time of his fight against Kimura in 1951.[7]

Name

When Maeda left Japan, Judo was still often referred to as "Kano Jiu-Jitsu",[8] or, even more generically, simply as "Jiu-Jitsu." [9][10]

Kigashi, the co-author of "Kano Jiu-Jitsu"[8] wrote in the foreword "Some confusion has arisen over the employment of the term 'jiudo'. To make the matter clear I will state that jiudo is the term

selected by Professor Kano as describing his system more accurately than jiu-jitsu does. Professor Kano is one of the leading educators of Japan, and it is natural that he should cast about for the technical word that would most accurately describe his system. But the Japanese people generally still cling to the more popular nomenclature and call it jiu-jitsu."

Outside Japan, however, this distinction was noted even less. The distinction between a jutsu and a do is subtle, and is still used somewhat arbitrarily to this day.

Thus, when Maeda and Satake arrived in Brazil in 1914, every newspaper announced jiu-jitsu despite both men being Kodokan Judoka.[5]

The Japanese government itself did not officially mandate until 1925 that the correct name for the martial art taught in the Japanese public schools should be "judo" rather than "jujutsu".[11] In Brazil, the art is still called "Jiu-Jitsu". When the Gracies went to the United States to spread their art, the system became known as "Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu" and "Gracie Jiu-Jitsu."

"Jiu-Jitsu" is an older romanization that was the original spelling of the art in the West, and it is still in common use, whereas the modern Hepburn romanization is "jūjutsu." Other common spellings are Jujitsu, Ju-Jitsu, and Ju jitsu.

The art is sometimes referred to as Gracie Jiu-Jitsu (GJJ), but this name is trademarked by Rorion Gracie and specifically refers to the style taught by him and his selected teachers. Other members of the Gracie family often call their style by personalized names, such as Charles Gracie Jiu-Jitsu or Renzo Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, and similarly, the Machado brothers call their style Machado Jiu-Jitsu (MJJ). While each style and its instructors have their own unique aspects, they are all basic variations of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

Development

Maeda met an influential businessman named Gastão Gracie who helped him get established. In 1917, his son Carlos Gracie, still a 14 year-old boy, watched a demonstration by Maeda at the Teatro da Paz and decided to learn jiu-jitsu. Maeda accepted Carlos as a student,[2] and Carlos went on to become a great exponent of the art and ultimately, with his younger brother Hélio Gracie became the founder of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, modern Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.[12]

In 1921, Gastão Gracie and his family moved to Rio de Janeiro. Carlos, then 17 years old, passed Maeda's teachings on to his brothers Osvaldo, Gastão and Jorge. Hélio was too young and sick at that time to learn the art, and due to medical imposition was prohibited to take part in the training sessions. Despite that, Hélio learned jiu-jitsu by watching his brothers. He eventually overcame his health problems and is now considered by many as the founder of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (though others, such as Carlson Gracie, have pointed to Carlos as the founder of the art).[12]

Hélio competed in several submission judo competitions which mostly ended in a draw. One defeat (in Brazil in 1951) was by visiting Japanese judoka Masahiko Kimura, whose surname the Gracies gave to the arm lock used to defeat Hélio.

The Gracie family continued to develop the system throughout the 20th century, often fighting vale tudo matches (precursors to modern MMA), during which it increased its focus on ground fighting and refined its techniques.[13]

Today, the main differences between the BJJ styles is between traditional Gracie Jiu-Jitsu's emphasis on self-defense, and Sport Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu's orientation towards point competition. There is a large commonality of techniques between the two. Also, there is a wide variety of ideals in training in different schools in terms of the utilization of technique versus how much to attempt to overpower an opponent.

Prominence

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu came to international prominence in the martial arts community in the 1990s, when Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu expert Royce Gracie won the first, second and fourth Ultimate Fighting Championships, which at the time were single elimination martial arts tournaments.[3] Royce fought against often much-larger opponents who were practicing other styles, including boxing, shoot-fighting, karate, judo, tae kwon do and wrestling. It has since become a staple art for many MMA fighters and is largely credited for bringing wide-spread attention to the importance of ground fighting. Sport BJJ tournaments continue to grow in popularity worldwide and have given rise to no-gi submission grappling tournaments, such as the ADCC Submission Wrestling World Championship.

