

A Glossary of Guards



Stephan Kesting

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A Glossary of Guards Part 1: **The Closed Guard**

BY STEPHAN KESTING AND ELLIOTT BAYEV
PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEITH HAIST
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *ULTIMATE MMA MAGAZINE*

Brazilian Jiu-jitsu terminology can be both confusing and intimidating to people beginning their grappling careers. Some martial arts – Kodokan Judo for example – have a central organizing body and relatively well-defined terminologies. Jiu-jitsu, however, is a young art that is constantly evolving and as a result, produces limitless new positions and variations.

Of all the positions, techniques and submissions in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, the guard position has spawned the greatest amount of variations and terminology. There are many different guards: Closed Guard, Open Guard, Spider Guard, Half Guard, Butterfly Guard, de la Riva guard just to name a few. Furthermore, guard positions usually have further variation, depending on exactly how you grip with your hands and where you place your feet

It is important to recognize that there is no single superior method of guard, and also that all guards are not created equal for every environment. Some positions work best with the gi, others work with or without the gi, and the presence or absence of striking can completely change the value of a position. Certain positions are great for winning submission grappling tournaments, but may be very risky in a self defense or mixed martial art (MMA) context.

Ultimately the type of guard(s) you specialize in will depend on many things, including your physical attributes, your competitive environment and the style of your instructor. The purpose of these three articles is to provide you with a reference for some of the more common guards, to help you understand some of the terminology used in class, and maybe give you some ideas on how to develop your own game.

This first article discusses some of the more common Closed Guard variations; subsequent articles will discuss variations of the Open Guard and Half Guard.

Basic Closed Guard



The Closed Guard used with a basic sleeve and lapel grip



With an overhooking lapel grip and wrist control



Keeping the opponent close by controlling an arm and the head



Using the Closed Guard to rest for a moment; not recommended for MMA!



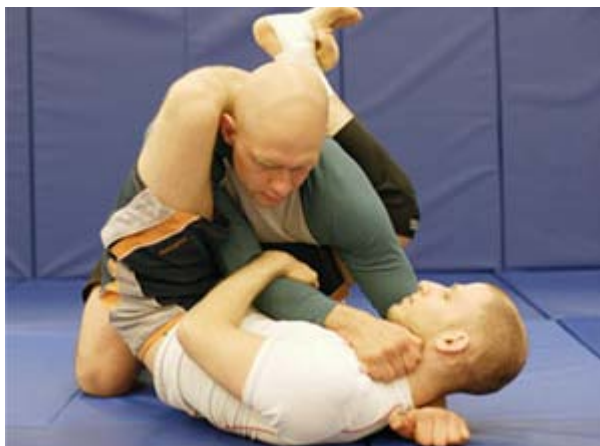
Maintaining the Closed Guard against a standing opponent

This is the style of guard most often taught to beginners, and it is still effective at the highest levels of competition. Like all Closed Guards, it locks your opponent between your legs, offering great control, preventing the opponent from improving position and providing you an opportunity to attack with sweeps and submissions.

A 'relaxed' position in the Closed Guard can be used for resting in BJJ or submission grappling, but it can get you very hurt in an MMA or self-defense scenario. If you use the Closed Guard to defend against strikes you **MUST** keep your opponent's head down, close to you, or he will have the distance and leverage to land some very damaging

blows. If you simply can't break his posture then immediately switch to a form of Open Guard that keeps him away, out of striking distance.

High Guard



Trapping the opponent's right shoulder in the High Guard

The High Guard, also known as the Crooked Guard or Climbing Guard, requires you to climb your legs up to trap at least one of your opponent's shoulders. Once trapped here, your opponent is in continuous danger from armbar, triangle and sweep attacks.

The High Guard requires less flexibility than the Rubber Guard (discussed next), but is similar, as the legs are used to keep your opponent's posture down. This is a great guard for both BJJ and MMA, because it is difficult for your opponent to strike you or pass your guard without giving you the sweep or submission.

