

# Jiu-Jitsu is a marathon of learning

Ten tips for white belts, by Curt Malin (TBJJP)

**1** Attitude: Choose the right school. In order to do this, you have to be honest with yourself. Why are you joining Jiu-Jitsu? Are you looking to become a serious competitor, are you interested in training as an after-work hobby, are you looking for a fun way to meet new people and get in better shape, or perhaps you're interested in learning self-defense? Visit the different Jiu-Jitsu academies in your area, watch a class, and talk to some of the participants about their experiences in the club. Be sure to talk with the professor about their teaching methodology/philosophy to determine whether it fits with what you're looking for in a Jiu-Jitsu school.

**2** Leave your ego at home. Jiu-Jitsu is a different martial art from karate, judo, aikido, wrestling, kung fu, etc. If you haven't trained Jiu-Jitsu before, then regardless of what you think you know, you don't know Jiu-Jitsu. Have an open mind, be prepared to lose to people younger, older, bigger, smaller, male and female, as it's part of the learning process. Remember, you joined the academy to learn – you wouldn't walk into a university/college class and begin challenging the professor's knowledge or asking to take the mid-term/final in the first week, would you?

**3** Jiu-Jitsu is a marathon of learning. There's no sprint to the finish. The journey from white belt to black belt is a long one full of knowledge, exploration, trial and error, peaks and valleys, and refinement. With each day you commit to Jiu-Jitsu, your sense of accomplishment builds, making the successes, big and small, more meaningful!

**4** Tap, tap and tap some more! If you're not tapping, you're not learning. Tapping means you made a mistake; mistakes, when reflected on, promote learning. When you tap to the higher belts, ask where you went wrong, make adjustments based on their explanations, and correct the mistake.

**5** Respect those that have gone before you. The senior students are a wealth of knowledge and they helped build the academy. The senior students have experienced the same challenges, plateaus, and difficulties that you're dealing with and have successfully navigated through them. Listen to their advice, even if it doesn't seem to apply to you at that specific moment.

**6** Technique: Focus on building a strong foundation. Think of learning Jiu-Jitsu as a similar process to building a skyscraper or cathedral. A building of any stature requires a solid foundation. Without a solid foundation, problems will occur as weaknesses in the building are exposed. The same can be said for learning Jiu-Jitsu. The foundation you built when first starting the practice of Jiu-Jitsu will determine whether you can successfully add more techniques or will be forced back to learning the basics in order to fix weaknesses. Posture, technical concepts, weight distribution, proper breathing, efficient energy use, finding and/or feeling a connection with your partner are fundamentals that set the tone for your development. Going back to the high rise analogy, a flashy submission or sweep is simply a decoration on the fifteenth floor!

**7** Build your fortress first. Focus on defensive Jiu-Jitsu first; learn safe positions and escapes before you focus on your offensive game. Roll with higher belts, start to recognize dangerous spots to be in and which positions you can defend and stall from. Once you develop a strong defensive game, you can let your offense become more aggressive with less concern for making a mistake and getting caught in a bad position.

**8** Learn to love drilling. The best athletes in any sport improve their skills by practicing drills. Drills are specific skills practiced over and over until thinking is eliminated and the skill becomes muscle memory. Whether it's a basketball player shooting fade-away jumpers, a soccer player shooting penalty kicks or a Jiu-Jitsu practitioner working on passing guard, practicing the skill over and over correctly is the only way to learn and understand why it works. If you have to think about it... you don't know it!

**9** Choke everything. When attacking on offense, look to choke first. Develop a strong arsenal of chokes because, no matter how big or athletic your opponent is, once you properly apply a choke it's always the same result: tap out or pass out!

**10** Don't ignore the self-defense aspect. Remember the roots of Jiu-Jitsu. A strong understanding of self-defense concepts will further your understanding in all aspects of Jiu-Jitsu. For example, rear-bear-hug defense translates directly to successful defense/reversal of the turtle position. **G**