SAFE SUMMER: PROTECT YOURSELF IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS!

BLACK BELT®

WORLD'S LEADING MAGAZINE OF MARTIAL ARTS

SPECIAL ISSUE
JAPANESE WEAPONRY

- *LEARNING TRADITIONAL KYUDO*
- *STARTING WITH THE SHORT SWORD*
- *CONTROLLING CRIMINALS IN OLD JAPAN*



GRACIE SURVIVAL TACTICS

THE SOLUTION TO THE POLICING PROBLEM?

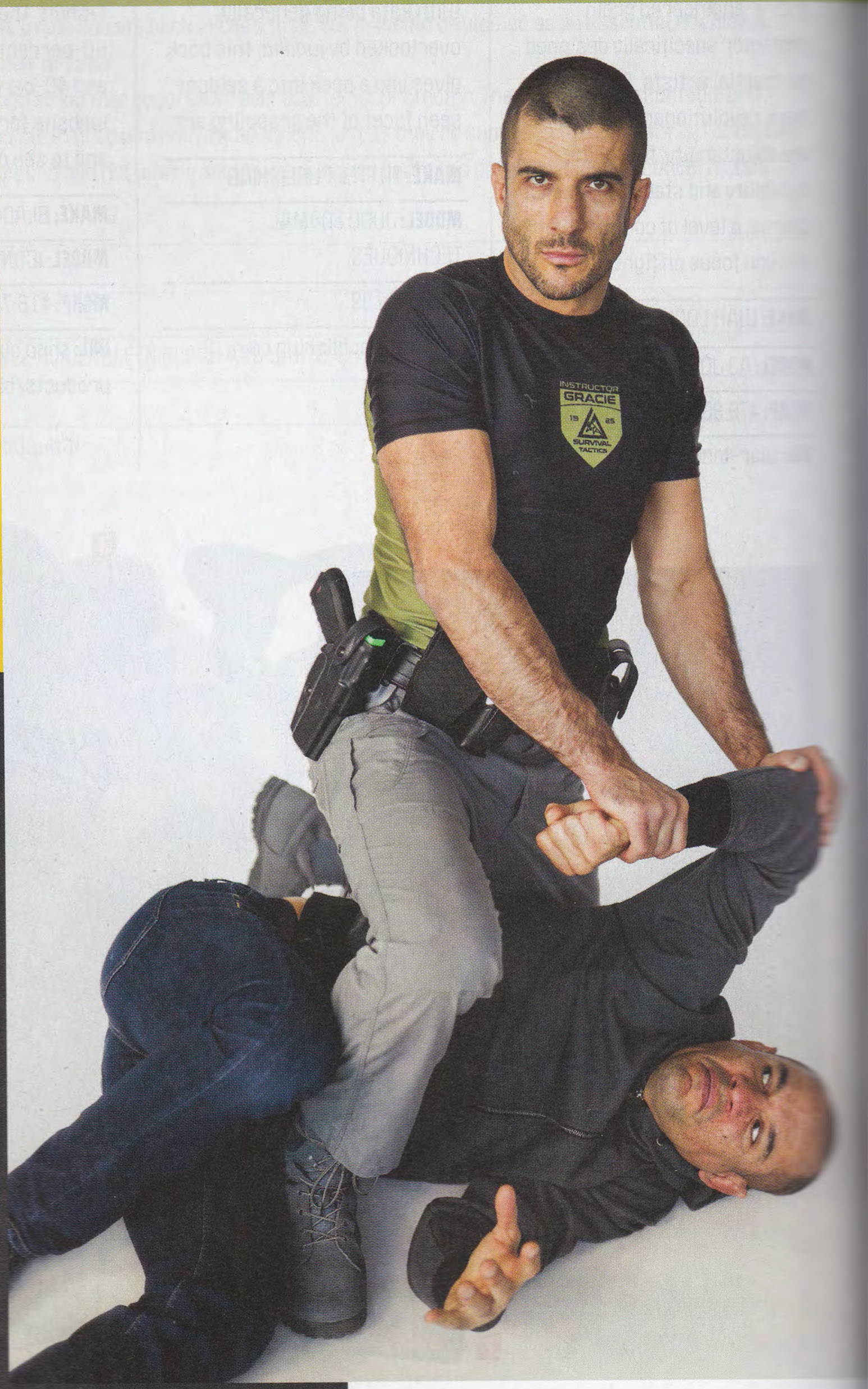
KRAV MAGA THAT'S TAILOR-MADE FOR THE STREET

