

The 3 Phases of Grappling

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The 3 phases of grappling.

Phase 1: Grip fighting (Kumi Kata)

Grips, Grabbing, Holding.

Phase 2: Posture/balance breaking (Kuzushi)

Break balance, break posture, upset.

Phase 3: The technique (waza)

Throw, sweep, lock, strangle, 'do a move'.

Why is the significance of these 3 phases overlooked so much in the modern instruction of BJJ?

Why is so much emphasis put upon the final phase, the technique, when the opportunity to perform it relies so much on the practitioner having won the battles of the first 2 phases?

Why?. Its because it's boring as fuck, and hard work.

It's of notice that, when fighting a better opponent, we always seem to be a step behind? It's because they are dominating phases 1 and 2.

When the first 2 phases are controlled, the fighter cannot be beaten.

This is because both fighters are climbing the same 'ladder' of 'grappling hierachy', and there are only 3 'rungs' to the 'ladder', phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3. With each fighter only able to occupy one rung at any one time.

PHASE 1: Grip

PHASE 2: Posture break

PHASE 3: Technique

If you can't grab someone in a way which is powerful, if you can't upset their physiology, if you can't off balance them or weaken them, then you will always struggle to perform a technique on them, as you're doing it on an opponent who is physically strong in position at that moment in time.

This is just as true in ground work as it is in standing, if not more so, as the lower centre mass generally creates a more stable opponent.

The art of grip fighting is an extensive study, with a deep technical aspect to it.

The fight for the correct grip is an essential concept to understand. Do not move forward onto the 2nd phase of breaking down your opponent, or off balancing them, breaking their posture, whatever u may call it, until the exact grip you require to achieve this has been taken in phase 1.

This could last anywhere from one second to the duration of the fight.

So, the ideal grip may be established within one second of initiating combat, or, the entire match may be one giant grip fighting battle, with neither fighter establishing sufficient grips to allow them to move on to the 2nd phase of 'kuzushi' and posture breaking, never mind the final 3rd phase of 'waza' or doing 'the technique'. This is why some high level matches are deathly boring to watch.

By spending the majority of our training time focusing on phase 3, 'the technique', we can rob ourselves of the opportunity to improve with the most efficiency.

It doesn't matter how well you can shoot the pistol, if you can't get the bullet into the chamber of the gun, it won't function.

HASE 1: GRIP

PHASE 2: POSTURE BREAK

PHASE 3: TECHNIQUE

Many of us have had the experience of ground fighting with a wrestler, or Judoka. Who couldn't finish you in the sense of a classic submission, but rather wore you down into extinction.

We've all sat on the mat afterwards thinking,

"He/She was just strong, he/she used strength to beat me, they had no technique".

No, his/her technique was superior to ours, he/she controlled the first 2 phases of the fight better than us, and they had a better understanding of grappling.

Wrestling and Judo doesn't have the lax approach to gripping which can happen through excessive 'flow rolling' and

missing about in ground sparring. As in general, experiencing the catastrophic consequences of being thrown onto your head from a height, quickly establishes the need to prevent the opponent from advancing through the phases much more than getting caught in a lock or strangle ever does. (Its hard to put a throw on slow).

I recommend to my students that they look at the game they've already developed in jiu-jitsu. That they don't move on to developing something else yet, and instead, put a magnifying glass over a magnifying glass, and look intensely at those 3 phases.

Whichever 'move' you like to do already, question yourself, "how can I improve that 1st grip for that 'move'", "how can I make the gripping phase of phase 1 better?"

"How can I tighten it up, make the grip deeper?"

From this it will make it much easier to achieve phase 2, the posture breaking phase, and once this is done, the consequence is that it becomes far easier to implement the 'move' in the final 3rd phase, be it the lock, the sweep, the pass, the throw, the kneebar. This is due to your opponent being weaker due to the extra work you did during the first 2 phases of the fight.

Anyone who spends time learning these first 2 phases quickly becomes a very competent fighter, as they will understand the fundamentals and methodology of grappling.