



ROY DEAN ACADEMY

STUDENT HANDBOOK

ROYDEAN.TV

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

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DEDICATION

To all my students: past, present, and future.

- Roy Dean







WELCOME TO THE ACADEMY

Congratulations on making the decision to gain a deeper understanding of yourself through the discipline of martial arts. The Academy brings people together from all walks of life. Each has different reasons for training, yet each should be striving for the same goal: to realize their full potential.

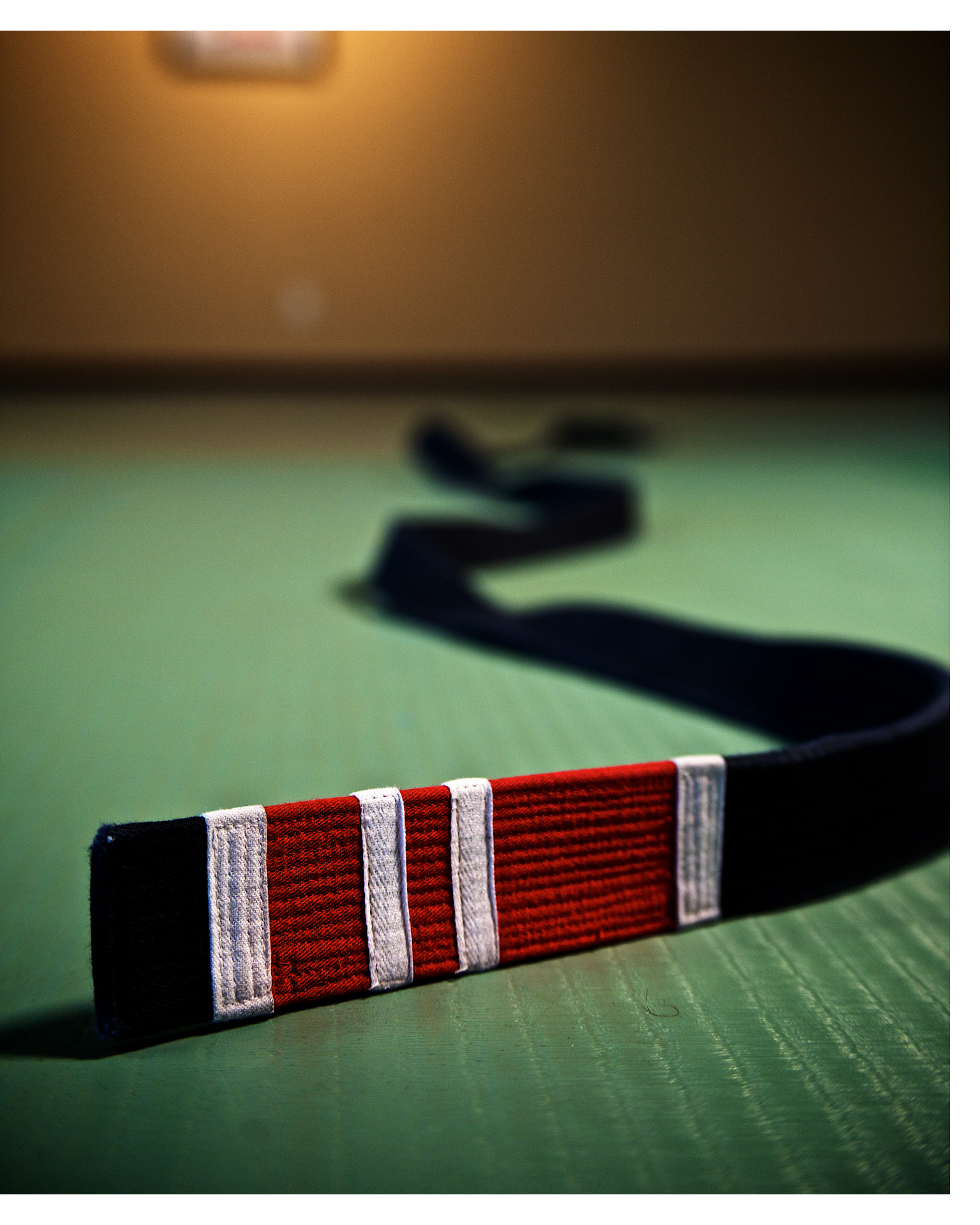
Discover who you are. Any discipline can offer the possibility of self discovery, but the discipline you have chosen, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, is particularly deep. The journey you have embarked on requires humility, perseverance, flexibility, awareness, and sensitivity. There are no shortcuts in the process, and because of the rigors of training, you will develop all of these attributes, and more! Increased strength and coordination, confidence, and a calm, centered awareness are just a few of the benefits that await you.

You will be learning very effective techniques. It is your responsibility to maintain control at all times. Refrain from showing off. The people you will train with will become your brothers and sisters. You will sweat together, laugh together, wrestle and roll. You cannot grow without the other, so respect your training partners, and take care them.

Celebrate the progress of your teammates- their progress and your progress are linked together, though it's often hard to see from the inside. Be patient with yourself, and I guarantee that you will see the progress you've been working for!

We have all been whitebelts. In many ways, it's the best place to be. Keep your mind open and enjoy the journey. I will be watching every step of the way.

Yours in the Arts,
Roy Dean





CHIEF INSTRUCTOR

ROY DEAN

Roy Dean began training in martial arts at the age of 16 when he moved to Japan as an exchange student. While there he received his shodan (first degree black belt) in Kodokan Judo.

At age 19 he began training in Aikikai Aikido under Calvin Koshiyama, eventually serving as uchideshi (live in student) under Julio Toribio. By age 24, he had received his shodan in Aikikai Aikido, and Enshin Itto-Ryu Batto Jutsu (Iaido), as well as a sandan (third degree blackbelt) in Seibukan Jujutsu.

