

FOCUSED JIUJITSU

8 Drilling strategies to destroy training plateaus
and effectively implement new techniques



Written by Nick "Chewy" Albin

Designed by Tanya Lam www.tanyalam.com



Foreword

First off, I'm glad you downloaded the ebook and I hope you enjoy the blog.

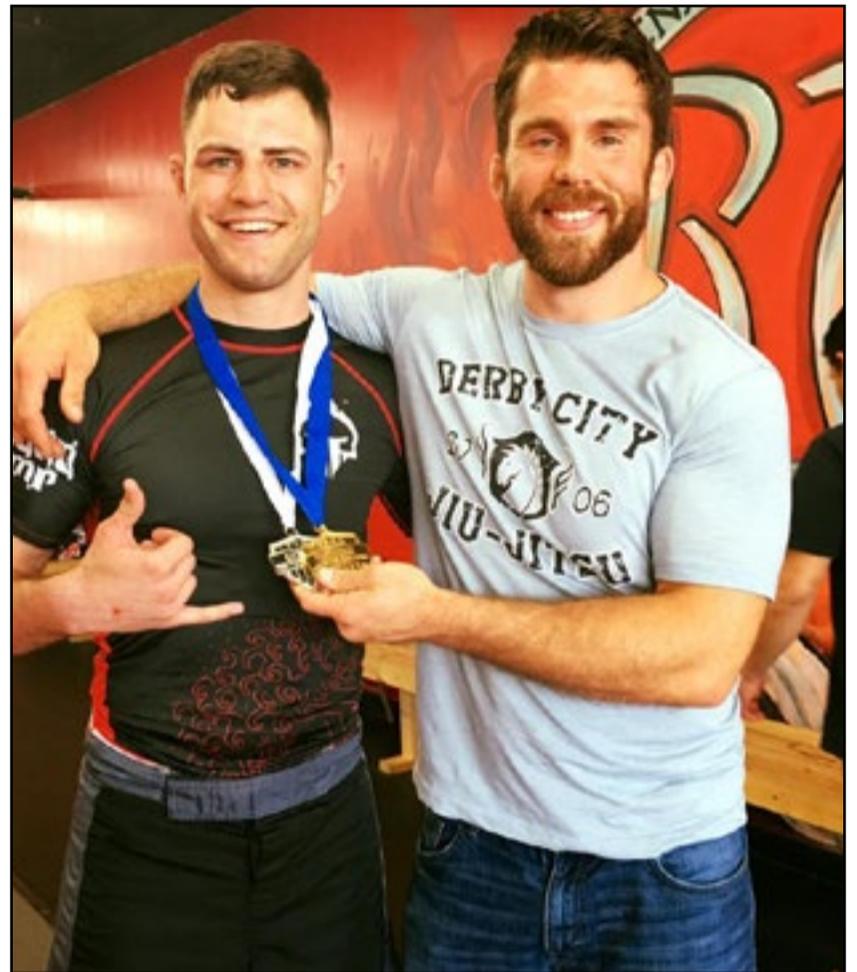
Before I get into the ebook itself, I wanted to just take a second to explain why I wrote this ebook. I've experienced and I've seen many of my students experience training ruts. Those dreaded training plateaus where you don't feel like you're making progress and in some cases you feel like you're regressing. There are also those times where I see someone get exposed to a new technique, but they are unable to actually implement it into their game.

Stagnation is **frustrating**. In particular, hitting a wall in Jiu-jitsu can really suck the motivation out of you, so what I've tried to do in this ebook is list some of the techniques I use (both in my own training as well as the training I use with my students) to counteract these kind of problems. If you're actively trying to get better in particular areas, I believe it's difficult to hit that training wall.

So, the idea is to keep a continuous flood of new techniques and information in order to stimulate growth.

The methods of training listed in this ebook can help you avoid training plateaus and offer a system to which you can bring new moves into your game. By developing a focus and with some simple adjustments, you can experience a steady stream of progression and get much more out of training. I believe this because all the information I share in this ebook comes from my own personal experience, not only as a practitioner and competitor but also as well as a coach.

