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Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and Defensive Tactics

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**By
Aaron Brower**

**Texarkana Texas Police Department
Texarkana, Texas
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ABSTRACT

Defensive tactics taught to police today do not focus enough on where fights occur. Since many altercations end up on the ground, law enforcement agencies should implement ground fighting techniques, specifically Brazilian jiu-jitsu, as the primary base of the defensive tactics training they teach and use. Brazilian jiu-jitsu does not require the officer to be bigger and stronger than the suspect. It was designed to work due to technique not brute force. Another benefit to Brazilian jiu-jitsu is it is easy to learn. Officers can perform the techniques at full force and do not have to fear injuring their partner. The techniques are not complex and easy to teach. Due to the popularity of mixed martial arts, there are a lot of gyms out there teaching Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Therefore, officers need to train in ways so that they can protect themselves from a suspect who may know some Brazilian jiu-jitsu techniques. It is also a good form of exercise and will positively affect the officer's physical fitness. Although Brazilian jiu-jitsu does have limitations and is not really applicable when facing two or more opponents, the positives outweigh the negatives.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the necessity of incorporating ground fighting techniques, specifically Brazilian jiu-jitsu, into all law enforcement agencies' defensive tactics training. Texas Police Chiefs Association requires departments to have bi-annual training for all their officers in defensive tactics. The Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) also requires that departments have regular defensive tactics training. If agencies do not perform this training, they will lose their accreditation through these entities. Due to how often law enforcement has to physically restrain or actively defend themselves, it is important for all law enforcement agencies to provide adequate training on how to utilize fighting techniques. Also, the largest amount of uses of force end up on the ground. Whether the suspect is actively fighting for the officer's duty weapon or he is just trying to get free from the officer so he can flee, it is very important that our law enforcement officers know how to handle themselves while fighting off their feet. Schreiber (2011) states, "When an officer is on the ground, gun retention becomes immensely important, as does a survival mindset" (p. 2).

Brazilian jiu-jitsu in particular emphasizes feeling comfortable fighting "off one's back." This is more important than only learning defensive techniques to perform while standing. Departments should implement training in ground fighting techniques into all their defensive tactics training. Bartuch (2013) states, "In an officer's entire career, the chances of firing the duty weapon hovers at around two percent. However, during a "routine," tour of duty, an officer's chance of having to put hands-on may run as high as 80%" (para. 1). Due to how often law enforcement has to physically restrain a resisting

suspect or actively defend themselves from an aggressor, it is important for all law enforcement agencies to provide adequate training on how to utilize these fighting techniques. The most popular ground fighting system is Brazilian jiu-jitsu. According to Gracie, Danaher, and Gracie (2003), Brazilian jiu-jitsu has seen a surge in popularity since 1993 and the first airing of a sporting event known as Ultimate Fighting Championships. Brazilian jiu-jitsu offers many advantages over other ground fighting arts. It is based on body leverage and technique and does not require the practitioner to be stronger or more athletic than his opponent. Not only will these techniques assist an officer with controlling a suspect, but it will also allow him to be able to defend against the suspect attempting to disarm him.

According to the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu Academy website (n.d.), Brazilian jiu-jitsu was founded by the Gracie family. Helio Gracie learned traditional jiu-jitsu from his brother, Carlos Gracie in the early 1900s. Helio was a smaller, lean man who had been sickly growing up. Helio adapted the traditional jiu-jitsu he learned from his brother developed it to be based more on leverage, control and technique. These changes allowed him the ability to compete and beat much larger, stronger and younger opponents. This form of martial arts is what we call Brazilian jiu-jitsu today. According to Green and Svinth (2003), the United States Army in 1994 and United States Marine Corp. in 1999 both implemented ground fighting systems that includes Gracie jiu-jitsu. According to Green and Svinth (2003), then Army Lieutenant Colonel James McChrystal picked Brazilian jiu-jitsu because he believed that it was easy to learn and it allowed competition in the ranks. This type of competition will drive officers to hone their skills outside of annual training requirements, and the result will be officers achieving a higher

fitness level. Law enforcement agencies should implement ground fighting techniques, specifically Brazilian jiu-jitsu, as the primary base of the defensive tactics training they teach and use.

POSITION

Brazilian jiu-jitsu utilizes body positioning and control techniques that are effective in controlling a struggling suspect without causing serious bodily injury to either the suspect or the officer. To understand why Brazilian jiu-jitsu is so effective, one needs to know how it was developed. According to Gracie, Danaher and Gracie (2003), in the early 1900s, a Japanese jiu-jitsu practitioner named Maeda came to Brazil on an exhibition tour showcasing his skill as a martial artist. He took on all comers and defeated the majority of them with his form of jiu-jitsu that was also known as Judo. Maeda went to Brazil and began to train a young Carlos Gracie. Maeda taught Carlos Gracie traditional jiu-jitsu along with techniques from judo. Carlos then began teaching jiu-jitsu to his younger brother, Helio. According to the Gracie Jiu-jitsu Academy (n.d.) website, Helio was an unhealthy child and suffered from fainting spells after physical exertion. At the age of 16, Helio began instructing traditional jiu-jitsu at Carlos' gym. Helio soon learned that a lot of the traditional techniques did not work for him because of his frail body. He began tinkering with the techniques and developed moves that did not rely on size, or brute strength to perform. He developed what is now known as Gracie jiu-jitsu. Gracie jiu-jitsu is trademarked so most instructors that are not directly affiliated with the Gracie Family call it, Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Hogeveen stated, "BJJ (Brazilian jiu-jitsu), is often called the game of human chess; it is a martial art of leverage and feel. Practitioners struggle for control of