Rubber Guard



Eddie Bravo demonstrates one variation of the Rubber Guard



Attacking from the Rubber Guard

The Rubber Guard, here demonstrated by Eddie Bravo who coined the term, is a method of keeping your opponent's posture broken by locking your legs and feet into a very high position around his neck. Other guard players, perhaps most notably Nino Schembri, have developed guard attacks along similar lines, though Bravo has certainly helped popularized it in North America.

This is an effective guard for MMA as it limits the opponent's striking options and keeps the guard player safe to attack. It has been used successfully by a number of MMA fighters, most recently by Shinya Aoki, a Japanese MMA Star. Flexibility in the hips and legs is very important to apply this guard effectively and to avoid injury. Being able to touch your foot to your face is probably the minimum amount of flexibility required. If you can put your foot behind your head then you may be able to make your opponent's life miserable from your back using the Rubber Guard.

A link to a [triangle choke attack sequence from the Rubber Guard](#).

Leghook Guard



Holding your own leg and your opponent's head in the Leghook Guard

The Leghook Guard position has been used in the UFC several times, most notably by Dean Lister to set up a triangle on Alessio Sakara at UFC 60. You can achieve the Leghook Guard when your opponent places an arm on the mat; as soon as he does this you trap his arm by bringing your leg up towards your shoulder and then link your hands, encircling both his head and your own leg.

This position keeps an opponent's posture broken. In an MMA or self-defense context this is very important because with his posture this far forward it is difficult for your opponent to use his arms to strike you with very much force.

Your main attacks from this position are the omo plata and the triangle choke; if you can bring your free leg over your opponent's shoulder then the triangle is right there for you ([see a triangle setup from the Leghook Guard here](#)).

Shawn Williams Guard



Shawn Williams working the Shawn Williams Guard



Shawn Williams deeper into an attack sequence

This guard is named in honor of Renzo Gracie blackbelt Shawn Williams who is known for using this position. It is closely related to the leghook guard except that both your arms have been moved to one side of your opponent's head – rather than encircling the head - making it harder for your opponent to counter you (see 1st photo).

Once again the most common attacks are the omo plata and triangle choke, typically used in combination. Shawn Williams demonstrates this guard in both pictures, and is shown partway through a triangle attack in the second photo.

A Glossary of Guards Part 2:

The Open Guard

BY STEPHAN KESTING AND ELLIOTT BAYEV
PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEITH HAIST
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *ULTIMATE MMA MAGAZINE*

This is the second of three articles discussing variations of the Brazilian Jiu-jitsu guard position. In this article we are going to focus on the Open Guard, where your legs are NOT locked around your opponent's torso (the other articles cover the Closed Guard and the Half Guard). Just because your legs aren't closed doesn't mean that you can't control or attack your opponent - far from it! There are many positional variations, sweeps and submission setups for the Open Guard, making it the bread and butter for many Jiu-jitsu competitors.

You can transition deliberately from the **Closed Guard** to an **Open Guard**, or your opponent can do it for you by forcing your ankles to uncross as part of a guard pass attempt. Regardless of how you get there, in Open Guard the options and possibilities expand considerably.

Once achieved, the Open Guard isn't quite as neat and tidy as the Closed Guard. There is less static control available in Open Guard and positions often change in an instant. You may be in Spider Guard one minute and in de la Riva the next. It becomes important to be able to transition between different Open Guards in order to stay a step ahead.

Standard Open Guard



The Standard Open Guard applied against a kneeling opponent



The same position used against a standing opponent.



Against a standing opponent, using feet on hips and two hands to control one wrist

It is difficult to exactly define the Standard Open Guard, because it is such a dynamic and variable position, seamlessly flowing into other guard positions and/or borrowing elements from them. Nevertheless, we first heard the term “Standard Open Guard” from BJJ black belt Marc Laimon, and think that it is a very useful term.