Comparison with judo

Combat strategy

Renzo Gracie wrote in his book *Mastering Jujitsu*[14]: "The classical jujutsu of old Japan appeared to have no common strategy to guide a combatant over the course of a fight. Indeed, this was one of Kano's most fundamental and perceptive criticisms of the classical program." Maeda not only taught the art of judo to Carlos Gracie, but also taught a particular philosophy about the nature of combat developed by Kano, and further refined by Maeda based on his world-wide travels competing against fighters skilled in a wide variety of martial arts.

The book details Maeda's theory as arguing that physical combat could be broken down into distinct phases, such as the striking phase, the grappling phase, the ground phase, etc. Thus, it was a smart fighter's task to keep the fight located in the phase of combat that best suited his own strengths.

Renzo Gracie stated that this was a fundamental influence on the Gracie approach to combat. These strategies were further perfected over time by the Gracies and others, and became prominent in contemporary MMA.

Free sparring

Like judo, BJJ encourages free sparring against a live, resisting opponent. Practitioners therefore have the opportunity to test their skills and develop them under realistic conditions, while minimizing the risk of injury. Also known as "rolling."

Divergence from Kodokan rules

Since judo was introduced to Brazil there have been changes in the rules of sport judo—some to enhance it as a spectator sport, and some for improved safety. Several of these rule changes have greatly de-emphasised the groundwork aspects of judo, and others have reduced the range of joint locks allowed and when they can be applied. Many of the banned techniques are preserved in the judo kata, and are practised to varying extents in different clubs. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu did not follow many of these changes to judo rules, and this divergence^[15] has given it a distinct identity as a martial art, while still being recognizable as a sub-style of judo. Other factors that have contributed towards the stylistic divergence of BJJ from sport judo include the Gracies' desire to create a national martial art, the influence of Brazilian culture, and the Gracies' emphasis on full-contact fighting and self-defense.

BJJ permits all the techniques that judo allows to take the fight to the ground. These include judo's scoring throws as well as judo's non-scoring techniques that it refers to as 'skillful takedowns' (such as the flying armbar.) However, BJJ differs in that it also allows a competitor to drag his opponent to the ground, and also even to drop to the ground himself provided he has first taken a grip.^[16] Early Kodokan judo not only allowed all that BJJ now allows, it even allowed a fighter to drop straight to the ground without first taking a grip.

BJJ's different rules set and point scoring mechanisms are designed to give BJJ an arguably more practical emphasis. This is done by rewarding positions of control from which the grappler could strike their opponent (if it weren't for the sport's restrictions against striking.) While judo's greater emphasis on throwing is sometimes criticised as not being as useful in a self-defence situation, the effectiveness of throwing should not be underestimated. This is especially so when performed on a hard surface and with the freedom to throw their opponent in a manner that would cause great injury (being unrestricted in the circumstances by sport judo's requirement to rotate one's opponent onto their back.)

Ground fighting

BJJ is strongly differentiated by its greater emphasis on groundwork. This is due to both its radically different point-scoring system, and the absence of most of the judo rules that cause the competitors to have to recommence in a standing position. This has led to greater time dedicated to training on the ground, resulting in enhancement of judo's groundwork techniques by BJJ practitioners.

However, there are also many techniques that are allegedly created by BJJ, though they already existed in Kodokan judo. This misconception is often the result of incorrect assumptions by BJJ practitioners who simply assume that the techniques they learned in BJJ classes originated in BJJ, and it is also due in some instances to BJJ practitioners genuinely rediscovering techniques that they did not know already existed in judo, such as the Gogoplata.

Along with BJJ's great strengths on the ground comes its relative weakness with standing techniques. There is an increasing amount of cross-training between the two sports as well as increased cross training in other striking arts especially boxing and Muay Thai as well as western styles of wrestling due to the popularity of Mixed Martial Arts competitions.

The gi

While the judogi (judo uniform) is regulated and inspected by sanctioning bodies so as to maintain a necessary amount of room between the arm and the sleeve for gripping, and also between the leg and the pants, a BJJ practitioner's gi is not generally as tightly regulated. The practitioner can therefore benefit from a closer fit, providing less material for an opponent to manipulate.

