

Jujutsu

By: Christopher Clemence

Brief Overview/Basic Philosophy:

“The Gentle Art” in Japanese, jujutsu began as an art devoted to close combat on the battlefield by Samurai who became separated from their weapons. As the need to fight armored combatants disappeared, jujutsu evolved into a very potent means of grappling with an opponent. Today the incredibly popular sport of mixed martial arts represents the latest evolution of the art originally intended for the bloody Japanese battlefields of five centuries ago.

History and Origins:

The art that came to be known as jujutsu originated in the sixteenth century in Japan as a fusion of battlefield techniques used in situations where weapons were ineffective or unavailable. Although the Chinese and Okinawan martial arts focused largely on striking, the development of jujutsu tended strongly to grappling, throwing, and joint locks.

In the seventeenth century, Neo-Confucianism began to exert a stronger influence via the edicts of the Tokugawa shogunate, and the ownership of weapons and armor was more and more curtailed, both legally and socially. As a result, hand-to-hand arts became more and more popular as time went on. During this era the term “jujutsu” was coined, but it described many diverse arts that involved joint locks and grappling.

In the eighteenth century the art began to concentrate more on grappling and holds and less on striking. What is known at the present time as *Nihon jujutsu* arose at this time, and largely

focuses upon situations not on the battlefield and makes use of vital-point strikes. A few, small weapons were included in the curriculum, but the techniques were largely empty handed.

The late nineteenth century saw the rise of *Gendai jujutsu* or modern jujutsu. This variety of jujutsu is what is practiced by many military and law enforcement units worldwide. The most popular of these is called *Keisatsujutsu* and was formed and used by the Tokyo Police Department. Also popular in the present century is the sport of *judo*, which has been an Olympic sport for over fifty years.

By far, the most popular variety of jujutsu today is Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Geo Omori opened the first jujutsu in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1909 and another in São Paulo in 1925. Mitsuyo Maeda arrived in Brazil in 1914, and, after several impressive and dominant victories over experts in several other styles, opened a school in 1921. Carlos Gracie witnessed one of these fights and became a student of Maeda's. Soon his younger brother Hélio Gracie joined Maeda's school and together the Gracie brothers developed their own brand of jujutsu, which focused upon ground fighting, joint locks, submissions, and chokeholds.

Popular for decades in Brazil, Brazilian jiu-jitsu became known to the rest of the world with Royce Gracie and his dominance of the first few Ultimate Fighting Championships tournaments in the early 1990's. Brazilian jiu-jitsu has been the discipline of choice for many of the most successful UFC fighters since then.

Training and Techniques:

Jujutsu has six main groups of techniques – joint locks, chokeholds, strikes, grappling, throwing, and takedowns.

Joint locks are a technique used by a practitioner to extend the joint to its maximum extension. When a joint is in this position, the person executing the technique has the most leverage on that joint, and conversely, the person whose joint is locked has the least possible leverage for returning that joint to a comfortable position. The joint lock provides the opponent with control and the ability to exert pain upon his opponent, and possibly severe injury. In most jujutsu competitions, the successful execution of a joint lock is usually sufficient to end the match via “tap out,” or concession of the match in favor of the competitor executing the lock. Also, most matches prohibit joint locks or manipulations on small joints, like fingers and toes.

Chokeholds are techniques used to restrict blood flow to the brain or breath to the lungs. Jujutsu teaches gi chokes (chokes using the opponent’s clothing) and non-gi chokes. For purposes of self-defense, an opponent’s windpipe is targeted and damaged or destroyed, usually causing asphyxiation and death. In sport jujutsu, chokeholds are limited to non-lethal holds that restrict blood flow to the brain by constricting the jugular veins of the neck. These “sleeper” holds will cause an opponent to be unconscious for several seconds if held long enough, and result in a victory by the other fighter.

The strikes used by jujutsu are unique as they are meant either to distract or to cause disruption to the nervous system. Frequently, a practitioner will use a strike as a distraction for or lead-in to a particular take-down. Alternatively, the practitioner may strike at a pressure point, such as the

solar plexus or the femoral nerve just above the knee. A disruption in these areas has the physical effect of causing pain and discomfort, as well as possible numbness and/or inability to use a particular limb for a period of time.

