

TACTICAL BJJ

GRAPPLING

FOR

LIFE



SPORT VS STREET



A funny story ...

A few years back, I was invited to instruct an elite Defensive Tactics Instructor cell over at Quantico in the states. One of the reasons I got that job was because of recommendations made to them by other specialized law enforcement and military groups that I had done work for in the past.

When I arrived at Quantico, I was wearing military greens, had my hair cropped 'high and tight' (marine style) and has familiarized myself somewhat, with the history and culture of their organization.. In short, I had fulfilled the first rule of teaching – always start the students journey, from the place they currently occupy. Ie: start where they are – not where I think they should be. My second rule of teaching is also important – always establish rapport. If you cannot develop rapport with the client, they won't hear what you have to say! Simple stuff really.

Anyways, it was obvious after our first few training sessions, on that first morning, that I was 'the right fit' for their group. We spoke the same language, we were dressed the same way, and everything was travelling along nicely. Later that day, the Colonel in charge told me that only a few weeks before, they had invited a well known Brazilian Jiu Jitsu instructor up from California to teach for a week. As it turned out, he didn't last very long. They sent him packing before the morning was out.

It seems the first thing this instructor asked when he walked into their training facility was 'Where are your Gi's?'. He then gave a brief demo of Classic BJJ – whereupon, they took a small break before training started. They never came back. The instructor was given an apology, and that was the end of that!

Different Strokes ...

I see this scenario quite a bit in my travels. Martial artists of one style or another, trying to pedal their particular art as if it was a tailored solution to someone else's particular

ENTERING TO CLINCH



Sport approach: Will shoots in, not considering the possibility of getting hit. The result – a failed shoot and a battering.



Tactical approach: With a good shell-cover in place, Will crashes in on his opponent to secure grips and outside position.

needs. It just doesn't work that way! This is good for me – as I am happy to do the research, gain a clear understanding of my clients needs and then embark on the sometimes arduous process of coming up with training solutions to those needs.

One of the main reasons I continually get work with various law enforcement and military groups, is because I do not try to pedal a classical martial arts solution to a set of real-world operational problems.

What do I know about the real world ops these professionals find themselves in? Usually, next to nothing. I need to talk to these highly experienced pro's and get info on the types of situations and scenarios they find themselves in; what kit or equipment they will be carrying, etc. These are professional warriors, with a warrior mid-set, many of whom have serious real-world experience. Only after collaboration, can we begin the process of working out what training approaches and techniques will give us the best results.

The martial arts are represented by a vast number of styles and systems of combat; each with their own sets of strengths, weaknesses, beliefs and customs. Most commonly, martial arts systems have evolved in ways that best prepares the practitioner to fight his or her fellow practitioners. I.e: Taekwondo practitioners practice to fight and beat fellow Taekwondo practitioners, Karateka practice fighting Karateka, Boxers fights Boxers, and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu fighters evolve better counters, and attacks to circumvent the defences thrown up at them by other Brazilian Jiu Jitsu fighters.

In short, although the martial arts are about interpersonal combat, when it comes to real-world functionality, their evolution is driven by the forces present on the mat, in the ring or in the dojo; and not necessarily by what happens in actual no-rules assault.

This doesn't mean that these arts cannot be effective; I would definitely put my money on a Boxer or a BJJ fighter in a one on one street encounter any day; but the fact remains, these arts (as do all systems) have small deficiencies in them that could, if the circumstances were right, lessen the chances of a positive outcome.

Drawbacks of Generic Martial Arts Training

Most martial arts training is done in an environment where courtesy prevails; so loud and abusive language is missing, the adrenal dump that goes with that is missing and so even highly experienced martial artists with thousands of hours training under their belt may never have experienced the tempo and stress as is commonplace in the real world no-rules assault scenario. And most often, their techniques and strategies (particularly training strategies) reflect this.

Apart from these environmental considerations, there are many technical considerations, that should be taken into account when determining the effectiveness of a specific martial arts system as a solution to real-world assault. Does the particular system have strong answers to the problems inherent in close-range nitty gritty fighting. If the system emphasizes long range kicks, for instance, then when it is 'pressure tested' at close range, the deficits and holes will become very apparent. If it is an art that does not practice 'full contact', then again, when 'pressure tested', the practitioner may experience a very rude (and most likely 'dangerous') awakening.