I hope that even if you just read a portion of it, that you'll have some easy to use tips to throw into your game.



Introduction

Alright, now the fun starts. I've attempted to list the types of drilling and training in an order of ascending resistance. The idea is to deliberately and continually increase the stress during the execution of the movement.

A meathead analogy I use is if you squat 100lbs and you'd like to squat 300lbs. You have to continuously increase the resistance(stress) and weight. I've heard people in the military say that a guy can be a fantastic shot in the range, hitting bulls eye after bulls eye. Then they find themselves in a firefight and can't hit the broadside of a barn.



Mike Tyson said it pretty well, “Everyone has a plan till they get punched.”

BJJ is no different—someone can demonstrate a technique slowly in a controlled situation flawlessly, but stress during live conditions really messes things up. So the way we drill and train should be done in a way to build up our “technical buffer” which will hold out and allow us to perform the techniques in dynamic situations. Simply doing a couple of repetitions of a move and then moving on to rolling is not an effective way to build new areas of your game.

By using the methods listed below and taking a more direct approach to your training, you'll be able to constantly bring in new techniques into your game which will help prevent you from hitting plateaus and will have the other benefit of improving your overall effectiveness on the mat.

Passive Training

Passive training makes up the various styles of drilling that will not have a fully active opponent resisting your actions. To me, it is the starting point for adding moves into your game. Even after a move has become effective and usable during rolling, it would be smart to continue drilling repetitions.

Performing repetitions of a technique through the different means of passive drilling will help improve your timing and assist you in taking away the hesitation during rolling or competition.



Passive Training

Slow Drilling - The type of drilling most commonly done when you're learning a new technique or position.

Fast Drilling - This is the type of drilling you perform once you have a good feel for the movement.

Drilling to Both Sides - Not really a different form of drilling per se, but it's always important to drill to both sides.

Chain Drilling - Developing and drilling techniques that flow together to combat counters and defenses.

Light Resistance - A method used to introduce minimal amounts of stress.

1. Slow Drilling

Slow Drilling is what I call the type of drilling that you do when you first learn a technique. It's slow and used more to get acquainted with the movement.

Its purpose is to break down, step by step, the technique or position. This is always the first step and it is important to make sure that you have flawless technique and have a feel for the technique.

Having the right "feel" for a technique is important, as it lets you know when the irons are hot. E.g, Whether to pursue the choke or let go because you don't have the right grip. Whether to twist your hips to knock your partner off balance or wait for another moment.

Having a "feel" for a move is possessing intuitional awareness for the technique. You just know.

Adding Techniques From New Positions

Start by focusing on drilling entries into the new position.

Once you can get to the position consistently during rolling, then focus more on the actual techniques.

It's hard to hit moves from positions you can't get to.



2. Fast Drilling



Fast Drilling should come as a continuation of Slow Drilling; Fast Drilling should simply be a faster version. You want to increase the speed of the techniques while attempting to maintain perfect technique. Initially, as you start to add speed, the techniques will probably get a bit sloppy, as this is to be expected in the beginning and is acceptable.

While you should always be striving for perfect execution of a technique, it's always important to keep in mind that most techniques will look a little sloppier when used in live conditions. By drilling faster, you increase your body's ability to perform the technique under increasing amounts of stress.

This style of drilling is cornerstone to getting your repetitions; the more repetitions you perform of any technique, the smoother and and more effective it will become.

How Many Reps Do I Need?

From years of practice, private lessons and teaching, I can say, the more the better. But when done right, some cool stuff starts to happen around **750- 1000 repetitions**. Make this your starting goal for a technique.



Drilling in a fast manner while still maintaining good technique will allow you to achieve hundreds and thousands of reps in a relatively short period of time.

Once you're used to this style of drilling, it should be applied to any move you feel comfortable with. For example, if you go into class and your instructor is going over a technique that you can do with your eyes closed while carrying on a conversation about what you ate last night, instead of just going through the move slowly and counting the minutes until it's time for rolling, **rep the hell out of that movement!**

Do the fastest repetitions you can do and in a few minutes you'll have racked up a surprisingly large number of repetitions.

You'll also have your blood pumping and a nice sweaty glaze to boot.