Grappling has become the hallmark of jujutsu, and especially Brazilian jiu-jitsu. The difference between jujutsu and other grappling arts is that a “dominant” position is considered to be the top in many other arts, whereas jujutsu teaches skills and maneuvers that may be executed to great effect from beneath a prone opponent as well. Royce Gracie made extensive use of such maneuvers from the bottom in the early days of the UFC. A major difference between teaching grappling for sport and teaching it for self-defense is that the object of grappling for self-defense is to be able to disengage and flee from an opponent, whereas for purposes of sport the emphasis is in trying to obtain positioning for executing a choke or joint lock, and thereby forcing a submission by the opponent.

Throws and takedowns are often considered to be in the same category for purposes of jujutsu. The main difference between throws and takedowns is that most takedowns are executed by using the legs of the opponent, whereas a throw may be implemented from other points on the opponent’s body.

Uniforms and Rankings:

The uniform worn by practitioners of jujutsu is called a *jujutsugi*. There is no one agreed-upon set of criteria for a *jujutsugi*. Frequently, *jujutsugi* are either repurposed *judogi*, or cut from similar dimensions, except tighter around the body to provide less material for an opponent to

grasp. International Brazilian jiu-jitsu regulations state that the only colors allowed in competition are white, black, and blue. There are also regulations about the appropriate fit of the *jujutsugi* so as to avoid giving an advantage to a participant wearing a particularly snug outfit.

The ranking system in traditional jujutsu is identical to the system used in judo, and is derived from the ranking system used in *go* (a board game of strategy superficially similar to checkers). For the lower rankings (*kyū*), a series of colored belts are awarded, whereas at the *dan* level, the belt is black, and often higher *dan* are recognized with a vertical stripe on the belt.

Brazilian jiu-jitsu's ranking system is comprised of eight degrees, and symbolized by eight different colors or color combinations. White represents a beginner. Blue is the next step, and is not usually awarded to anyone younger than sixteen. Purple belts are for those who have attained the proper knowledge and been a blue belt for two years. Brown belts are reserved for those aged eighteen and above, and who have been at the blue level for at least eighteen months, but usually takes around five years.

As in other arts, the black belt is reserved for those who have a high level of competence in the basic techniques. In Brazilian jiu-jitsu, they are only awarded to those aged nineteen or older and who have been a brown belt for at least a year. A highly experienced black belt who has greatly influenced the sport may be awarded a black and red belt, otherwise known as a "coral" belt. After a minimum of 31 years and after making a tremendous impact on the sport, a practitioner may be awarded a white and red belt. Seven years after that a practitioner is eligible for a red belt, but only if he has reached "the pinnacle of the art." A red belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu

is addressed as “grandmaster” and, due to waiting periods, can be no younger than 67 years of age.

Terms and Teachings:

Grappling – techniques used to manipulate the body of an opponent so as to gain a positional advantage upon him, or ultimately to gain submission.

Jujutsugi – a uniform worn by a jujutsu practitioner, superficially similar to a judogi.

Randori – “grasping freedom”; one-on-one sparring between jujutsu practitioners.

Tantō – a small dagger used occasionally by traditional jujutsu practitioners.

FAQ’s:

What is the main difference between traditional jujutsu and Brazilian jiu-jitsu? The main difference between traditional jujutsu and Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the greater emphasis on ground techniques in Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Are Brazilian jiu-jitsu and Gracie Jiu-Jitsu the same thing? No, Gracie Jiu-Jitsu was a trademarked name once belonging to Hélio Gracie’s son Rorion, but voided by US Courts. There are now three branches of Brazilian jiu-jitsu descending from the Gracie family.

Why is this art spelled in different ways? Because Japanese does not share the same alphabet as most Western languages, Japanese words are often translated in different ways at different times. The spelling “jujutsu” is derived from the Hepburn Romanization, which is generally

considered standard. However, jujutsu was spread prior to this, and therefore different spellings have become accepted in different places.

Organizations dedicated to the Style:

Ju-Jitsu International Federation - <http://www.jjif.info/> - governing body for sport jujutsu

Sport Jiu Jitsu International Federation - <http://www.sjjif.com/> - international governing body for Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu founded by Hélio Gracie, among others

Gracie Humaitá - <http://www.academiagracie.com.br/> - school founded by Carlos and Hélio Gracie

Gracie Barra - <http://www.graciebarra.com/> - association founded by Carlos Gracie, Jr.

Carlson Gracie Federation - <http://www.carlsongraciefederation.com/> - school founded by Carlos Gracie's oldest son

Alliance Jiu Jitsu - <http://www.alliancebjj.com/> - fourth major branch of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, founded by Romero "Jacare" Cavalcanti