For the sake of this article we define the Standard Open Guard as a position where your legs are not locked around your opponent’s waist, and at least one foot (but often both) is on your opponent’s hips. Having a foot on the opponent’s hip enables you to control the space between you. There are different upper body controls, each offering different sweep, submission and transition setups.

When the gi is worn the Standard Open Guard and the Spider Guard are very closely related: it is hard to use one without using the other at some point. Also keep in mind that in MMA it is imperative to control the opponent’s wrists or elbows, or to push your opponent away with your legs to prevent strikes.

Spider Guard



The Spider Guard being used against a kneeling opponent (both feet on biceps)



Against a standing opponent, one foot on biceps and the other on the hip



Against a standing opponent using one foot on the bicep and one leg wrapped around the arm

The Spider Guard is a position mostly used in gi grappling. It is characterized by gripping your opponent's sleeves and placing at least one foot on his bicep; the other foot can also be placed on the bicep, or it can push the hip, hook behind the knee, encircle the arm, or otherwise control/off balance your opponent. As the Spider Guard controls the opponent while your hips remain free it offers great off-balancing and sweeping options with the triangle choke remaining a constant threat as well.

The Spider Guard is applicable whether your opponent is standing or kneeling. It also transitions well to other guards like the de la Riva Guard, the Upside-Down Guard, the Grasshopper Guard, etc.

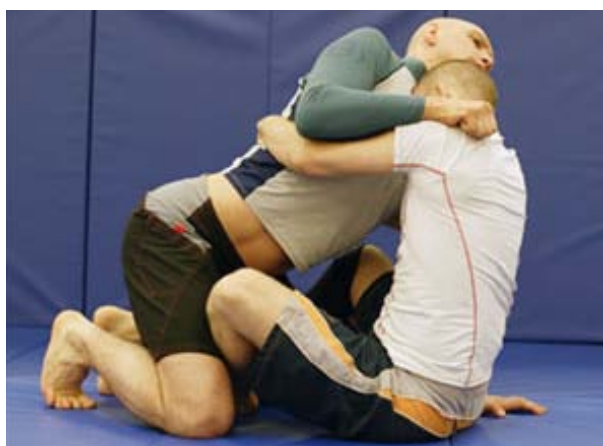
Butterfly Guard



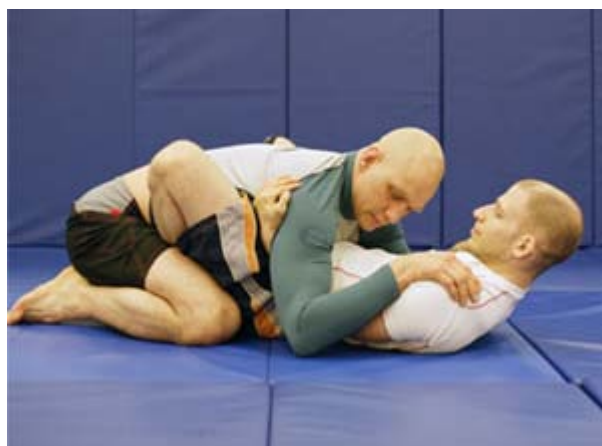
The Butterfly Guard using an underhook and a belt grip



Using a pant leg and lapel cross grip



The Butterfly Guard in no gi using a bearhug grip. Occasionally used in MMA, since it is difficult for the opponent to generate a lot of force in his strikes.



A very difficult position from which to play the Butterfly Guard (referred to as the TK Guard by early UFC commentators)

The Butterfly Guard is also called the Sitting Guard (a term used for several different styles of guard) and/or Hooks Guard. Regardless of terminology, it is a very dynamic position with many powerful sweeping options. Submissions from Butterfly Guard are not very common, but some practitioners use the Butterfly Guard to set up leglocks, which are available if you can get a leg between your opponent's legs. Also, because your legs are not locked in place, it allows smooth and fluid transitions to other positions, such as the X Guard and Half Guard.