3. Drilling to Both Sides

This isn't a different style of drilling or training but it's incredibly important and worth including in this ebook. I talk about this a lot to my guys, and in fact, one of my most popular blog articles was on this subject. ([Blog about drilling both sides](#))

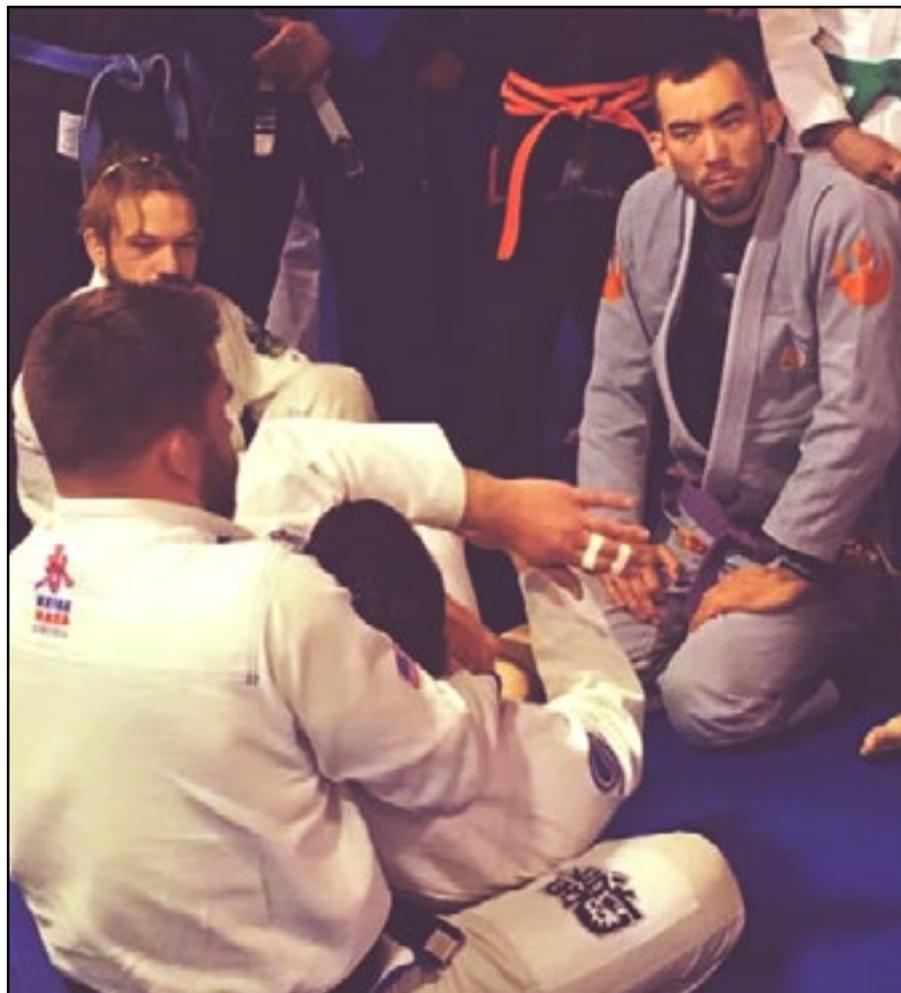
If you read the article you'll see how I think of our separate BJJ styles as armies formed in a battle line, each with a left, center and right side and various troops to spread amongst these areas.

Just like one of these armies, if we have weak sides, then we have chinks in our armor that our opponent can exploit. On the other side of that coin, if we have weak sides then we will not possess the skills necessary to take advantage of our opponent's weak side should they have one.

You will undoubtedly always favor one side over the other but it's important to drill your techniques from both sides. If you're not already doing this, simply adding this aspect of training will have a hugely positive effect on your game.

Drilling Your Bad Side Makes You Better

You may also notice that when you start drilling techniques to your "bad" side, it forces you to break down the move down even further to compensate for lack of ability on that side. This will boost your understanding of the technique. Dealing with someone who can attack on both sides effectively is a nasty thing to deal with. You want to have this multi directional ability in your game.