MARTIAL ARTS COMMUNITY REACTS TO UKRAINE

JUN/JUL 2022 Display until 07/19/22
$7.99 US $8.99 CAN
07>
0 74470 01689 2
blackbeltmag.com

Rener Gracie (standing) and Ryron Gracie

SURVIVAL OF



Rener and Ryron Gracie

THE FITTEST



HOW THE GRACIE SURVIVAL TACTICS PROGRAM IS OFFERING A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WHEN POLICE HAVE TO USE FORCE

STORY BY NOEL PLAUGHER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACQUEL KUSSMAN

The trial and conviction of Derek Chauvin for the 2020 death of George Floyd brought closure to the most recent and infamous case of police violence in America — but not a solution to the problem it's come to epitomize. The issue of excessive force in law-enforcement interactions with the public has smoldered for a long time.

A through line can be drawn from the beating of Rodney King in 1991 to the death of Floyd in 2020, pointing to seemingly escalating incidents of excessive force used by police. Frustration and anger are rekindled with every viral video that surfaces with evidence of yet another assault or death. An exhausted populace and an isolated police force seem to be eyeing each other with growing suspicion as they're driven further into their own camps, awaiting each others' next move.

And here we are.

LONG HISTORY

The problem of excessive violence in law enforcement has been studied by one martial arts family for decades. When readers think of Gracie *jiu-jitsu*, they might not immediately connect it with law-enforcement training, but that soon may change. Recently, Rener Gracie, co-owner and head instructor of the Gracie University of Jiu-Jitsu in Torrance, California, spoke with *Black Belt* about a way forward that's been tried and tested — and is working.

The Gracies created today's pre-eminent martial arts combat showcase, the Ultimate Fighting Championship, and by extension the sport of mixed martial arts. How did the progenitors of a violent combat sport become involved in solving the riddle of excessive use of force in policing?

"In the early '90s after the Rodney King incident, the Los Angeles Police Department created a civilian committee of martial arts experts that basically were pulled together to try to revamp 'defensive tactics,' which is the term they use for martial arts or hands-on control tactics in law enforcement," Rener said. "My father (Rorion Gracie) was on that panel."

Since that time, the family's relationship with law enforcement has continued, and understanding the concerns from the outset has been most important. "From early on, we have been involved with the LAPD, trying to help them lower their levels of force because they were being scrutinized for what was perceived, and in many cases confirmed, as excessive uses of force," Rener said.



MOUNTED HANDCUFFING: The mount is a common control position in ground fighting, and this GST technique enables an officer to pronate the suspect once compliance is achieved. Rener Gracie uses two hands to control the suspect's right wrist (1). He posts his right leg and positions the arm over his knee (2). Next, Rener pushes on the back of the elbow with his left hand while pulling on the wrist with his right (3). Using verbal commands, he directs the suspect into a prone position (4). He finishes by handcuffing the suspect (5-6).

WHY BJJ?

Considering the challenges that face police officers who must bring a suspect into custody, what specific value does Brazilian jiu-jitsu have? Why not use a different martial art like karate or kung fu?

"The reason [LAPD] chose us and why they really leaned so much on jiu-jitsu is because of the fact that it's so nonviolent," Rener said. "Jiu-jitsu is inherently de-escalatory, whereas other martial arts are inherently escalatory.

"If my solution to the threat that you present is to punch you in the nose, I'm going to aggravate you. But if my solution to the threat you present is to lay you on the ground, immobilize you without strikes and neutralize your will to fight, it may aggravate you for a short period — but as soon as you realize that you're not going anywhere, compliance will follow."

With the success of the LAPD program, it wasn't long before other agencies started considering the methods and techniques taught by the Gracies. "The demand from law enforcement started with LAPD, and because LAPD is such a pioneer when it comes to defensive-tactics training in the American law-enforcement community, other agencies started to seek out our help," Rener said. "So we created a law-enforcement program back then, and my father was leading it."

That baton was handed to Rener and his brother Ryron Gracie in 2001. Their job was to carry on the program and bring it into the 21st century.

TECHNIQUE TWEAKS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* has exploded in popularity in recent decades, but when practiced in its original form, it has limited applicability in police work because of two primary considerations.

One, there is no tapout in police encounters. The altercation ends only when the suspect is taken into custody.

Two, each officer has a belt full of weapons that can be taken and used against him or her at any point in a grappling encounter.

The Gracie Survival Tactics program is unique in that even though it's based on BJJ, every technique has been adapted to address these two concerns.

— Rener Gracie



Rener Gracie (right) teaches Gracie Survival Tactics to law-enforcement officers.