You can't really 'hang out' in the Butterfly Guard – you need to be sitting up and actively working to off balance them and threatening them with grips, sweeps, and submissions,. Gaining the upper hand in Butterfly Guard closely resembles clinch-fighting, as both torsos are facing each other at approximately the same height. One should generally NOT lie flat on one's back (as shown in the third picture), although there are a few practitioners who can make that position work for them.

Butterfly Guard has been used successfully in MMA, but mostly with the exponent using two tight underhooks or a bearhug because these arm positions prevent an opponent from getting the space to strike effectively.

For more information about this position see the [‘Basic’ Butterfly Guard Sweep article](#), the [Butterfly Guard Crash Course](#) tip, and the [Butterfly Guard and X Guard DVD](#).

De la Riva Guard



Ricardo de la Riva demonstrating his namesake guard



Details on leg and hand placement



As applied against a kneeling opponent



Using a shallow hook and no wrist control against a standing opponent

This position is named after Ricardo de la Riva, a famous competitor and teacher from the Carlson Gracie lineage, and it is de la Riva himself demonstrating his guard in the first photo. The de la Riva guard is predominantly, but not exclusively, a gi-based position, in which you wrap one of your legs around the outside of your opponent's lead leg. Your foot can be inserted deeply or shallowly in his knee or hip. The position of your other leg depends on what your opponent is doing and/or on which sweep you are attempting to set up at that moment.

In the de la Riva Guard your hands typically control both his sleeves, or one sleeve and the heel of his lead leg. If you use this position without controlling his wrist or arm you are exposing your legs and feet to a variety of leglocks, so be on alert and move quickly. This position best known for its sweeps, but offers a few transitions into submissions as well.

Reverse de la Riva



The Reverse de la Riva Guard

Here Ricardo de la Riva demonstrates the Reverse de la Riva Guard, usually used in conjunction with the "traditional" **de la Riva Guard**. It is often employed as a counter when your opponent attempts to cross-slide his knee across your free thigh to pass your guard. In this case you simply switch hooks: instead of your outside leg wrapping his leg you use your inside leg to trap his leg at the knee or thigh. You can also use your free hand to support your own knee instead of grabbing the sleeve.

From the Reverse de la Riva you can sweep your opponent or transition to other open guard positions such as **Deep Half Guard** and **X-Guard**.

Cross Guard



The Cross Guard using a sleeve and pant leg grip against a kneeling opponent.



The same grips being used against a standing opponent.

The Cross Guard is another gi-specific position. It relies on cross-grabbing the opponent's opposite sleeve with one hand and gripping or underhooking his leg with the other. In the Cross Guard you have a number of sweeping and submission options, the most common being the **omo plata submission**, omo plata sweeps and the triangle choke. Pe De Pano is probably the most famous exponent of the Cross Guard.

Sitting Open Guard



Joe Moreira demonstrating what he calls the Sitting Guard



Another view of the body position and stiffarm lapel grip

Various BJJ practitioners use the term Sitting Guard to refer to some very different positions. As used by black belt instructor Joe Moreira (and described in the **Strategic Guard** book) it refers to an upright posture using a rearward posting arm and a stiff arm on the collar bone using a lapel grip to keep your opponent at a distance. In this position you have the freedom to

move left and right, forwards and backwards, come to your feet or go to another style of guard. Typically you will make small adjustments every time your opponent moves, allowing you to counter his guard passing attempts and also to set up various armlocks and chokes.

The term Sitting Guard is also used to describe the Butterfly Guard and/or a sitting half guard position.

Grasshopper Guard



Elliott Bayev demonstrates the Grasshopper Guard

Most commonly attained from Spider Guard or when an opponent is passing with double underhooks, this is a gi-dependent position named by Elliott Bayev. It is characterized by sleeve control and butterfly hooks or crossed ankles, with the opponent's arms hooked under the legs.

The control over the opponent's arms and shoulders offers a number of unique sweep, submission and back-taking options. There is always the danger, however, of the opponent passing your guard if you lose your grips or butterfly hooks.