4. Chain Drilling

After drilling a technique hundreds of times, it will undoubtedly make it's way into your rolling. It will also more than likely, at some point, fail and get countered.

Whenever you have a move that gets countered it doesn't necessarily mean you need to abandon it.

Instead, you need to figure out how to counter their counter or break down their defense. This is a good time to consult your instructor or even ask you training partner who is doing the countering. You can ask them what they are doing and then look for a solution.

After you have a technique to solve the problem you're experiencing, add it in as part of your passive drilling techniques and start performing reps.

Alternatively, you can be pre-emptive about it and start adding in additional techniques before any problems arise.



Make Them Flow

Whichever happens, just make sure that the additional techniques directly chain together with the original movements you were drilling.

This will help you develop a game that allows you to attack with an increased level of persistence as you will have a Plan A, B, C, D and so on.



The Over Under Pass

I know that I've always favored the over-under pass, even as a white belt. It really is a good pass, but one that can be tricky. I had some initial success with it and then as a Blue and Purple belt I ran into a lot of snags. In one instance, I kept getting caught in kimuras because of my arm positioning, while against others, I was getting triangle choked.

At one point I was given the advice to consider moving on to a different pass but I was stubborn and determined to use the pass. Also, some of my favorite BJJ competitors used it, and I wanted to as well. So, I kept using it.

I would also work on countering these common problems I was experiencing. Now, I've gotten to the point where it is by far one of my best passes. I can hit it on both the left and right side and I have nearly a dozen different techniques that chain together with it and just as many ways to initiate the pass.



5. Light Resistance

Light Resistance represents the last style of Passive Drilling. This style of drilling will require a good partner as they will need to essentially be a moving dummy. During this type of drilling, you will execute your moves while your partner gives you some resistance. I still lump this into the passive category because ultimately your partner will not fully resist, nor will they actively try to win control of the situation (unless you instruct them to do so).

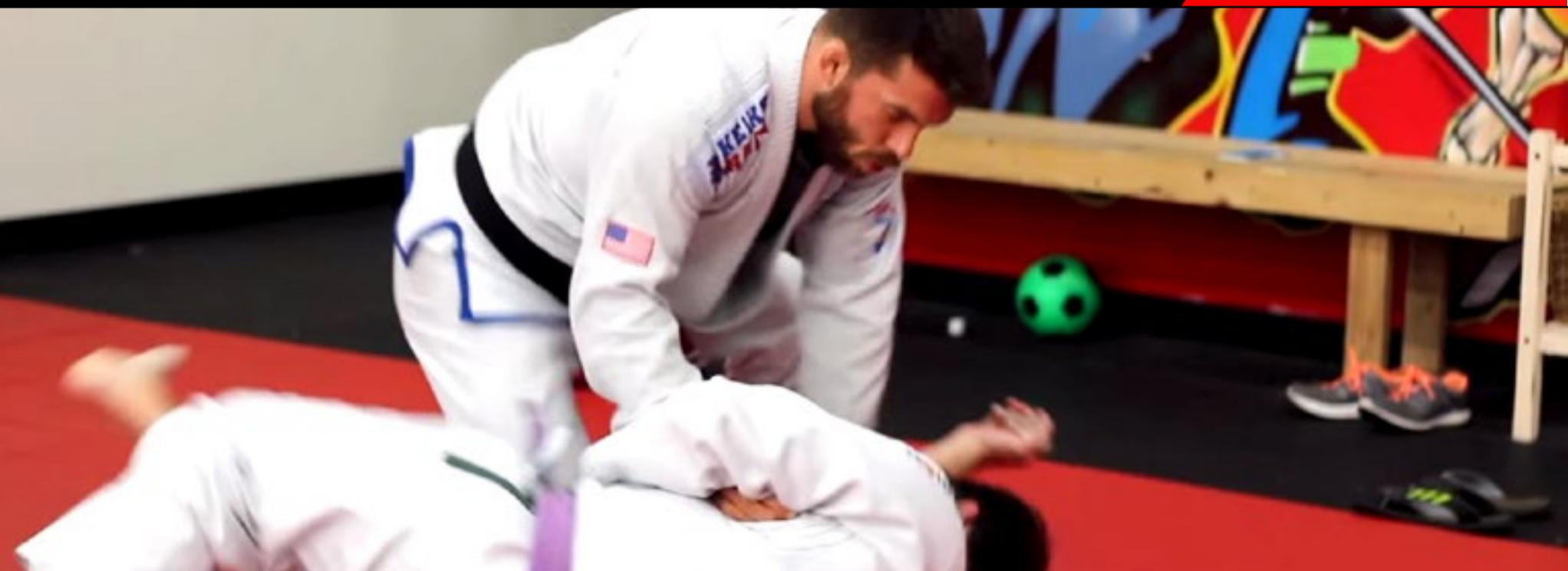
With this type of drilling you want to get a good "look"; you want to start being able to execute your techniques with speed and now with the introduction of movement.