Training in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu began under Claudio Franca in 1997, where he received his blue belt. In 2000 he began training under Mr. Roy Harris in San Diego and was promoted to purple belt in 2002, brown belt in 2004, and black belt in 2006. He is currently a third degree black belt.

Dean has competed and won in both Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and submission grappling competitions.

Today he enjoys sharing the art of jiu jitsu around the world through his media ventures, affiliate program, seminars, and by teaching at CVBJJ in Palm Desert, CA.



TWO JAPANESE TERMS

Onegaishimasu

(oh-neh-guy-she-mah-sue)

Used to open classes. Translated as “please be kind to me” or “please do this favor for me.” The meaning changes slightly depending on the situation, but the intent is the same, and it is used constantly in Japanese society. In some schools, it’s abbreviated down to hearty “Oss.”

Domo Arigato Gozaimashita

(doh-moh are-E-gah-toh goh-zhai-E-mah-she-tah)

Used to close classes. It means “thank you very much.” Domo is the equivalent of “thanks” and is less formal. Domo arigato is “thank you.” Domo arigato gozaimashita a polite way of saying “thank you very much.”

ACADEMY LOGO:
MEANING OF THE SYMBOL

The logo was modeled after traditional Japanese family crests, or kamon.

The three circles in the center of the symbol represent the trinity of our consciousness: body, mind, spirit. The triangle is commonly used in Jiu-Jitsu, but here it is implied, rather than drawn.

The outer white ring represents the external applications and benefits of the art, while the smaller ring parallels the inner realm.

The heavy use of circles represents the circularity of movement. The balance between positive and negative space reminds us to remain open.

CLASS STRUCTURE

1. A handclap will signal that class is about to begin. Students should be silently lined up before the instructor. Classes should be opened and closed with a bow, and a salutation. The instructor may open with a seated or standing silent bow, saying "Let's begin" in either English or Japanese (Onegaishimasu).
2. Instructors may lead a light warmup (5 to 10 minutes) before beginning techniques. Basic classes will include ukemi, specifically forward and backward rolls, and other essential movements.
3. 30 - 45 minutes of each class will be dedicated to technique. Drills may be done after techniques before sparring, or before techniques as part of the warm up. Mat time (sparring) follows and will last 20-45 minutes.
4. Sparring is optional. This time can be used for observation, drilling, or experimentation. It is recommend that new students observe sparring during the first 2 classes. A technical game plan is necessary in jiu jitsu to succeed against a skilled opponent. Take your time in gathering your tools and adapting your body to this new way of moving.
5. Remember that while BJJ is a very effective martial art, it is also a hobby for most people. Nobody want an injury. Gentlemans rules. The following are strictly enforced:
 - No biting, pinching, finger grabbing, facial contact, or neck cranks.
 - No heelhooks until purple belt.
 - No slamming.

Use common sense. Tap early, tap often. Leave your ego at the door. Ultimately, do unto others as you would have done unto you.
6. Two handclaps signal class is about to end. Students should line up, silently and uniforms adjusted. The instructor will bow and say in either "Thank you very much" in either English or Japanese. Repeat this back to the instructor, who will then say "Please thank your training partners." The last student will turn towards the front of the line, shaking hands with everyone.
7. Mat/dojo cleaning should take place immediately after class, with all participating.







RANK GUIDELINES

RANK STRUCTURE

The Roy Dean Academy Brazilian Jiu Jitsu system uses the following sequential ranks:

WHITE

BLUE

PURPLE

BROWN

BLACK

Stripes are awarded as indicators of progress at white and black belt ranks only.

No stripes are used during blue, purple, and brown belts.

The option for a demonstration of skill is available at all belt promotions.







ON POSITIONAL DOMINANCE

BY TJ BRODEUR

To the individual new to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, grappling can be a foreign and confusing experience. One of the first aspects one needs to understand is the common positions they may find themselves in while training or sparring.

This understanding supercedes everything else in BJJ, including getting “the tap”. There is a common saying in BJJ: “position before submission”. Study this well.

There is an underlying hierarchy of positional dominance in BJJ that each practitioner must appreciate. It is critical that you understand the strength, weakness, and gravity of each position you might find yourself in. The following is a brief discussion of the major positions.

THE MOUNT

The mount is often thought of as THE dominant position in grappling. There are variations of the mount, but the basic idea is that you are on top of your opponent (who is lying flat on the ground), straddling their body, with their legs behind you. The advantage is obvious; gravity and leverage are on your side. You control your opponent’s body

and can attack with little risk to yourself.

However, the mount is one of the hardest positions to maintain. It is relatively easy to get reversed, particularly against skilled opponents, and the threat of this reversal provides openings for other escapes.

You will quickly learn that attacking from the mount is difficult and the domain of more experienced practitioners.

The new student will frequently find themselves on the wrong side of this position. Understand that at this point, your only concern should be escaping. You have no viable attacks against your opponent, so your focus should be getting to a better position. It is critical in the early stages of training to learn and drill mount escapes. They will be your lifeline.

BACK CONTROL

Back control is exactly as it sounds; you are on your opponent like a backpack, peering over their shoulder and looking in the same direction. This position can be maintained with your opponent on top of you, both of you on your side, or with you on top. Like the

ON POSITIONAL DOMINANCE

BY TJ BRODEUR

mount, the advantage of this position is obvious; whoever has back control has control of their opponent's movement and free access to attack— most notably the neck.

Like the mount, the new student will often find themselves on the inferior side of this position, and their concern should be defending the neck and arms, and ultimately escaping the position.

