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## 4 Principles That Changed My Grappling Game

Posted by Richard - 2010/03/03 20:34

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I found the below article from Damage Control MMA to be very helpful. Check out their site. Brian (Dr. Sick) is actually a member of this site, and a GREAT guy and martial artist.

Lately, I've been working hard on understanding how the great fighters think.

In the past, I'd watch them spar or fight and inevitably they'd catch their opponents in some nifty little hold and that's what would grab my attention.

For the next few weeks, that's what I'd be working on. That reverse Omo-Plata or that new half guard trick, you know the drill. And of course, brick by brick, move by move, I felt like my game would improve. Later on, at the behest of my Instructor (Khuen Khru Will Bernales), I took a step back and began to look at things from a little bit wider perspective.

I started trying to look at "games" rather than just a single technique. He was always telling me to work on my side cross escape "game" or my guard passing "game". Using this mindset improved my grappling at a much faster pace. I was seeing more pieces of the puzzle at a time and as a result could begin working on entire chunks as opposed to hunting for a single piece at a time.

Instead of studying a technique, I began to study how a technique related to it's brother and sister moves within a series designed to handle a particular position or situation.

And this lead to the next step. Another step backwards. I started looking at concepts and principles. I started looking at how the great fighters were thinking.

I tried to understand their minds which was a giant leap from looking at their finishing moves which were really only the result of an number of maneuvers which, I realized were all governed by a set of simple rules and bylaws.

The following are by no means a complete set of these rules, but they are the ones I have been able to extrapolate and have begun to digest and understand. They have had the greatest impact on my game in recent times.  
He who controls the arms, controls the means by which his opponent will try to control him.

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control their hips  
control their head  
control their posture  
maintain your posture  
**CONTROL THEIR ARMS**

Over time, I had heard these objectives from many qualified and accomplished instructors. All made perfect sense but for whatever reason found a way to escape my abilities... Until one night when I was swept repeatedly by one of my BJJ instructors Mike Diaz, a Pedro Sauer Black Belt and masterful butterfly guard practitioner.

I asked him what I was doing wrong, why I couldn't stop his sweep, and what technique I could use to defend his attack. He smiled and said, "I could sit here all night and try to teach you a counter to all the different sweeps that I use. Or, I could give you the simple answer." Eager to understand my situation better, and being lazy and somewhat dim whitted (I knew there was no way I was going to remember all the techniques he could teach me), I opted for the simpler answer, to which he replied.

"You're doing pretty good with most of the other stuff, but what's making the difference between you defending and me finishing the sweep is arm control. You let me control your arms and that is why I succeed and you fail."

I took this lesson to heart and worked diligently for the next few weeks at that seemingly simple suggestion. Don't let your arms be controlled and control your opponent's arms as much as possible. And sure enough, the sweeps diminished noticeably. And even more noticeably, my game improved from the standing clinch, in the takedown department, pretty much everywhere you go hands on in MMA. And then it hit me. The arms are the means by which we control the head, the hips, the posture, or the means by which we defend these things.

Control the arms, and the rest begins to fall into place.

When you're out of position, under fire and on defense, use your tools and faculties to fortify those defenses rather than digging yourself deeper into the hole.

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Another night after numerous weeks of being dominated on the mats by my BJJ Black Belt Instructors, I expressed my frustration. "Man, I don't expect to tap any of you guys out, but for crying out loud, I'm always on the run from you guys. I'm always fighting just to keep my head above water and survive." I said. This time, both Coach Diaz and my primary instructor Khru Will were present and sitting before me. Almost in concert, they explained "Sometimes all you can do is play defense... And sometimes all you SHOULD do is play defense. Jiu-jitsu is a Self Defense Art."

I sat and thought about this for a moment. Reading the confused look on my face, they both began to point out that even though I had exhausted myself, escaping this submission and fending off that sweep and then scrambling to get out of beneath this or that position, that in the end I had made it pretty difficult to submit me. They went on to explain that if you could defend yourself against bigger, stronger, more experienced fighters, that was a pretty nice accomplishment. This made me smile. They were right. Over the years of working with Khru Will I had pushed my defensive capabilities from a few seconds of survival, to minutes and sometimes even tens of minutes. And beyond this they explained that sometimes it's just a matter of surviving until an opportunity appeared or the guy on top made a mistake.

I then realized that most of the time, when I got submitted, it was because I was frustrated about being on the run for so long and decided to push my luck by attempting a low percentage submission or sweep from out of position. These were the times they were talking about. The times when all I should have done was play defense.

Ever since then I have paid a lot more attention to when it is best to fortify my defenses and when an opportunity arises to make a calculated move and this has helped my game immensely.

Use chained attacks and escapes whenever possible.

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Beginners think one move ahead, more advanced practitioners think two and three moves ahead.

Since the beginning of my training, this idea has made sense to me from the offensive perspective. The Triangle sets up the Arm Bar which flows to a sweep, etc. etc. etc. These submission chains are nearly everywhere. But much more difficult for me to grasp was the idea of a progressive, chained escape path.

So many times, I'd be underneath someone, trying to escape, using an appropriate escape technique just to have the guy on top of me transition into a different control position... ON TOP.

Finally it occurred to me, that knowing the escape was not enough. Knowing the escape and where the guy on top would most likely transition, and having my second escape ready to go, half way through the first escape was the key to getting out of under their tyrannical reigns.

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Fight to be on top and when you can't get on top, fight for top some more!

This was an epiphany I had after watching the Black Belts roll with each other over the course of many many months I realized that they would always fight like dogs for top position. Even when out of position on bottom they would fight to get to their knees and reset vs. working for guard. And when they did try to get guard the guy on top was practically passing it before it even fully materialized.

After watching this, scene unfold, time and time again I asked my instructor Khru Will when it was that he determined when to fight for top and when to start working the bottom game techniques. His answer was simple.

"If you have gas in the tank, it should be used to get to the top."

This has been one of the most difficult concepts to make part of my game, especially since it is so physically demanding. But what I have discovered is that while employing this mentality, I can prolong the amount of time it takes for my seniors to trap me on bottom and finish me off with a submission. And sooner or later, that extra time is going to equal an opportunity. And when it does... I'll be ready.

These four principals have done more to improve my game recently than anything else.

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## Re:4 Principles That Changed My Grappling Game

Posted by tron smith - 2010/03/04 14:18

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Good stuff. I am not a fan of lay a pray, but the reverse lay and pray is even worse. Guys who just pull guard and never try to escape or submit they just pray that the ref. stands them back up. I hate it when guys say he just laid on me. Well if all he is doing is laying on you GET UP! If you can't then he must be doing more than just laying there. I like this guys mind set.

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## Re:4 Principles That Changed My Grappling Game

Posted by Louhmaylin - 2010/03/17 16:58

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That was an amazing little bit of information. Very well said and makes so much sense. Thanks for posting this Richard!! I agree Tron. If someone "just laid on you" then you were "just laying under them". Work work and work some more to get them off, get up, or anything. if you can get them even off balanced then at least you are one step closer

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