And so it is, that those particular arts that are practiced under 'full contact', 'in-close' and 'non-compliant' conditions tend to be the more effective in limited or no-rules encounters. Boxing, Kick-boxing, BJJ and Wrestling (and the synthesis of such) reign supreme when the real-world pressure has been turned on full blast!

My Regular Blog

And now – the drawbacks of BJJ

Each and every system, even those pressure-tested and more effective systems, have their drawbacks and deficiencies; and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is no exception.

One of the strengths of BJJ is its continued evolution due to the Darwinian forces at work in a highly competitive sporting environment. Paradoxically, this is also where the weakness lies. To



achieve better outcomes in the sporting arena, the BJJ athlete can easily spend the majority of his or her time becoming entangled in the intricacies of that environment. Eg: loads of time can be spent in the development of yet another counter to the counter of a favourite technique. This evolutionary path can be exciting and stimulating, while not necessarily addressing any of the problems encountered in the real-world assault scenario.

My Regular Blog

A few examples:

- Setting up a favourite sweep while not considering 'striking options'
- Entering for the takedown while not considering 'striking options'
- Ignoring the dynamics of how fights start and having no pre-fight strategy
- Applying the footlock for the 'tap' but not considering what happens afterward
- Engaging in grappling while not considering third part interference
- Not considering how the fight dynamic changes in tight tubular environments



The above are only a few of the more obvious deficiencies in trying to apply a sporting application of an art to a real-world environment.

Do not misunderstand. BJJ, like Boxing, Kickboxing or Wrestling, will still provide you with more useable real-world skills than other more theoretical and non-contact arts – it's just that we still need to apply some tweeking if we are going to take it to the 'street', 'into battle' or into any other no-rules, 'live' environment. So, time to apply a Tactical Patch ...

The Tactical Patch

TACTICAL: 'pertaining to a maneuver or plan of action designed as an expedient toward gaining a desired end'

In my view, it is good policy to apply tactical thinking to most situations we find ourselves in. In fact, most martial arts systems are a product of tactical thinking – it is just that most of them are considering 'sporting' outcomes as the desired end – and not 'self defence' or 'life-death' outcomes. To apply tactical thinking to any martial art in order to make it more robust for real-world assault, we need to be clear on a couple of things, namely:

- What outcomes do we want
- What will the likely real-world environment be like



- How would the real-world assault be likely to unfold

Once we consider these things carefully and truthfully, we can begin to see the shortcomings of any sporting applications or practice we do. That is the first step toward modifying our training so that we can more readily cope with real-world assault, using our preferred art as the 'core' of our practice.

The way of progress

This is the way the world works; the way things evolve. Most every big jump made in any field is made by identifying the shortcoming of something and then through either pure creative invention or a process of synthesis, coming up with a way to make something else, something different, something that fills a newly identified niche.

I do this in my work, all the time. I am faced with a particular problem; a problem that quite often, cannot be answered by any mainstream technique or training method that I have heretofore been exposed to. So I need to synthesize. It is this act of combining different elements from different fields/arts that most often affords me an answer to the problem.

Whilst I fully respect those many people who are passionate about the preservation of the 'original' art (whatever 'original' may mean), for the world needs librarians and book collectors just as much as it needs new authors and writers. But in my view, true progress is really about synthesis and creativity, and not about the preservation of a single idea or methodology.

In using any martial art for the purposes of real-world self defence, we need to consider how well it suits a particular environment or operational need. The world is not the mat, and the mat is not the world! Here are a few situations that impact drastically on the outcomes of conflict when employing grappling measures in real-world environments.

My Regular Blog

Tubular Environments:

When considering real-world operations or environments, we need to take into account how the fight dynamic can change dramatically in a tubular environment. Hallways, aircraft isles, corridors, train carriageways, etc, all present unique difficulties for the grappler and stand-up fighter alike.

For the stand-up fighter, round kicks, for instance, are of little or no use. In fact, in a tubular environment, it is far more likely than usual, that the fight will go to the clinch. And the problems certainly don't end there.

Grappling in a tubular environment is fraught with problems. Classical BJJ for instance, needs to be drastically modified. When





fighting from the Guard, sweeps will not work – there just isn't the room for the opponent to be taken to one side or the other. Side control is out; as are many other commonplace ground positions.

For combat in the tubular environment, the training emphasis needs to be placed on remaining on our feet. If the fight goes to the floor and we end up on the bottom, we need to have put time into 'vertical disengagement'. By creating space from bottom and with the correct use of our feet to make space, we can get back up and onto our feet. Apart from 'vertical disengagement', our only other main option is to 'finish' or incapacitate the opponent. Chokes from the bottom are our best bet in this regard.