Back escapes are far more difficult than mount escapes and take a long time to master. A better strategy for the beginner is to rarely, if ever, expose your back. A common way to end up with someone on your back is a poorly executed escape to the knees. Again, it is critical to become proficient with escapes.

SIDE CONTROL

Side control, often referred to as cross side position, is a position where you are over your opponent, perpendicular to their body. You are controlling their body with your weight; chest-to-chest, hip-to-hip, knee-on-belly, etc.

Once you learn to control them and obtain several attack options, you realize this is an

extremely powerful position. It is often easier to maintain than the mount and there are a vast number of attacks from this position; including shoulder locks, arm locks, chokes, even leg locks.

While there are some limited attack options for the individual on the bottom, for the beginner this is another position where— along with keeping your neck and arms safe—the focus should be on escaping.

There are a vast number of escape options from side control and the new student is well served to develop a repertoire of these escapes. Having solid escapes from this position will greatly improve your survivability and, ultimately, the enjoyment of grappling.

One hint regarding side control: a very common tendency when held in side control is to allow yourself to be put flat on your back or to turn away from your opponent. Avoid this tendency at all costs. The secret is to work hard to get onto your side, facing your opponent. This is the key to surviving this position and usually gets you most of the way towards your escape.

continued...

ON POSITIONAL DOMINANCE

BY TJ BRODEUR

THE GUARD

The guard is a position that is almost unique to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu in the grappling world. The guard game is extremely deep and there are seemingly infinite variations of the position—butterfly, spider, half, etc—but the basic guard position is when you are on your back with your opponent kneeling between your legs. In the “closed” guard, you will have your ankles crossed, preventing them from moving out from between your legs.

Beginners commonly misunderstand this position. When in someone’s guard (kneeling between their legs) it seems that you are in the dominant position since you are on top. The urge will be to try to attack, most commonly attempting to choke your opponent from this position. Resist this urge.

While you have the benefit of gravity when caught in someone’s guard, this is all you have going for you. Your opponent controls leverage and your hips. This means that you really have no viable attack options while they can attack your neck and arms or sweep you into the mount. In someone’s guard you are vulnerable.

When you find yourself in this position, your only thoughts should be maintaining good posture and passing their guard. This is easier said than done and you must train hard to master these two aspects of BJJ.

The beginner—particularly smaller individuals—should also seek to work their way into guard whenever they are in a bad position. Many Brazilians refer to the guard as the “fortress”. This is the position they retreat to when things are not going completely as planned. From this position, you have a temporary reprieve from your opponent’s attacks and can begin to launch attacks of your own. Become comfortable with this position.

In closing, the practice of grappling, and particularly BJJ, requires a firm understanding of positional dominance. This understanding is critical to helping navigate the foreign environment of ground fighting. This is the first step in developing a roadmap for sparring and will greatly enhance your appreciation and enjoyment of this art.





BELT REQUIREMENTS: BLUE BELT

BLUE BELT DEMONSTRATION REQUIREMENTS

There are two parts to the demonstration: technical and sparring.

The technical portion of the test involves demonstrating techniques from each of the following categories:

- **ESCAPES**
- **GUARD PASSES**
- **SWEEP AND REVERSALS**
- **THROWS AND TAKEDOWNS**
- **BASIC SUBMISSIONS FROM THE MOUNT AND GUARD**

The sparring portion of the test involves putting the techniques together in a live, dynamic environment. Here are the **ESCAPES** I require a student be able to demonstrate:

A. MOUNT

1. Bridge and roll (hands on ground, forearm under neck)
2. Elbow / knee series (basic, foot lift and foot drag)

B. SIDE MOUNT

1. Replace the guard
2. Go to your knees

C. HEAD LOCKS

1. Frame the arms series (scissors choke, straight arm lock)
2. Hook the leg (bent arm lock)
3. Go to your knees (straight arm lock)

D. CLOSED GUARD PASSING

1. Under the leg guard pass
2. Over the leg guard pass
3. Hand on hip resistance (hip wiggle, knee push inside, knee push outside)

BELT REQUIREMENTS: BLUE BELT

Here is the position I require a student to perform **SWEEPS AND REVERSALS**:

A. GUARD (OPEN AND CLOSED)

1. Scissors sweep
2. Knee sweep
3. Elevator sweep
4. Hook sweep

Here are the **THROWS AND TAKEDOWNS** I require of a student:

A. TWO STANDING THROWS

1. Any hip, neck or arm throw, or any kind of reap

B. TWO STANDING TAKEDOWNS

1. Any single or double leg technique or variation

Here are the **SUBMISSIONS** I will want to see (proficiency is not required at blue belt level):

- A. Four chokes from the guard (two must be collar chokes)
- B. Four chokes from the mount (two must be collar chokes)
- C. Three arm locks from the guard
- D. Three arm locks from the mount
- E. Four leg locks from inside the guard

Everything up until this point in time represents the technical portion of the test.

The sparring portion of the exam, which comes next, will demonstrate a student's physical skills and heart.

Sparring will be four rounds of five minutes.

Be physically and mentally well prepared.





ON BECOMING A BLUE BELT

BY RICK ELLIS

I was recently awarded the blue belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu by Mr. Roy Dean. While things are still fresh in my memory I thought I'd share my experience with Jiu Jitsu thus far.

When I started training Brazilian Jiu Jitsu a year and a half ago I knew very little about the art, except that it had proven to be highly effective in mixed martial arts competitions. I didn't know the positions, transitions, or finishes. I had done Japanese Jiu Jitsu for a few years when I was younger, so I knew what chokes felt like, and I knew a few joint locks and throws, but still, having techniques applied while sparing in a way that resembles a real fight is a much more visceral and intense experience.