For instance, if you're practicing take downs, your partner should be in a proper stance and adjusting to your movements. They will reach for grips and essentially do all the things they would do during a normal roll, but they just aren't going to put their full effort into things.

Think of this type of training as pulling your punches when you're sparring in boxing.



Track Your Reps! Just like lifters track their repetitions and weight, it's a good idea to keep track of your techniques and reps.



Active Drilling / Deliberate Rolling

What I call Active Training or Deliberate Rolling methods have the intended consequence of assisting you in furthering a particular position or technique by adding a resisting opponent.

These methods are also bit more challenging as they will involve a fully resisting opponents in most cases.

What we are trying to accomplish during this phase of technical implementation is quality time in the positions we want to better and giving ourselves more opportunities to attempt the techniques we wish to develop.

It's not a secret that if we want to get good at anything, that we must spend more time doing that thing.

If you told me you wanted to improve the maximum weight you could lift on your squat.

I imagine you wouldn't start this process off by doing bicep curls. Likewise, it should come as no surprise that if you wanted to improve your Butterfly Guard, you shouldn't start off by getting the takedown and sitting in full mount.

Active Drilling / Deliberate Rolling

Situational Rolling - Rolling with very limited objectives or positions.

Restricted Rolling with Lower Belts - Restricting yourself to a certain set of positions or techniques during rolls.

Restricted Rolling with Equals or Higher - Same as the previous but now it's against people of the same skill level or higher



6. Situational Rolling

Situational Rolling is our first listing under Active Drilling and by far I think the most important. Even if you don't passively drill your techniques as much you'd like, you can make some serious improvements just by doing this style of active training. Situational rolling can be done in so many ways to accomplish so many goals, as it is a very deliberate way of training. You're rolling with a very narrow goal and potentially narrow means of obtaining that goal.

Lack of Focus Creates Plateaus

Oftentimes when we train we just get on the mat and roll, which is fine. You're probably still progressing and improving, and sometimes, maybe after a hard day of work you just want to shut your brain off.