Style of fighting

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu emphasizes ground fighting techniques and submission holds involving joint-locks and chokeholds also found in numerous other arts with or without ground fighting emphasis. The premise is that most of the advantage of a larger, stronger opponent comes from superior reach and more powerful strikes, both of which are somewhat negated when grappling on the ground.

BJJ permits a wide variety of techniques to take the fight to the ground after taking a grip. Once the opponent is on the ground, a number of maneuvers (and counter-maneuvers) are available to manipulate the opponent into a suitable position for the application of a submission technique. Achieving a dominant position on the ground is one of the hallmarks of the BJJ style, and includes effective use of the guard position to defend oneself from bottom, and passing the guard to dominate from top position with side control, mount, and back mount positions. This system of maneuvering and manipulation can be likened to a form of kinetic chess when utilized by two experienced practitioners. A submission hold is the equivalent of checkmate.

Types of submission

The majority of submission holds can be grouped into two broad categories: joint locks and chokes. Joint locks typically involve isolating an opponent's limb and creating a lever with the body position which will force the joint to move past its normal range of motion, generally referred to as hyperextension.^[3] Pressure is increased in a controlled manner and released if the opponent cannot escape the hold and signals defeat by submitting. Opponents can indicate submission verbally or they can tap out (i.e. tap the opponent, the mat, or even themselves, several times.) A choke hold, disrupting the blood supply to the brain, can cause unconsciousness if the opponent does not submit soon enough.

A less common type of submission hold is a compression lock, where the muscle of an opponent is compressed against a hard, large bone (commonly the shin or wrist), causing significant pain to the opponent. These types of locks are not usually allowed in competition due to the high risk of tearing muscle tissue. This type of lock often also hyper-extends the joint in the opposite direction, pulling it apart.

Joint locks

While many joint locks are permitted, most competitions bar or restrict some or all joint locks involving the knees, ankles, and spine. The reason for this is that the angles of manipulation required to cause pain are nearly the same as those that would cause serious injury. Joint locks that require a twisting motion of the knee (called twisting knee locks or twisting knee bars, or techniques such as heel hooks, and toe holds) are usually banned in competitions because successfully completing the move nearly always results in permanent damage that requires surgery. Similarly, joint manipulations of the spine are typically barred due to the inherent danger of crushing or mis-aligning cervical vertebrae. Certain locks involving the knees and ankles are only allowed in competition starting at the brown belt. Any competitor from white to purple belt who attempts any of those locks may be disqualified.

However, most joint locks involving the wrist, elbow, shoulder or ankle are permitted as there is a great deal more flexibility in those joints and those locks are safe to use under tournament conditions. Also, some fighters practice moves whose sole purpose is to inflict pain upon their opponent, in the hope that they will tap out. This includes driving knuckles into pressure points, holding their opponent's head in order to tire out the neck (called the "can opener" or kubi-hishigi) and putting body weight on top of the sternum, floating ribs, or similarly sensitive bones. These moves are not true submission moves - they are generally only used as distractions mostly in lower levels of competition. They are avoided or aggressively countered in middle to upper levels of competition.\

Chokes and strangles

Chokes and strangles (commonly but somewhat incorrectly referred to as "air chokes" and "blood chokes" respectively) are a common form of submission. Chokes involve constriction of the windpipe (causing asphyxia.) Strangles involve constriction of the carotid artery (causing ischemia.)[17]

Air chokes are less efficient than strangles and may result in damage to the opponent's trachea, sometimes even resulting in death. By contrast, blood chokes (strangulations) cut the flow of blood to the opponent's brain, causing a rapid loss of consciousness without damaging any internal structures. Being "choked-out" in this way is relatively safe as long as the choke is released soon enough after unconsciousness, letting blood back into the brain before oxygen deprivation damage begins.[18] However, it should not be practiced unsupervised.

The prevalence of the more dangerous "air" chokes has led to the banning of choke holds from some United States police departments. Because of the negative legal connotations of the words "choke" and "strangulation", it is advisable to use the term "lateral vascular restraint" when describing a blood choke used in a self-defence situation.