The most shocking aspect of Jiu Jitsu for me was the physicality of it. I remember feeling absolutely crushed under the weight of my opponent during my first roll on the first day of class. It was as if my ribs were being split apart at the seams. That first roll only lasted a minute before my heart was racing so fast I thought it would explode. There was an intensity to it that I had never experienced before, having never wrestled or participated in sports. And I loved it instantly.

It became crystal clear to me on my first day of class that Jiu Jitsu is hard. There are no pretenses in this art; no inflated sense of ones ability. If you want to be good you have to prove it—every single day you train. If you step on the mat to roll I can guarantee you that someone will want to test you. Sometimes the person wanting to test you is you, of course, but that's the beauty of it. Few martial arts have such a built in reality factor.

I trained Danzan Ryu Jiu Jitsu for about three years. Danzan is a form of Japanese Jiu Jitsu that blends traditional stand up Jiu Jitsu with Judo. It's a cool art and I enjoyed doing it. One problem, though: No sparring. As a consequence, no reality check. After a while you start believing that the choreographed moves you practice in class will be effective in a real fight. In your own mind you become a killer who wins every battle. It wasn't until BJJ that I realized the folly in this. Even though there are some great techniques in that art, unless you can apply them under duress, you're not really learning how to be effective.

The first six months of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu for me became about one thing: survival. I was tapping constantly, so if I could learn to defend myself enough to prolong

ON BECOMING A BLUE BELT

BY RICK ELLIS

the battles, and more importantly, not get hurt in the process, I would consider it a victory. To an equal extent, the first six months also became about physical adaptation. Grapplers are among the best conditioned athletes in the world, but until you try to grapple yourself you'll never truly appreciate what that means. On my very first day of class I ended up bent over in front of a toilet on the verge of puking, so if I was going to do this art I needed to get serious about my fitness. Again, the built in reality check. You can't fake it in BJJ.

After my sixth month I began to broaden my game by incorporating elements of offense, rather than only defense. Instead of immediately jumping into the safety the guard I started trying other positions. I began attacking a little more, getting more aggressive. I calmed way down too. When you first start out you expend way too much energy, ironically, because you don't know yet where to apply your energy. Should I push here or there, should I pull, hook, or grab? As a consequence, you flail about and burn out quick. Over time you learn to relax within the game, and expend energy more efficiently. As I improved, my movements got more focused, they gained purpose and

trajectory. When you watch a high level player you'll notice most of all that their movements seem so precise and calculated, with no wasted energy or needless motion. As I approached the end of my first year I could begin to see that my movements were getting better. Although far from graceful, it could be said that I was starting to look like I played Jiu Jitsu. Once I hit the one year point I felt like I understood the basics of the major positions; guard, side-mount, and mount. In fact, my positional game seemed to be developing faster than my submission game. When I expressed concern about this to Mr. Dean he told me that attaining a blue belt is not about being good at submissions, it's about proper movement and position.

The submissions, he said, would come later. Although I took that to heart, it still bothered me that I wasn't getting the tap as often as I wished. Then I found an article written by Mr. Roy Harris where he stated:

"I have seen too many blue belts begin their journey into submission too soon and often become frustrated because they just can't finish their opponent. They get so close, but they often fail at finishing

ON BECOMING A BLUE BELT

BY RICK ELLIS

their opponent. This usually leads the blue belt to seeking out more and more submission techniques. He thinks that the "new" and "sneaky" techniques will make him more skilled at submissions. However, what he doesn't realize is that his inability to finish his opponent is directly related to his inability to positionally dominate him."

According to Mr. Harris, the most important task of the blue belt is to begin to master positional escapes. After that, positional dominance. Once a good grasp of those are in place, submissions can be focused on. I felt much better about my game after I read that. After about a year I also began learning how to apply physical pressure, a very important component in Jiu Jitsu. If, for example, you weigh 180 pounds as I do, theoretically, if you could focus your entire weight on one spot you would be able to apply 180 pounds of force. And if you could enlist your pulling muscles into the equation as well you could in theory generate more than 180 pounds of pressure. You'll never be able to focus all that force on one spot, of course, but that's the goal. As my game began to improve I began feeling where that pressure needs to be applied, and I began understanding how to apply continuous pressure in order to

advance my position and make my opponent work harder. I had the honor of rolling with Mr. Roy Harris on one occasion. They call him "The Boa" because of his crushing pressure. Over years of training he's learned how to focus his weight like a laser beam. He can literally crack ribs and submit you just with his pressure. It's impossible not to moan when he cranks it on. He told me that rolling with Rickson Gracie first opened his eyes to the pressure game. Rickson, he said, had incredible pressure, despite not weighing much. Mr. Dean has pretty mean pressure too, although his game tends to be so light, quick, and fluid, that most of the time he doesn't need to utilize it.

One of the unexpected benefits of Jiu Jitsu that I'm enjoying the most is the camaraderie and friendship. The brotherhood of Jiu Jitsu, if you will. Unlike most martial arts, it takes about ten years to get really good at BJJ, so unless it becomes a lifestyle, you'll never make it. It helps a lot to have classmates you enjoy hanging out with. It's those friendships that will help you make it through the low spots in your training.

I've had my share of frustrations with the art. One of my biggest is that it takes so damn long to

ON BECOMING A BLUE BELT

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get good at BJJ. Often, weeks go by with seemingly little progress. In reality there is progress, but your classmates are progressing too, making it seem like there isn't any. But then, when you least expect it, you'll have a breakthrough moment and the door into the art opens up a little bit more and you'll be incredibly excited.

For me, becoming a blue belt has been about laying a foundation. At blue belt, you haven't built the house yet - heck, you don't even know exactly what type of house best suits you, but you've poured the slab, and hopefully reinforced it with some rebar.