opponents' bodies and create opportunities for locks and choke holds" (as cited in Garcia & Spencer, 2013, p. 82). Brazilian jiu-jitsu does not require the officer to be larger, stronger, more athletic or more physically fit than the suspect to be effective. In law enforcement, officers are not placed in an age and weight class with the suspect they are attempting to arrest. Sometimes, officers are at a small disadvantage, and sometimes they are completely out of their depth. With BJJ, officers can be physically disadvantaged but still win the encounter. Weiss and Davis (2002) stated, "Leverage and technique defeat size and strength. Gracie tells his class, that officers must always assume that someone who will try to fight with them will be bigger and stronger, and on the street nobody plays by the rules" (p. 2). They went on to say, "The majority of police fighting, controlling, and grappling ends up on the ground and leaves officers at a disadvantage, especially if the assailant is taller or heavier" (Weiss, & Davis, 2002, p. 1). If officers are trained in proper techniques, then Weiss and Davis (2002) advises, "...the difference between a big guy and a small guy isn't that much when they are on the ground if the small guy has the advantage of leverage" (p. 2).

Another positive for BJJ is that it is easy to learn, and officers can train at close to full speed because BJJ practitioners learn how to "tap out" when a move is applied correctly. Trainees learn to properly submit to their opponent when a submission technique is applied, this allows you to train hard and without fear of injuring your training partner. Green and Svinth (2003) advised, "First, Gracie jiu-jitsu was reasonably easy to learn and use" (p. 266). The military implemented Gracie jiu-jitsu for this reason. This allows officers to train at 100%. Training at 100% allows the officer to hone his techniques and determine what needs to be improved. Also, training

at full speed allows an officer to learn what moves and techniques work for his body type. This type of training will also show the officers that these techniques are viable and easy to perform. Some techniques are easier for tall officers than short officers, and some techniques will be easier for thin officers than heavyset officers. This will not only teach them a set of skills, but it will also improve their self-esteem and confidence on the street.

According to Strandberg (2017), there has been an enormous growth in the sport of MMA recently. This has created a dramatic increase in the amount of awareness of certain moves and techniques by those who watch mixed martial arts competitions. The rise in popularity of mixed martial arts through sports like Ultimate Fighting Championship and Bellator Fighting Championship have made it important for officers to know how to defend themselves against those who have a workable knowledge through watching fights on TV. They need to be able to recognize when they are fighting a more knowledgeable and experienced mixed martial arts fighter. Hogeveen stated, "Today, BJJ (Brazilian jiu-jitsu) is taught in almost every major urban centre and is considered the world's fastest growing martial arts" (as cited in Garcia & Spencer, 2013, p. 82).

Due to this proliferation of the sport, there are many people on the street that may be skilled enough to disarm, seriously injure, or even kill the officer. Schreiber (2011) pointed out that BJJ is so popular, people are finding techniques off YouTube and practicing them. With this amount of exposure to the general public, it is important that officers are training in BJJ. Officers will be able to determine when a suspect is placing them in a chokehold or a joint lock that would render them either unconscious or

unable to fight due to a broken limb. This could be lifesaving for the officer and will allow the officer to know when to escalate his force options, all the way to deadly force. Law enforcement officers today are provided with a tool belt full of less lethal instruments. Officers are provided with batons, pepper spray, and tasers. These are great tools and should be utilized, but due to the increase in less-lethal items like these, officers do not put enough onus on their basic abilities to remove someone who is on top of trying to take a handgun from their holster. If an officer finds himself in that type of scenario, he will be glad that he trained in ground fighting especially BJJ.

BJJ based defensive tactics training will improve a department's overall fitness level. According to Bourg (2013), although most fights are over in seconds, officers should train to be prepared for a fight to last longer. He states that officers should be prepared to fight with a suspect for at least 3 minutes continuously. In BJJ, an officer can train at 100% and put forth the effort to exert the energy needed to be in the proper shape for a real fight without the fear of injury to himself or his training partners. He will also learn how to breathe while in an altercation. People who are unaccustomed to grappling tend to hold their breath while in an altercation. This causes severe fatigue even in individuals who are in good physical condition. By training, the officer will unconsciously learn to remember to breathe, allowing him to fight longer and with greater ability due to less fatigue.