3rd Party Intervention:

One of the biggest problems with the conflict going to ground is the real possibility of 3rd party intervention. A sporting approach to the conflict, where we are fully focussed on a single opponent, can leave us open to dangerous, even deadly attack from other parties.

If our grappling skills are superior, then it may be possible to bring about a quick resolution to the fight and regain our feet. If we cannot quickly resolve the fight, then 'vertical disengagement' or getting back to our feet, should be our top priority.

There are some situations though, where it may be strategically prudent to stay on the ground. During a melee, or 'all in brawl', I have had students (working in security roles) survive without a scratch by staying on the ground, on the bottom position, with their opponents in their 'Guards' until the melee was virtually over. Upon emerging at the end of the conflict, they discovered that almost every other member of the security detail was injured; some of them quite badly. So certainly, there are odd times, where the bottom position can provide effective cover, but usually only when the battle or conflict is of an impersonal nature, as in a melee.

If there are other people standing by, but the conflict is really only between ourselves and one other assailant; then it can be prudent to make use of positions such as the Kneeride. This position allows us to vertically disengage if needed, but also provides visual evidence to bystanders that we are 'in charge' of the situation. From this position we can also set up a convincing and authoritative 'verbal fence'.

My Regular Blog

Use of Weapons:

The use of weapons, although increasingly more commonplace in today's society, are rarely considered in the sporting world of martial arts; and the BJJ environment is no exception. Much of Guard Strategy is about trying to stop your opponent from



‘passing your Guard’; but remember, in a real-world environment, the assailant is not trying to pass your Guard, he is just trying to injure you and inflict maximum damage in any way he can. If he is armed, then basic Guard strategy will not prevent us from becoming the victim of a multiple stabbing incident.

When knives or other improvised weapons are employed, we should ideally remain on our feet, at least until the weapon arm is under total control. If we are on the ground and the weapon is in play, then the focus must be put on ‘weapon arm control’. If our normal BJJ practice sees us develop a game where the opponents arms are usually controlled, then this type of game can more readily adapt to a conflict that includes use of weapons. The rule is mandatory – control the weapon arm!

The Mat Tap:

Most often on the grappling oriented mat, people are over focussed on a single outcome; and that outcome is usually to get the opponent to submit, or tap. But it is important, for real-world application to ask the question, ‘would the submission that illicited the ‘tap’ from the opponent during that match, have incapacitated him in real no-rules confrontation?’

Now, many commonly employed subs will end the fight; chokes for example. There is no doubt about the outcome; the opponent is unconscious, we are still in play! Usually, dislocated elbows and shoulders (armbars and armlocks) result in the opponent ‘shutting down’ and will effectively have brought the fight to a conclusion; but not necessarily always. Sometimes, mentally tough or extremely highly motivated people can still function with dislocated joints; so there is no ‘guarantee’. I like to say ‘switch ‘em off or break ‘em! – but I much prefer, the ‘switch ‘em off’ part; chokes rule supreme on the ground, just as the knockout rules supreme in the ring!

What is the priority:

In sporting applications of grappling or BJJ, the objective or priority is clear; control and submit the opponent! In real-world environments or ‘operations’ this may not necessarily be our number one priority.

For example; consider the scenario where we have found ourselves grappling in the middle of a road. The priority then becomes clear – we need to ‘disengage’ and get off the road before we get hit by a vehicle.

In military or law enforcement scenarios, the operator may often need to ‘disengage to task’. That is, it becomes important for us to get away from the assailant, to get out of the house, to re-acquire our weapon, etc. The practice of disengaging from our assailant is a very different process than that of seeking the submission. Most usually this means seeking a position of control first, and then effecting a escape strategy; and it is by no means straightforward. Like everything else, it takes practice to be proficient at this.

Conclusion:

Having explained some of the shortcomings of grappling when it comes to certain real-world environments and situations, it is still important to understand that you may well find yourself in a grappling situation whether you like it or not. Simply put, it is quite often, not your choice. So it still remains imperative that we have strong grappling skills in case this happens; but we need to temper those skills with ‘real-world’ or ‘operational’ considerations.

Train Safe- Train Smart!

JohnB Will - 2007

For John Will's Regular Blog - visit:
[CLICK HERE](#)