I still have a very long journey ahead, but I feel that I've reached my first major milestone. And thanks to the incredible fortune of having an elite level instructor in Mr. Dean, I feel like the sky is the limit.







BELT REQUIREMENTS: PURPLE BELT

PURPLE BELT DEMONSTRATION REQUIREMENTS

There are two parts to the demonstration: Technical and sparring.

The technical portion of the test involves demonstrating techniques from each of the following categories:

- **ESCAPES**
- **GUARD PASSES**
- **SWEEP AND REVERSALS**
- **THROWS AND TAKEDOWNS**
- **SUBMISSION COMBINATIONS**

The sparring portion of the test involves putting the techniques together in a live, dynamic environment. Here are the **ESCAPES** I require a student be able to demonstrate:

- 7 MOUNT ESCAPES**
- 7 SIDEMOUNT ESCAPES**
- 7 SWEEPS**
- 8 GUARD PASSES**
- 5 TAKEDOWNS**
- 10 SUBMISSION COMBINATIONS OF YOUR CHOICE**

Combinations should at least 3 steps in complexity.

Sparring will be four rounds of six minutes.

Be physically and mentally well prepared.



#CREWRDA



THE PATH TO PURPLE

BY TJ BRODEUR

As I write this, I have been a purple belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu for just over one month. The process of my transition from blue to purple is still very clear in my head, and has given me a much greater appreciation for the complexity and elegance of this art. I hope that by sharing my experience in earning my purple belt, I will give the new practitioner a glimpse into a deeper part of the game and view of what is to come if they stick with it. There are many things that have changed for me on the way from white belt to purple belt. However, to compare and contrast these changes, let me focus on three terms define this progression: clarity, efficiency, and purpose.

EFFICIENCY

Most new students leave their first classes—particularly after their first rolling experience—saying the same thing: “I need to get in better shape.” While this may be true to some degree, the real problem—as Roy discusses so well in the Blue Belt Requirements DVD—is poor gas mileage or, put another way, inefficiency of movement. Plainly put, new students lack the basic skills to move themselves on the ground.

For the student who focuses

their early efforts on learning and practicing fundamental movement drills (e.g., shrimping, rolling, bridging, etc), overcoming this gas mileage problem is easily accomplished and is their first real break-through in the art.

By the time we reach blue belt, most students have made great improvements in energy conservation and economy of motion. With the progression from blue belt to purple belt I have discovered the next evolution in improving efficiency.

At first, this improvement manifested itself in more seamless transitions between movements. The individual steps that defined a given technique at blue belt have morphed into a single, fluid movement. The gaps that existed between, say, passing the guard and securing an arm lock have gotten smaller and smaller, until the momentum of the first carries into the second.

But recently I have noticed an even more profound change in my efficiency; the ability to multi-task. This was unexpected, but has dramatically changed my game. There is now overlap in my movements and techniques. While moving into mount, I find myself already beginning to control and isolate an arm. This

THE PATH TO PURPLE

BY TJ BRODEUR

allows me to be 90% complete with my submission attempt by the time I establish my position; greatly increasing my effectiveness in getting the actual submission.

Much of this improved efficiency has been the result of drilling. In hindsight, I now recognize how important—and often neglected—this aspect of training is. Drilling movement and combinations, particularly while preparing for my purple belt demonstration, was the vehicle for change I experienced. To the new student, I would offer the suggestion to resist the urge to spar all the time, and instead use some portion of each open mat to drill techniques.

CLARITY

Looking back at my first year (maybe two years) of training, the only way I can describe it is chaos. It didn't seem like chaos then, but is sure does in retrospect. Chaos was in every aspect of my training. Sparring was an exhausting thrash; desperately scrambling for positions and frantically—often futilely—grabbing for submissions. Even after getting my blue belt, much of my sparring was still a random search for how to use the techniques I knew in a given situation. I had not yet developed a “game”, as I will discuss later. As a purple belt, rolling is no

longer the foreign, confusing event it once was. Instead has become more of a chess game for me. I understand the rules of the game, I can see the position of the pieces on the board, and I know how each of them can move. Getting caught in a submission is no longer a “where did that come from” event. Instead, I am aware of the set up and my options as the set up is happening, but getting tapped is often much more the result of a strategic error; I see the armlock set-up and the choke threat to prevent my counter, I begin to rotate, aware of the risk to my opposite arm, but leave it out for a fraction of a second too long, and “check mate.” Conversely, the opposite is true; I have a better understanding of the strategies that make my own submissions work.

An additional dimension to this clarity is having a better understanding of what my opponent will do in a given situation. I now know that if standing, a brand new student is likely to drop their head and attempt a tackle (perfect opening for a guillotine) or a bigger student will be likely to attempt to reach out and choke me if in my guard (truly a gift if you are ready to rotate for the arm lock). The magic of the submission that seems to “come out of nowhere,” that all of us have felt when rolling with a higher belt, is often

THE PATH TO PURPLE

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just this; they knew what you were likely going to do before you did and were setting up while you were still dealing with the last movement. As a purple belt, I get to be on the right side of this situation much more than I ever did when I was a blue belt.

PURPOSE

By purpose, I mean being deliberate and having a defined road map to rolling and training. This is really just a result of the efficiency and clarity discussed above, but is more than that. For the first time since starting BJJ, I feel I am developing a “game”. As I stated before, the early parts of most of our training is a random search for techniques. The first step out of this was finding my first my first “bread and butter” submission. For me this was the straight arm bar from the guard and it opened up a a whole new dimension to rolling. It provided a regular method for “getting the tap”, but more importantly, it gave me something I could threaten my opponent with.