COUNTER POSITION

Officers taking suspects to the ground is not always the best option. Clemmer (1998) states, "When an officer takes a fight to the ground, it should only be under the right conditions" (p. 1) Officer safety does not always allow officers to take a

hard hand control situation to the ground. There are all types of factors that should be considered before taking a fight there. These factors include the area; for example, officers should not try and take a suspect to the ground when on a hill. The grade of the hill and the type of takedown used could be severely compromised by the grade of the incline. According to Clemmer (1998), the officer does not get to dictate whether the takedown will be on asphalt or some other hard substance. The officer could end up underneath the suspect and in a poor situation. The officer should also not take a struggling suspect to the ground if there are multiple suspects in the call. Clemmer (1998) advises, "One boot to the head by some dirtbag's partner will really screw up your day" (p. 2).

Clemmer (1998) also pointed out that in domestic disturbances involving two or more people, sometimes the domestic victim will turn on an officer when the officer goes to arrest the suspect, and if the officer had taken the fight to the ground, he is now fighting two people. Clemmer noted that when Royce Gracie was asked about what to do when facing two or more opponents, Royce stated to not get in an altercation with more than one person at a time. The number of opponents cannot always be controlled in police situations. Officers do not need to put themselves in a position that they cannot retreat if necessary.

Officers do not get to arrest resisting suspects in a perfect world. According to research done by Los Angeles Police Department, 70% of resisting arrests end up on the ground (Clemmer, 1998, p. 1). If that statistic holds true among all departments in Texas, then officers should focus at least 70% of their training time on how to control a suspect when they reach the ground. Strandberg (2013) states, "Most cops don't study

the bad guys; they train in martial arts and focus on court-defensible techniques” (p. 2). Brazilian jiu-jitsu teaches the officer techniques that allow him to control where the fight ends up, either remaining standing or on the ground. BJJ is a realistic option and feasible for officers to perform. The officer learns basic defensive moves such as sprawling, a move that stops someone from grabbing the legs and tackling the officer. He will also learn techniques that will help him disengage from an aggressive suspect. These techniques could allow him time to push away and reach his belt of tools (Less Lethal devices) or even his service weapon if the situation dictated it.

Law enforcement requires an increased focus on controlling the suspect's hands. The suspect's hands are the most dangerous part of the body for a cop. Hands can access items that can kill or maim a law enforcement officer. Bumgarner (2016) advised, “A hidden hand can access a weapon. If the person you're fighting can get to a knife or gun, the fight can change instantly, even if you're in dominate position” (p. 3). Since Brazilian jiu-jitsu focuses on pressure and body positioning, the traditional BJJ training practitioners spend the majority of the time learning how to control their opponent. They learn how to use leverage and pressure to maintain at least three of the bodies four main movement point, these being both shoulders and hips. BJJ practitioners do not spend a lot of time controlling hands.

Although Bumgarner (2016) makes some excellent points, the benefits of teaching officers BJJ outweigh the negatives. BJJ has a large amount of moves and countermoves. There are many techniques that can be incorporated into training. For example, according to Weiss and Davis (2002), Royce Gracie teaches officers multiple techniques in his trainings so the officer will revert to the move they feel is best for them.

The instructor or agency would need to do the research to determine what moves would be best taught. There are techniques that would allow officers to be aware of the suspect's hands while still controlling him. There are also techniques that would allow the officer to be able to adequately control the suspect's hands. Ultimately, the good just outweighs the bad.

RECOMMENDATION

All law enforcement agencies should implement Brazilian jiu-jitsu ground fighting techniques in their defensive tactics training. Since most officer/suspect physical altercations end on the ground, it is important that officers are able to handle themselves while fighting a suspect on the ground. According to George Williams (2001), more than eight of ten fights end on the ground. Since such a high number of altercations end on the ground, it is important that officers focus at least 70% of their training on ground fighting techniques. As pointed out above, Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the best option for training that type of ground fighting because it has a high focus on leverage and technique. The techniques were developed so a smaller, weaker, and slower practitioner can control a larger, stronger, and faster opponent. This is why it is better than other ground fighting techniques like amateur wrestling and judo, which both require the practitioner to be at least equal close to the same size as the person they are facing. BJJ training for officers is also beneficial since it can be trained at 100% effort. It will allow officers to perfect the moves, and it will improve officers' physical condition. This type of training will also allow the officer the ability to learn to breathe while in an altercation. Since BJJ has seen such huge growth since the 1990s, it is important for officers to be aware of the techniques that people have learned through

their own training in BJJ and from watching mixed martial arts on the television.

Although there are some concerns that it is not always safe to take a fight to the ground due to the number of suspects and the type of ground being fought on, the fact that such a high percentage of fights end on the ground it is imperative that officers know how to react when they end up there. There is also a concern with BJJ that the officer will not be focusing on the suspect's hands when he is controlling the suspect on the ground. It is important for agencies to tailor BJJ training to those techniques that would have a larger focus on techniques that are best suited for law enforcement. The fact is the training program the department chooses will have to have separated sport BJJ from defensive tactics BJJ. Law enforcement agencies should consider looking in house for any of their own veteran officers who have been training in BJJ and see what moves and techniques they would suggest for defensive tactics. There are also programs out there like Gracie Combatives. The Gracie family has developed plans for the US Army and Marine Corp. They have also developed a program for law enforcement officers. These plans can be searched out and reviewed by command staff to determine which one they would like to implement.

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