Upside Down Guard



The Upside Down Guard in action

The Upside Down Guard is an unusual position in which the practitioner inverts himself, keeping his feet in contact with his opponent. This can be done either intentionally or in response to an attempted guard pass.

When used in gi competition this position is sometimes maintained for some time; in no gi situations it is more commonly only a momentary, transitional position. In either case, the most common submission from this position is probably the triangle choke, but it also leads into a variety of sweeps and submissions.

Octopus Guard



The Octopus Guard in no-gi

The Octopus Guard was named by BJJ and submission grappling competitor Eduardo Telles. In this position you duck under your opponent's armpit and lock his body down by placing your arm across his back. This position opens up various sweeps and submissions, as well as a clear

route to your opponent's back. With slight variations the Octopus Guard can be applied from the Closed Guard, the Open Guard or even the Half Guard.

Once again, Telles is not the only person to have developed and used this position. BJ Penn, for example, used it to take Matt Hughes's back in their second battle at UFC 63.

A Glossary of Guards Part 3: The Half Guard

BY STEPHAN KESTING AND ELLIOTT BAYEV
PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEITH HAIST
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *ULTIMATE MMA MAGAZINE*

This is the third and final article in a series introducing a wide variety of guard positions. Today we are going to tackle the Half Guard, where you have only one of your opponent's legs trapped between your own. Previous articles were dedicated to variations of the Closed Guard and the Open Guard, and readers should be aware that these classifications are somewhat porous, there being areas of overlap between styles and variations of guard work.

Half Guard is a very common position in jiu-jitsu, as guard passes rely on first getting to Half Guard, and many pin escapes also result in Half Guard rather than Full Guard. Years ago it was seen as a pitiful position, just one step before having your guard passed. From the 1990s to today, however, this position has evolved considerably. Jiu-jitsu practitioners realized that the Half Guard allowed them to get right under an opponent's center of gravity which in turn led to the development of whole series of new sweeps.

One of the catalysts for this change was Roberto "Gordo" Correa, a Brazilian black belt who had an injured knee, which prevented him from playing a more typical guard game. He started having a lot of success from the Half Guard and when he started winning tournaments with it the word was out: the Half Guard was no longer an inferior position

Since that revelation other people have explored and expanded the offensive potential of the Half Guard and today it is the favored sweeping position of some of the best jiu-jitsu and submission grappling competitors in the world.

Standard Half Guard



The standard Half Guard with the legs triangled and one arm grabbing the belt



A similar position, grabbing the far lapel behind the back and hooking only with the bottom leg



In no gi with the bottom leg hooking the opponent's right leg



Coming onto the knees from the Half Guard with an underhook

We are using the term 'Standard Half Guard' to describe a situation where you are on your side using your inside leg to hook one of your opponent's legs and have some sort of underhook with your top arm. There are many minor variations to this position, including having your legs triangled, gripping his gi or his belt, etc.

Standard Half Guard is great for taking the back, sweeping an opponent by getting under their hips, and coming up to your knees, which greatly enhances your ability to sweep.

Grapplearts recently released [a highly reviewed DVD on the half guard](#) covering the strategies, attacks and sweeps available from this position.

Half Butterfly



The Half Butterfly Guard with an overhook...



...and with an underhook

The Half Butterfly combines the Half Guard and the **Butterfly Guard** into a very powerful sweeping position. You are on your side with your bottom leg hooking your opponent's leg and the instep of your top leg buried under his thigh. Your arms can be in a variety of positions including the overhook (photo 1) and the underhook (photo 2).

Maintaining the butterfly hook with one leg offers several advantages. If returning to guard is your goal then it provides a leverage point to swing back into Butterfly Guard as soon as your opponent relaxes his forward and downward pressure onto you. If you want to use this position offensively, the hook allows you to lift his leg and manipulate him in a variety of ways to sweep him. Finally, placing your foot in this position nullifies many of the most common leglock attacks available to your opponent in Standard Half Guard. The main thing that you have to watch out for in Half Butterfly is your opponent pushing your top knee down with his hand and popping his leg over top of it, directly into mount!