Roy Dean Academy
Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

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PROGRESSION

IN BJJ

BY ROY HARRIS

Allow me to share with you my personal observations of the progression through the different belt levels in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I believe this will help you to understand where you are now and where you are headed with your journey in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I hope you enjoy this article!

WHITE BELT

This is the belt of paying your dues. This is the belt where you will spend most of your time on his back. You usually end up doing most of the tapping as well.

Your ability to grapple successfully will depend largely on three things:

Your previous martial arts experience, (a grappling background helps a lot)

Your current fitness level, (a higher level of fitness help tremendously)

Your ability to learn visually (visual learners adapt and absorb information more quickly)

Students who come from a wrestling background seem to adapt very well to the slight change in grappling methods. Students who come from an

athletic background also seem to adapt quite well.

Those who come from a striking background sometimes have a difficult time adapting. Many have become so accustomed to visually grabbing onto the vertical and horizontal lines of the walls, doorways and ropes to stabilize their equilibrium that they feel very uncomfortable with the diagonal world of grappling. They quickly learn that the ground has not been their friend, and, that they must take some time to acquaint themselves with this new perspective.

The most frustrating part about being a white belt (especially if you have no experience on the ground) is the fact that most of the advanced students will make you tap, or at least positionally dominate you. (I remember feeling frustrated as a white belt.) This frustration usually leads to white belts asking questions like, "How do I get on top of these guys? How do I escape the side or full mount? How do I tap out the blue and purple belts?" Unfortunately, there's nothing you can do right now to immediately change the tables in your favor. Get used to the blue and purple belts tapping you out. Get used to having them positionally dominating you.

PROGRESSION IN BJJ

BY ROY HARRIS

Consider tapping as a “form of learning”, a way of “paying your dues.” I remember when I was a white belt. I remember feeling like a rag doll in the hands of the blue and purple belts. I wish there would have been something I could have done to prevent from feeling like that, but there wasn’t. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is just one of those “time in service” things. You simply have to put your time in. There are no short cuts!

The only encouragement that I can give to you is this, “Keep training! Your day is coming. The day will come when you will no longer be a white belt. The day is coming when you will be able to escape from any position with finesse and ease. Then, it will be your turn to watch the frustration of the new white belts that enter your school. Then, it will be your turn to encourage them as I have encouraged you!”

White belts are expected to rely on speed, power, strength and explosiveness. For that is all they know. However, once a person dons the “blue belt”, the world of Jiu Jitsu suddenly changes.

BLUE BELT

This is the belt of survival. It is the belt where the focus of your training must be on escaping

from most of the inferior positions (the mount, the guard, the side mount, the wrestler’s cradle and headlocks). Having the ability to escape from most inferior positions is paramount to having the ability to get on top of a person, positionally dominate them and making them tap.

I know that there are a number of submissions from inferior positions (not necessarily the guard), but these submissions require a high level of speed, power and explosiveness. The reason why these submissions require speed, power and explosiveness is because your body, when placed in an inferior position, can not effectively apply leverage. To compensate for the inability to apply leverage, you substitute it with speed, power and explosiveness to effect the lock. (Anyone who tells you any different is either purposely misleading you or very unknowledgeable with grappling!

I know that some may argue this point, but I stand by this point.) Not only do you have an inability to apply leverage from an inferior position, you also do not have control of your opponent’s body! So now do you see why escapes are so important to building a firm foundation in grappling? When you can easily escape the tightest pin (from just about

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anyone), you will find yourself on top more often.

When you find yourself on top, you have more chances for submission. However, you should not jump right into submission just yet because you have not developed the skill to hold someone down with finesse and ease. I have seen too many blue belts begin their journey into submission too soon and often become frustrated because they just can't finish their opponent. They get so close, but they often fail at finishing their opponent. This usually leads the blue belt to seeking out more and more submission techniques. He thinks that the "new" and "sneaky" techniques will make him more skilled at submissions. However, what he doesn't realize is that his inability to finish his opponent is directly related to his inability to positionally dominate him. The blue belt feels good when he has escaped a hold down and has landed on top. However, he also feels like he has ONE SHOT at sinking in the submission. He knows if he fails, he will end up on his back and have to fight for the top position again. So, he usually stalls, waiting for his opponent to make a mistake so he can hopefully capitalize on it.

Once the blue belt has a firm

grip on positional escapes, he should then move on to positional dominance: which is "the ability to control an opponent." When the blue belt can readily escape from most of the bottom positions, he should focus his training on learning how to control his opponent with greater ease and finesse. Although anyone can control their opponent if they can use all of their strength for short periods of time. It will take some time before a person can effortlessly hold down their opponent.

Once the blue belt has a good grip on these two aspects, he should then begin to develop a few good submissions. Still, he should not be consumed with them because there are still a few more areas to train before a lengthy period of time should be spent on submissions. (Yes, yes, yes, I know that submissions are the more enjoyable part of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I am not saying that you should not train them at all. However, all I am saying is this, "Don't focus on them quite yet. Wait until you are a high purple belt!")

The blue belt should have a large repertoire of positional and submission techniques. However, his depth of knowledge of these techniques is very limited because of his experience level. And

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because of his limited experience, he will still require a good amount of speed, power and explosiveness to effect most of his techniques. This is to be expected.

Another interesting thing happens at the blue belt level: the bar of performance raises itself to highly competitive levels. I remember when I was a white belt, it felt OK to tap to everyone because hey, I was a white belt. However, once I was promoted to blue belt, many of the bigger, stronger and more talented white belts began to set their cross-hair on me. What once was a shared journey of joy and frustration suddenly became field of itchy trigger fingered snipers. Many of the white belts who were once fellow sojourners now wanted the privilege of being able to say, "I made a blue belt tap!" It seemed like overnight the game of Jiu Jitsu suddenly became very competitive. Well, if you think the game was interesting at the blue belt level, wait until you hear about the highly regarded purple belt!