Training methods

Sport Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu's focus on submissions without the use of strikes while training allows practitioners to practice at full speed and with full power, resembling the effort used in a real competition. Training methods include technique drills in which techniques are practiced against a

non-resisting partner; isolation sparring where only a certain technique or sets of techniques are used against full resistance; and full sparring in which each opponent tries to submit their opponent using any legal technique. Physical conditioning is also an important part of training at many clubs.

Grading

The standards for grading and belt promotions vary between schools, but the widely accepted measures of a person's skill and rank in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu are:

The amount of technical knowledge they can demonstrate, and their performance in sparring and competition.

Technical knowledge is judged by the number of techniques a person can perform, and the level of skill with which he performs them in sparring and competition. This allows for smaller and older practitioners to be recognized for their knowledge though they may not be the strongest fighters in the school. It is a distinctly individual sport, and practitioners are encouraged to adapt the techniques to make them work for their body type, strategic preferences, and level of athleticism. The ultimate criterion is the ability to execute the techniques successfully, rather than strict stylistic compliance.

Competitions play an important role in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu gradings, as they allow an instructor to compare the level of his students against those of the same rank from other schools. A belt promotion may be given after success in a competition, particularly at the lower belt levels. A promotion might also be awarded when a person can submit most people in his school of the same rank, e.g. a white belt who consistently submits most other white belts in sparring and is starting to catch blue belts.

The high level of competition between schools - and its importance for belt promotion - is also considered to be one of the key factors preventing instructors from lowering standards or allowing people to buy their way up the belts. Instructors may also take the personality of the person and their behavior outside of class into account, and may refuse to promote someone if they exhibit antisocial or destructive tendencies. It is by these and other criteria that most instructors promote their students. Some schools may also have formal testing which might include oral or written exams.

Some schools use a stripe system for each belt level, indicating progress through that belt.

Adult belt colours (16 and over) White

Blue

Purple

Brown

Black

Red

Junior belt colours (15 and under) White

Yellow

Orange

Green

Some schools use slightly different belt systems, such as having more colored belts before blue belt, but the above are the only widely accepted ranks as they are the standards for tournaments. There are minimum age requirements for belt promotions. Blue belts are never awarded to anyone under the age of 16. For promotion to black belt the minimum age is 19 years old according to the main regulating body of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, the International Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation.

Stripes may be awarded to any rank below black belt, but like the belts themselves, they tend to be given at the instructor's discretion, and may be in recognition of accomplishments like noticeable improvement or tournament victories. However, not all schools award stripes, or award them consistently, so the number of stripes a person has is not necessarily a good measure of their accomplishments or time in training. When they are used, it is standard for a student to receive four stripes before being promoted to the next rank.

Black belts can receive degrees, up to 9th degree, for as long as they train or teach the art. At 7th degree, the black belt is replaced by an alternately red and black belt. At 9th & 10th degree, the belt becomes solid red. Only the founding Gracie Brothers Helio, Carlos & his brothers will ever have the 10th degree red belt[19]. The Gracie family members who are 9th degrees belt holders are Carlson Gracie, Reylson Gracie, Relson Gracie, and Rorion Gracie.

BJJ differs in some aspects from other martial arts in the criteria for grade promotion, which is almost exclusively based on practical expertise in randori (free sparring, or rolling) and championship results. It's expected, although not always the case, that any BJJ black belt is extremely proficient in every applied aspect of BJJ and also perform well in competition. Less emphasis is given to theoretical and background knowledge. Rarely is any formal test undertaken for the grading, which is based mainly in observation at every-day practice sessions. By contrast, in Judo, practical knowledge and expertise in shiai (competition) and/or randori alone would not normally give an athlete the black-belt grade, as knowledge of technique names and Kata demonstration are necessary (the exception is promotion by Batsugun.)

There is a vast difference in how often belt progression takes place, and the requirements for the progression.[citation needed] More traditional schools and especially Gracie-affiliated schools believe that black belt cannot be achieved in under 8 to 10 years, while some schools allow students to achieve black belt more quickly.