For more information check out **The Dynamic Half Guard DVD**, which has a section covering the half butterfly.

Double Triangle



The Double Triangle half guard leg position in a gi context...



...and in a no gi context.

The Double Triangle Half Guard position, also named the “Lockdown” position by Eddie Bravo, is a solid way to prevent your opponent from passing your Half Guard and also to set up various sweeps and submissions. This position has also been used in Japanese Judo, although primarily as a stalling position.

Typically you will use this position with at least one underhook, if not two. Both of your insteps are tucked under something: the foot of your inside leg is snug against your opponent's shin or instep, and the foot of your outside leg is tucked under your own inside leg. Controlling your opponent's leg this way makes your half guard difficult to pass and makes it possible to attack your opponent's posture by stretching out his body. Once his posture is gone you have a variety of sweeps, and even a few submissions, available to you.

Deep Half Guard



The Deep Half Guard with triangled legs



In no gi, with one butterfly hook inserted under the opponent's lower leg

In the Deep Half Guard you are – as the name implies – deep underneath your opponent’s hips. Typically you are trying to keep your body turned onto its side, and can control either your opponent’s hip (1st picture) or your opponent’s thigh (2nd picture) with your top arm. The legs can do a variety of things, including triangling around the opponent’s leg, butterfly hooking underneath it and more.

The Deep Half Guard is primarily used for sweeping your opponent and has very few submission attacks available from it. This position and some of the techniques associated with it was the subject of a [Grappling Tip post on our Blog](#). To date it has not found a lot of application in mixed martial arts competition, probably for fear of getting punched in the face. Perhaps a future competitor will yet come along and offer some new insight into using this position in an MMA context...

Z Guard



The Z Guard with the bottom leg hooking and the top knee pushing at the hip



The same position with the top knee pushing in the chest/shoulder area

The Z Guard, thus named by Leo Kirby, is also known as a Knee-In Half Guard. This guard is shown here in a no gi situation, but it is equally useful with the gi. In this position the bottom leg hooks your opponent’s leg while the top knee maintains distance between you and him by pushing into his hip, chest or shoulder. From here you have both sweeps and submissions available to you, Kimura armlocks and various collar chokes being the most popular.

With the gi, you typically hold the far collar with your top hand and your opponent’s sleeve with your bottom hand. Without the gi you often frame his neck with your forearm while controlling his far arm to prevent him from controlling your head and neck.

X Guard



The basic X Guard position, in this case with the right foot in the hip and higher than the left foot which is at the knee



A variation with the feet crossed the other way and both positioned at the opponent's knee (left foot over right foot)



The Scissored X Guard variation



The X Guard applied against a kneeling opponent, here shown with an ankle lock style grip

Marcello Garcia popularized the X Guard when he used it to cut a swath through the competition at ADCC 2003. In the X-Guard, your whole body is positioned between the opponent's legs, stretching them apart. This provides a great ability to destabilize, sweep and leglock the opponent. In the X Guard you keep your opponent's leg on your shoulder, not in the crook of your arm, which is a common mistake. Your hand at his kneecap helps control his top leg.

There are several leg position variations; we will discuss four of them. All these variations offer powerful sweeping options.

1. In the first, most popular, variation (1st photo) you have one leg behind his knee and the other in the crease of his hip.

2. In another variation (2nd photo) you stack your legs differently and position both at the knee.
3. In the Scissor X Guard position (3rd position) you are lying even more on your side, with one foot behind his knee and the sole of your other foot pushing near his ankle.
4. Finally the X Guard can be applied against kneeling opponents, either with his foot on your shoulder (as in the first three photos) or even in an ankle lock style grip (4th photo).