PURPLE BELT

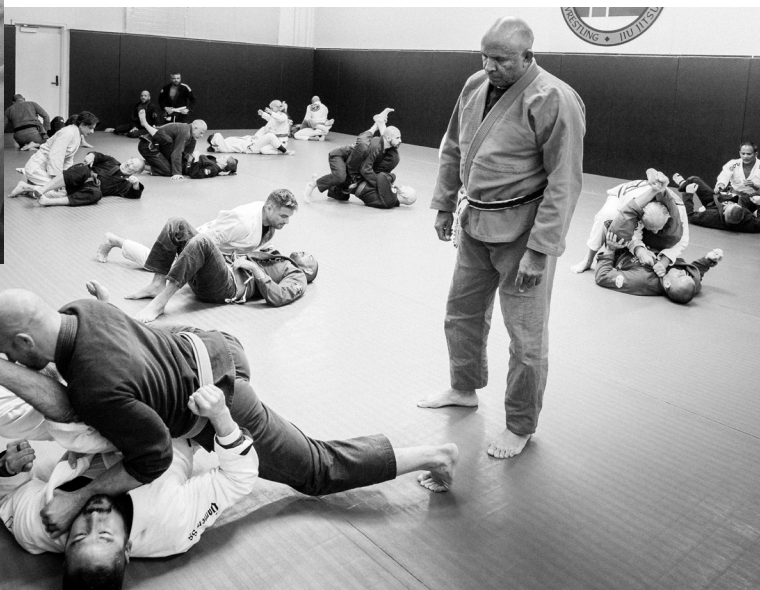
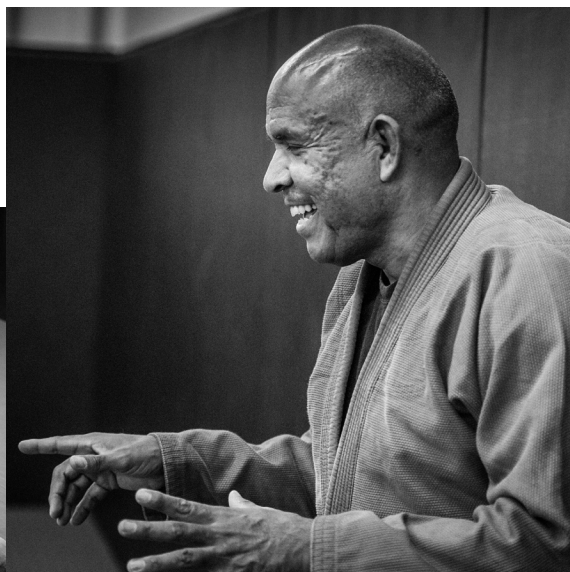
This is the belt of momentum and combinations. This is the belt level where the amount of energy you expend to accomplish a specific

task should be considerably lower than it was when you were a white belt. Your game should have a certain amount of grace and finesse to it. Your game should not have rely on speed, power and explosiveness to get you into positions or out of positions. Your repertoire of techniques should be very high. However, you should begin to focus your training on your depth of knowledge. The white and blue belts are the belts where you accumulate techniques. The purple belt is the first belt where you must begin to refine your techniques. It is also the belt where you learn to put the basic techniques together into various two technique and three technique combinations, with the use of momentum.

Because you become more reliant upon combinations and momentum, the amount of speed and power required to effect your technique decreases. This is not something a white or blue belt can do just yet because of their limited amount of knowledge and experience.

As a purple belt, you must begin to focus your training on the use of momentum. You must train your entire body to FEEL momentum. Up until this point in time, most everything was visual. You must





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develop a high level of sensitivity so that you can flow with your opponent instead of forcing techniques with speed and power, especially when you grappled people who are much bigger and stronger than you are. Pushing an opponent's dead weight around is exhausting if you do not have a firm foundation in escapes and positioning. You will need to learn to use the momentum that your opponent gives to you, as well as create momentum when his body is not in motion. Momentum will help you to lower the amount of strength you use to perform your techniques.

Your training should also begin to use the basic techniques together into two, three and sometimes five technique combinations. Notice I said "basic" techniques. The purple belt mentality is very different from the white and blue belt mentality. White and blue belts think the answer to their problems is learning more techniques. The purple belt thinks to himself: "I need to refine the techniques I already know and then learn how to reflexively put the appropriate techniques together into flowing combinations." For example, when I first learned the triangle, I thought it was just a matter of

throwing my legs over their head and shoulder and squeezing my legs together. Then as I matured in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, I noticed that there were a specific set of components that made up the technique (20 to be exact!). Then, I noticed that these components could be broken down even further into sub-categories. Now (as a black belt), the triangle is no longer a simple technique with three or four movements. It is now a myriad of over twenty (20) different (and subtle) moving parts that must be put together in a specific order so they can all work together towards one common goal: apply pressure to the neck. Once I had mastered the triangle, I needed to put it together with other basic techniques like the arm lock, the hip bump, the sweep, the kimura, a knee lock, etc. Knowing how to combine the triangle with other basic techniques was very important to my development in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu! Once I could combine techniques together and use them in conjunction with momentum, I now felt ready to take on the world. I've noticed the same in many students, both in seminars, at my school and other schools.

The purple belt's mind set should be on the refinement of his current knowledge and the use of momentum and combinations.

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The purple belt is able to do this because he already has a wide base of knowledge in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I know that white and blue belts want to learn how to do this, but they simply aren't ready for it just yet.