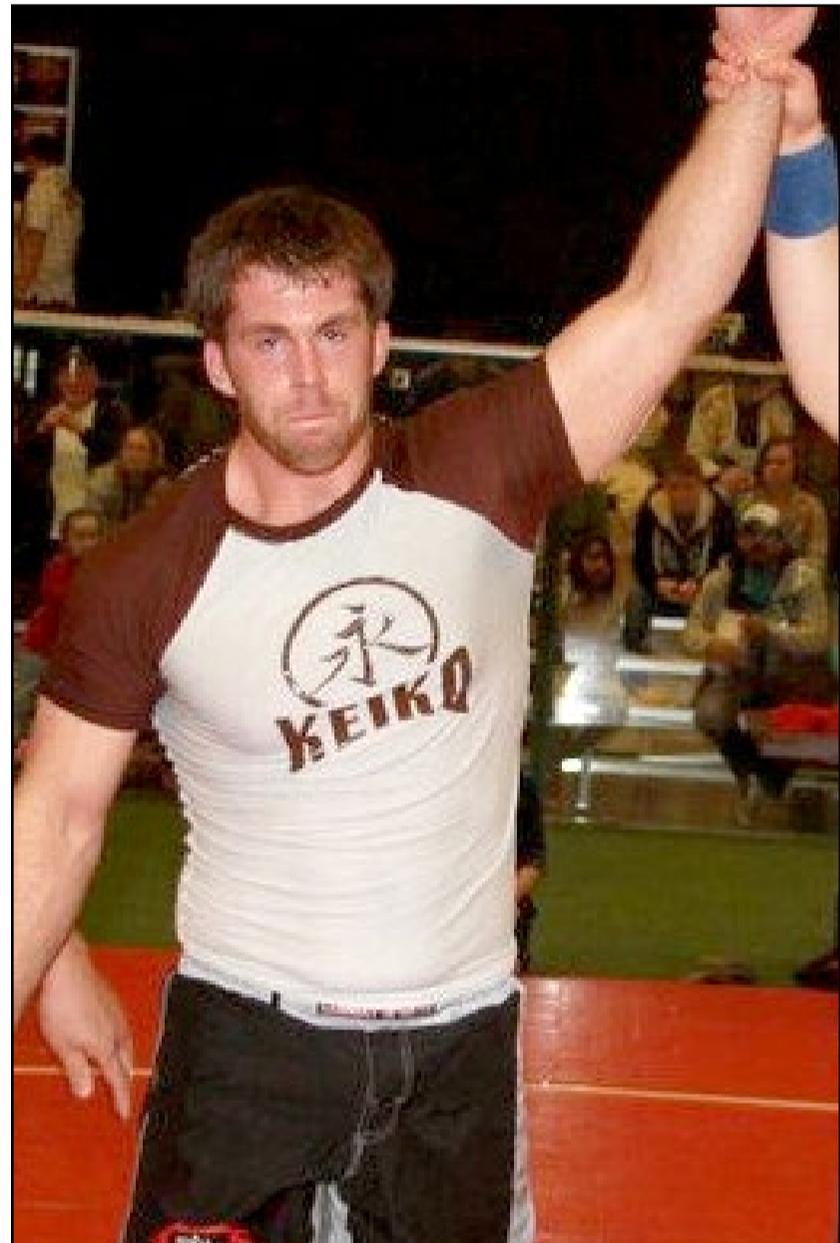
But if you're trying to work on a particular technique or position, doesn't it seem smart to work on that area?

Eliminate Weaknesses

I know this type of rolling has helped me so much; several times I've been able to identify certain weaknesses I've had in my game and addressed them with situational rolling.

One such situation that had a huge effect on my game, was my ability to escape Mount. I used to be terrible about escaping Mount, to fix this problem, one of my friends, a Black Belt, would come in and roll with me every Sunday for nearly a month.

His Back Mount escapes were his weakness and but he had a super tight mount, while my mount escapes left much to be desired but I had a good back mount. Perfect right? We spent close to 2 hours on the mat every Sunday, split 2 minutes a piece back and forth in our worst and best positions.



Over the course of a month, that's about 240 minutes per position. That's a lot of quality time working on a particular area of the game, and it made a huge impact on my BJJ personally.

Give Yourself No Other Option

The magic of situational rolling is that when you force yourself to do something, you'll find a way to make it happen. You're burning the bridge behind you and pushing yourself forward.

7. Restricted Rolling with Lower Belts

If you're reading this and you are a higher belt (Purple and up), how do you roll with the lower belts (especially White belts)? Do you smash them over and over again or do you use it as a learning opportunity for yourself and them? I'm sure you see where I'm going with this.

A lot of times I see higher belts just smashing their less experienced counterparts which, in my eyes, can be an absolute waste of time. If you have the ability to apply your "A" game to someone with no hope of them stopping it, why not use this as an opportunity to build other areas of your game? I know from being a gym owner and head instructor that you can use your less experienced training partners very effectively, and in a manner that is beneficial to both parties.

I advocate that when someone rolls with a person who is nowhere near the same level as them to focus on their weaknesses or on techniques and areas they wish to improve.





Use The Lower Belts / Stripes Better

So after you've been passively drilling a technique in the hopes of adding it into your game, when it comes time to roll with the newer guys, instead of smashing them over and over again, use them more effectively to benefit your game.