The X Guard can be used by a **variety of body types** and usually offers **great control of your opponent upon completion of your sweep**. For more information on this position you can check out the **Butterfly and X Guard DVD available on this site**.

Sitting Half Guard



The Sitting Half Guard, gripping the lapel with the hand of the arm that goes around the leg

The Sitting Guard is one way to deal with an opponent standing up in front of you: you sit up, bringing your chest to his shin, your legs to either side of his lead foot, hug his leg from the outside with one arm and post on the ground behind you with the other. Gripping your opponent's belt, lower lapel (shown in the photo) or the sleeve of one of his arms make the position even more secure.

Most of your offensive options from this position are sweeps; although it is possible to apply a few leglocks from the Sitting Guard, they probably won't be enough to base your offense around them. Sitting Guard transitions well to **Deep Half Guard**, **Instep Guard** and **X-Guard**.

Note that some BJJ practitioners use the term "Sitting Guard" to refer to the **Butterfly Guard** position rather than the position shown in this photograph. Other practitioners use the same term to describe a position in which one is **sitting up and stiffarming** an opponent with one arm.

Instep Guard



The Instep Guard, here demonstrated with a shallow grip



The position being used to sweep an opponent

This position, also known as the Shin Guard, is similar to the **Sitting Guard** position with the addition of your instep being placed across your opponent's instep. While this is a seemingly minor variation, it allows you to tremendously destabilize your opponent by lifting his foot off the ground. It is also a lot less gi-dependent a position than the sitting guard.

Your arm secures the back of his leg in one of two ways: shallow (shown in these pictures) with the hand at the back of the knee, or deeply with the entire forearm. Both the shallow and deep versions are good, and they both work with and without the gi.

About the Author

Stephan Kesting



Hi there, and thank you for visiting my site! My name is Stephan Kesting and I operate Grapplearts.com and [Beginning BJJ.com](http://BeginningBJJ.com). Through my DVDs, articles and newsletters, I have helped tens of thousands of grapplers all over the world improve their Brazilian Jiu-jitsu skills.

Grappling is my passion, and I want to help it become yours too. Whether your goal is to compete, challenge yourself, improve your fitness level, lose weight, or acquire some serious self defense skills I truly think that Brazilian Jiu-jitsu (BJJ) has a lot to offer you. I'm not kidding when I call it the most sophisticated martial art in the world.

Why should you listen to what I say? Here's my brief biography and Martial Arts resume:

I am a **Brazilian Jiu-jitsu black belt**, and have been doing martial arts for over 25 years. I am also a certified instructor in Erik Paulson's **Combat Submission Wrestling**, a black belt in Kajukenbo Karate, an instructor in Dan Inosanto's Jun Fan JKD, Maphalindo Silat and Filipino Martial Arts program. Additionally I have also studied Japanese Judo, Russian Sambo, various Chinese Kung Fu systems, Brazilian Capoeira, Muay Thai Kickboxing, and many other martial arts.

I have published over 20 articles in magazines like **Black Belt**, **Ultimate Grappling**, **Tapout Magazine** and **Ultimate Athlete**, and been interviewed by **The Fightworks Podcast** and **Lockflow.com**. You can see a small sample of the magazines in which my articles have been published on the left side of this page.

[Click here](#) for a 5 minute video where I talk about my martial arts history and training background in more detail.

In addition to my print articles, I also publish two online newsletters, **The Beginning BJJ Newsletter** and the **Grapplearts Grappling Tips Newsletter**. Thousands of grapplers, from rank beginners to advanced black belts, have already subscribed to these newsletters to become better grapplers, better teachers, and better martial artists.

Since 2002 I've released **a series of best-selling instructional DVDs** covering a wide range of topics including

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- [The Roadmap for BJJ](#)
- [Yoga for martial arts](#)



I have competed successfully in **Brazilian jiu-jitsu, submission wrestling and Judo tournaments**. I train both with and without the gi, and have been a sparring partner for some top MMA fighters.

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