This mindset, along with some rapidly developing skills by the purple belts usually sets the stage for some highly charged matches, especially amongst new purple belts. Why? Because some of the "veteran" blue belts want to make a purple belt tap. Plus, a number of students who get their purple belts go through a period which I call "testing their wares." They want to see just how they compare to the older, more experienced purple belts, especially those who are about to be promoted to brown belt.

BROWN BELT

This is the belt of mastery of ALL the basics and something I call "at-will grappling." This is also the belt where submissions play a big part in the training. When I decide that someone is about ready for their brown belt, I tell them in advance that they are about 9 months to a year away from their brown belt. I give them a schedule of tasks that I want them to work on.

First, they must master each and every escape. I want them to be able to escape every position with the use of their hands AND without the use of their hands (they must know how to push and pull, lift and lower with every portion of their anatomy.). I want them to be able to hold other students down with their hands and without their hands. I want to see them use all of the basic techniques in three and five technique combinations. I also want them to begin to refine their submissions. This is where I begin to use the "at-will grappling" training method. I will tell the student, "for the next thirty days, all I want you to do is apply straight arm locks when you grapple with the other students. No chokes or leg locks. Just arm locks." Then, a month later, I will tell them, "for the next month, all I want you to do are leg locks. Then a month later, I will tell them to choke the other students. So, for each month, they have been given a specific task to master. Because they tell the other students, "All I am going to do is arm lock you today," the student knows what the purple belt is going for. This forces the student to be creative in setting up the arm lock because his opponent knows that he will not try a different submission. Setting up an opponent is a difficult task,

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however, it is one that needs to be learned at this belt level. (I know the lower belt levels want to learn this stuff, but again, they are simply not ready for it.)

Once the student has gotten pretty good at arm locks, leg locks or choke, I will have him narrow the scope of his training. Now, he must focus on one specific limb. I will tell him, “for the next month, all I want you to do is arm lock your opponent’s left arm.” This really forces the student to develop a multiplicity of ways to enter into the straight arm lock on his opponent’s left arm. The student has the confidence to go for all of these submissions because he has a foundation in positional escapes and positional dominance. If he did not have this foundation, he would be timid to go for the submission because he would not want to end up on the bottom again. However, because he can easily escape from any position, and because he can readily hold down and control his opponent, he can repeatedly try for these submissions time and time again! This is why I do not place a lot of emphasis on submissions until the purple or brown belt levels. Position and control are the most important tools to develop at first.

Once a student has a firm grip on the mastery of his basics, I will promote him to brown belt. Once he has been promoted to brown belt, he must continue to refine his game. He must seek out his weak areas and focus on them. He must also find his strengths and focus on them for an extended period of time because these will define his character as a black belt. Most black belts have a specialty. Some are good at throws. Others are good at collar chokes. I happen to be good at leg locks. I want my brown belts to find their sweet spot and train it like crazy!

BLACK BELT

This is the belt where a person focuses his training on counters and placing his or her signature on the art. First, let’s talk about the signature. Some black belts develop an affinity for leg locks (like myself). Others tend to focus on throws or take downs. Some are exceptional at arm locks. While others are magicians at collar chokes. This is also the belt where you really begin to refine and redefine the art. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu takes on a more personal look to it. The new black belt begins to realize that there’s more than one way to skin a cat. He also begin to notice how certain things work for some people while others don’t. (Now, let me

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qualify that last statement: all of these things apply to the black belt who is still refining, growing, learning and adapting. They do not apply to the black belt who is stuck in his old ways, paralyzed by his resistance to change!)

At the black belt level, the learning process starts over again. If a new black belt is honest with him or herself, they realize they know very little about their chosen art.

They will also know that there is a difference between a new black belt and a black belt who has consistently been training “as a black belt” for the past ten years. For example, I am a relatively new black belt, someone you might call “a white belt amongst other black belts.” I’ve had my black belt for two years now. Then there’s Royler Gracie. He’s had his black belt for several years. As a matter of fact, he had his black belt before I even thought about Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Plus, he has so many more hundreds of hours competing, teaching and training that there’s no way to compare my black belt with his black belt. So, as a new black belt, I am introduced to a new journey, one that is as long and hard as the one I just traveled. However, because I have already traveled a similar road, I am ready to take on this new one!

At the black belt level, a person’s technical expertise is very high. However, his ability to skillfully perform all of his technical knowledge will not be as good as some might think. The black belt will obviously have some favorite moves that he does most of the time. However, over time (if he continues to train with the same intensity as he did in the earlier belts), his skill level will continue to increase. The only thing that will be different is that his game will become much smaller. He will not concern himself with “NEW” techniques, but the refining and redefining of the old ones. He will work on the small subtle movements that will make the art much easier and more enjoyable to practice. He will begin to make smaller movements to accomplish the same objectives as the other belt.

For example, to a black belt, the difference between escaping and being held down is often the difference between a hip movement of less than one inch. YES, I SAID “ONE INCH!” The black belt’s feel and sensitivity of the game is so much higher than the white, blue or even purple belt’s game. The black belt begins to move like a shadow. He flows effortlessly around his opponent’s movement and follows the path they set. He finds his opponent’s weakness and then exploits it. The

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game is very small and tactile!

Finally, the black belt's knowledge and ability to execute counters will be much higher. For example, when a student performs a basic technique, the black belt is already three or four moves ahead of him. The black belt knows that for every move, there are several counters. For every counter, there are several more counters.

Do you now see and understand the progression from white to black belt? The process of becoming skilled at Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is frustrating, very time consuming and nerve racking, however, it is always rewarding!

I wish you continued success in your journey. Keep training hard and smart!

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