



Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: Does it have a place in Law Enforcement Training??

“There are not fifty ways of fighting, there is only one: to be the conqueror.”
--Andre Malraux

As a professional instructor of law enforcement and military tactics, I believe it is my responsibility to research what is being taught by other instructors. I do this for several reasons. My primary objective is to further my education on how the field of combatives and tactics are evolving. My secondary objective is to learn from these instructors about what works and what doesn't work; what is applicable to different units; what clearly isn't appropriate training; and to stay abreast of cutting-edge developments in the field. I try to take what I observe and apply a rigorous examination of its applicability and appropriateness to the reality of the officer. I begin my audit by asking myself a series of questions. Does the particular technique or training seem realistic for the type of situations that an officer would be engaged? Can these skills be executed in the gear the officer will be wearing (duty uniform, tactical rig, clandestine lab operations)? Are the techniques limited to a very narrow scenario or pre-fabricated situation? Do you believe that you could execute these skills when the adrenalin is pumping and you are scared? The final question that I ask is, “Did the training have an element of limited-constraint fighting?” Making a decision about the value of techniques is extremely difficult without testing them in the reality of non-compliance. Everything works on a compliant training partner. The introduction of non-compliance and unpredictability, however, changes things. When your life or well-being is the price you pay for adhering to unrealistic training techniques or training methods, we must answer these questions with complete honesty. Using these directed questions as our “reality-check road map”, let's begin our intellectual exercise of trying to determine what role, if any, that Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) plays in law enforcement training.

To expedite this examination I will list three major areas of concern that should flash red lights in your mind immediately:

1. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is a sport and law enforcement is not. Any time we try to substitute techniques and training methodologies from sport to reality we must proceed with extreme caution.
2. Officers must adhere to rules of engagement (ROE). Failure to apply a response that coincides with the force continuum can result in many negative repercussions. While BJJ also has ROE, they are not as specific as those present in law enforcement. A BJJ competitor cannot poke his opponent in the eyes while grappling. If he does choose to do so the result is disqualification. If an officer chooses to gouge a citizen's eye when they were being non-compliant they would suffer much greater punishment than the athlete. Furthermore, compare the narrow range of force that a BJJ competitor employs in competition to that an officer must contend with in reality. The BJJ competitor attempts to secure a choke or a joint-compromising technique. Choking and arm-breaking are often not appropriate actions for the officer. The officer, in comparison, must choose between responses that cross the gamut of verbal persuasion to deadly force.
3. The last place an officer wants to be in an engagement is on the ground. Notice I am not stating that they will never end up there, rather they wish to avoid having to go to the ground. The opposite is true in BJJ. The goal of the skilled practitioner is to successfully

take the fight to the ground. Again, when there is such a discrepancy between goals and tactics of sport and reality we must be rigorous in our examination.

So what can we learn from BJJ for law enforcement? After asking the questions that I posed above I have reached the following two conclusions:

1. It is applicable for law enforcement as a reference tool.
2. It is applicable for law enforcement as a conditioning and fitness development tool.

As a reference tool, BJJ is very useful for law enforcement. I believe its value is twofold in this capacity. First, understanding BJJ gives us a reference tool for understanding how a ground fight evolves. It allows us to speak intelligently about positions of vulnerability and positions of dominance. This is important because any time we can systematize components of a fight we are better able to problem solve issues that often occur in a particular evolution of a physical encounter. For instance, BJJ provided officers a very valuable hierarchy of ground position dominance. Understanding when one is in a non-dominant position is a critical piece of information that should dictate how one responds to their opponent.

Secondly, BJJ's focus on the positional theory of ground fighting teaches officers the importance of being able to hold a position of dominance. An untrained fighter will try to punch his/her opponent from any position on the ground without paying attention to dominance and positional control. What often results is that the puncher, more attentive to landing blows than maintaining control, is thrown off balance and out of dominance. In a wild, free-for-all grappling situation, the stronger opponent will most likely come out on top. Officers must understand that control is the foundation for their safety. Ground-fighting training is also beneficial to law enforcement personnel in the area of conditioning and physical fitness development. This type of training allows officers to train at various exercise intensities with a low chance of injuries. I would much rather have officers practicing BJJ, while developing warrior ethos, than have them run around a track in a mind-numbing mind set.

With a little imagination a trainer can significantly change the tempo, intensity, and situational applicability of this type of training. It is also useful as a training tool when you have officers of various fitness levels. Having some officers practice standing up in base and doing floor exercises might be challenging enough while others may be fit enough for multiple sparring rounds.

I believe that BJJ, when appropriately framed, has a role in law enforcement training. To ignore training for a ground fighting scenario is irresponsible. Furthermore, blindly transferring the techniques and training methodologies from sport to reality is equally irresponsible. Take some time to carefully scrutinize what officers need to know when a situation moves to a ground based scenario and apply the questions that I have outlined in this article. In the words of Bruce Lee, "Take what is applicable, disregard what is useless."

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