Use the newer techniques you're wanting to practice, at this point you'll be attempting to use these techniques in a fully dynamic environment and you will be forced to gain the position you need and then execute the technique.

This is still a step down from the full resistance of a comparable opponent where they can simply shut down your game if you make even one mistake, but it allows you a bit more wiggle room for mistakes and allows you to tinker with the position.

Practicing newer techniques with lower belts is also an ideal way to roll for those of you who are a little pressed for time and don't have many chances to drill repetitions of technique.

Hate Losing?

If you're one of those people who hates losing and finds it hard to explore other areas of their game because they don't want to get submitted. Training this way can be a good start to help you relax because if you're rolling with someone you completely outclass, you can always turn it up an extra gear and regain initiative of the match.

How I Got Better at Standing Passes

An example of this from my own personal experience is my standing passing game. I was always able to pass with the traditional tight pressure passing, but when I started to try and expand to a standing passing game back in 2008, it was a little rough at first.

While I was trying to build this area of my game I would passively drill my standing passes hundreds of times. Then when I would roll with lower belts I limited myself only to these standing passes. It was frustrating at first, as I was leaving too much space and would get swept or experienced a lot of difficulty passing someone's guard that I knew I could shred using lower pressure passing.

Eventually though it paid off, and I started hitting the standing passes more and more and eventually worked them to a level of proficiency that made them usable against opponents of the same skill level as myself. In addition, this helped my lower leveled training partners by allowing them a chance to engage and work as well. A win win for both sides.



8. Restricted Rolling with Equals or Higher

This was always the toughest for me years ago. When I was younger, I was always so concerned with winning, that when it came time to roll with someone of the same level or higher, I always reverted to my A game.

Even if I had been drilling techniques from other areas, I felt too insecure to jump into them. This was really a reflection of my own insecurity as a person at the time, as well as the poor environment I was around. But that's a philosophical discussion best left for another time.

If you're to the point where you can reliably use your techniques against your lesser training partners, and you've yet to use them against the guys in your gym that are at your level or higher, it's time to give them a go.

Hopefully you won't be like a young and insecure me and will realize that even if you are stopped dead in your tracks trying to use one of your new techniques, it's ultimately for the betterment of your game.

The gym is the lab in which we experiment and learn, not a place for us to solely feed our ego by the number of successes we have.

5 Examples of Situational Rolling to Try

1. During your next class, walk in with a focused goal. Give yourself some position to get to, or some move to hit.
2. During the technique portion of class, attempt to increase the speed of your drilling if you're comfortable with the move.
3. The next time you roll with someone less skilled than you, try and work on your weaknesses. Don't simply revert to your "A" game.
4. Either before or after class, try getting an extra 20-50 reps of a move with a partner. It's not a lot initially but if you come 3 days a week (an average for many), that's an additional 240 - 600 repetitions a month.
5. The next time you come into class, give yourself a new move to hit on a similarly skilled training partner. Try to use something that you feel uncomfortable going for. Being able to take the chance and "mess up" is a huge mental obstacle to conquer.



Armbar, Please!

As a purple belt, I got into a habit of picking something I wasn't good with and spending a month or more limited to that type of technique or position.

One month, I restricted myself to only submitting only with armbars because I never hit them against guys at my skill level. I started drilling passively and then during rolling I allowed myself only armbars. I remember when I had a light bulb moment, you know, that moment where everything clicks and you're not exactly sure why.

I was rolling with a big wrestler during no gi and he started to throw me. Somehow as he was throwing me with a hip toss, I secured an armbar and as we landed he was already tapping. I didn't have a setup and wasn't even sure how I got to the armbar, but I could see the magic of having a laser-like focus on one particular area or technique. Again, going back to the analogy.

When you burn the bridge of options behind you and limit yourself, you'll find a way to adapt and make things happen.



Mentality is Key

When I began my training, I was under an instructor who was less than ideal. He fostered a lot of negative traits into my training; one of the negative traits he instilled in me was a fear of failure and losing. Losing wasn't ok.

We are all initially afraid to lose in training, usually, but he reinforced this already present mental obstacle. When I was on the mat rolling, if I lost position, got submitted or anything like that, he would throw his hands up in the air and turn away in disgust.

This made it really hard to experiment with new positions and techniques because if I screwed up, my instructor would pretty much ignore me for the rest of the class. As a result, I avoided anything new and stuck with a handful of techniques that worked well.

Fast forward to my days as a purple belt, I started encountering technicians when I would compete or visit other gyms and roll with guys with a well-rounded and developed game.

Initially, I would have some success, but then they could adjust to me and my style, and would pick me apart. Me on the other hand, I was unable to adjust because the rest of my game was so underdeveloped.

I eventually left my original coach for various reasons when I was a purple belt.



My new coaches Colin and Kyle Cannon had a talk with me one day after class. They basically told me that I wasn't getting a brown belt if I didn't expand my game, and that I should be more concerned with learning, growing and absorbing everything I could, rather than simply trying to win every roll at all costs.

I took the lesson to heart and started trying new techniques. In the process, I had to soften myself a bit. Losing at anything during a roll irked me so much. To give you an idea. I would smack the mat, cuss and storm around the gym pissed off, then come back and ask for another roll with a crazy eye. Needless to say my training partners didn't appreciate it, and I had a reputation of being **that guy**.

Failure is a Necessity

After simply accepting screw ups as due course for learning, this roller coaster effect happened on my game. I got worse for a bit, and then as I continued to grow more and more, my game shot up. I saw a huge increase of success both in training and in competition.

In training, the mental change relaxed me and got rid of the training anxiety I used to have.

This may not be you, but I used to head to the gym white-knuckling the steering wheel while getting myself mentally ready. When I got on the mats with my teammates, it was like a tournament roll.

After the mental adjustment I was able to relax on the mat and be more creative with my techniques. In addition, I could roll longer because my stress response wasn't going bonkers. It was especially helpful in competitions; I used to be a competitor who rarely got the submission.

After adjusting my mentality, my motivation to be successful came from a focus on winning and being aggressive to successfully use my techniques, rather than a fear of losing. I also became more open to take chances and play the game from any position. Now you may not have an instructor beating you down with negative coaching like I had, or even be as anxious as I was, but often people are still plagued by the fear of losing.

Food for Thought!

How We Learn

In this lecture, the professor discusses the effects of stress and the mental state of a person and learning. When a person is more relaxed and open minded, they are able to be more creative with their knowledge and make more creative connections.

If you've ever been on the mat and experienced "flow" you know what having a completely relaxed mindset can do for you.

On the flip side, when a person is at a higher stress level they are more closed minded and it is often hard for them to explore outside the boundaries of their comfort zone. (Think the narrow focus we have when we compete)

Lose The Fear

So when training BJJ, lose the fear.

In training, like in life, losing sucks. I hate losing competitions, and I don't like being smashed on the mat, but it's going to happen at some point. But I promise you, you will get more out of your training and even your competitions, if you are focused on succeeding, learning and improving. Typically the way we judge whether or not we are improving is based on whether or not we hit our techniques on someone. If we don't successfully use the technique, then we look at it as a loss, but in every failure lies some nugget of information. Feedback is something that we can learn and improve from.

When you think of it this way, it makes it easier to accept the losses and it also gets you to focus on how you can improve from the mishaps, rather than simply writing it off. With a well-positioned mental attitude towards training, you can now move on to getting the most out of your actual training.

In the sections above I gave you some tips on drilling methods and ways to approach rolling with a deliberate purpose. But you'll be unable to really utilize any of this, if you are hamstrung by a poor mentality.

Try This!

Use your phone or a small camera and record yourself during hard rolling or drilling. It will give you tons of great feedback!

Afterword

So as I stated at the beginning of this ebook, I hope this information was helpful. What you've read are just some of the effective strategies I used with my own training as well as the training I use with my students. The information is just information though.

The key to getting better in anything is all about getting your hands dirty and putting the information to use.

That means you need to implement! So I encourage you to get back on the mats and try some of the training ideas I've listed, if you aren't already. Even if you add just 1 of the training strategies, it could pay off huge later on. Again, thanks for reading and I wish you the best of luck with your BJJ journey.

-Nick "Chewy" Albin

Resources

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