ARMBAR HANDCUFFING: Until GST introduced this technique, the armbar was frowned on in law enforcement because there was no effective way to transition into handcuffing. Rener Gracie proves otherwise. He uses the armbar to gain compliance from the suspect (1-3). Then he bends the suspect's right arm over his right leg (4). That orientation enables him to post on his left elbow and drop his left knee to the ground (5). Rener rises onto his knee (6) and begins the mounted handcuffing procedure (7).

GREAT DISCONNECT

Some readers might wonder why police officers would need supplemental training in the first place. Why don't they just rely on the hand-to-hand training they get at the academy?

The unfortunate answer is there really isn't much training, Rener said. "For most states in America, the average annual training requirement for unarmed defensive tactics is two to four hours per year." He explained that some states, including Texas and Georgia, have no annual training requirement at all.

"This to me is the big misunderstanding surrounding law enforcement in America," he said. "The general public believes that cops are training several hours each week in these important hands-on skills, just like Navy SEALs — which is why it's understandable that each time an excessive-force incident occurs, the public backlash is so severe. But this couldn't be further from the truth."

Once this fundamental lack of training is understood, it paints a clearer picture of the problems that develop between the police and the public. There's a chasm of misunderstanding and unfulfilled expectations between what officers should do and what they are trained to do.

"How can you ask someone to do something if you haven't trained them to do it?" Rener asked. "The result is often putting police officers in a no-win situation. I don't think there is any field or professional endeavor where the professional is asked to do more with less preparation than when we ask a police officer to arrest a potentially violent, aggressive, resisting suspect with two hours of training per year."

Society's access to technology has changed while law-enforcement training has seemingly been in a state of arrested development. The proliferation of smartphones, along with the ability to upload video and share it with thousands of people through social media, has shifted the public's awareness of the issue. What once may have been a bystander's story is now a documented event. Rener is aware of the paradigm shift, and he said his team evaluates each case carefully.

"What I want the world to know is that when I see a use-of-force incident caught on tape and it goes viral and it looks like the cop is using inappropriate levels of force, I'm not so quick to jump to the conclusion that the officer is abusing their power," he said. "Since the level of force used by an officer is largely a function of the perceived threat an officer faces, a poorly trained officer is going to escalate their level of force more rapidly because they're scared and they know deep down inside that they haven't learned nonviolent techniques to deal with the threat in front of them with the lowest level of force possible."

Having spent two decades working on the problem, Rener stands in the middle of the disconnect, understanding the public's perception while acknowledging the shortcomings of police training. "I see both sides clearer than I see the palm of my hand," he said.

"It's worth noting someone like Derek Chauvin in a George Floyd incident does not get the privilege of the analysis that I'm giving. There is a massive difference between an officer who escalates their level of force because they were disastrously undertrained and scared during a critical incident and an officer who clearly and maliciously abuses their power. Most police officers are good people and are doing the job for the right reasons, but some cops don't deserve to be wearing the badge."

THE PROGRAM

Police officers have specific needs that are different from those of self-defense practitioners and BJJ competitors. The family's two-decade-old police program, called Gracie Survival Tactics, has been refined by Rener and Ryron to take those needs into account.

"Rather than simply teaching jiu-jitsu to law enforcement, we modified all the techniques so we were teaching jiu-jitsu for law enforcement," Rener said. "[It's] a truly customized jiu-jitsu-based solution for law-enforcement agencies to get their officers up to par with the most rudimentary but most necessary nonviolent control techniques that jiu-jitsu has to offer. Since 2001, we've certified tens of thousands of instructors to teach the GST program. With such widespread adoption among federal, state and local law-enforcement agencies, we've been able to receive POST (Peace Officer Standards and Training) accreditation in 39 states, making GST the only jiu-jitsu-based defensive-tactics program to achieve this distinction."

When the pandemic shut down the country, the Gracies created the GST Online Instructor Certification Program so officers could learn from anywhere in the world and have their skills verified via video evaluation through the online learning portal at GracieUniversity.com.

"We originally created the online-certification option for officers who couldn't travel due to COVID restrictions, but it was so successful that we've kept it going," Rener said. "It has allowed countless smaller agencies with very limited budgets to access this important material at a fraction of the cost of live certification."

While GST has been taught for two decades, it was a recent report from one police department that was jaw-dropping. The Marietta Police Department in Georgia had trained its officers in the Gracie program since 2009. However, after a viral video showed a violent encounter with a suspect and brought the ire of the public, the department decided to take it one step further. Since 2019, many of the officers have supplemented their training with weekly BJJ classes at a civilian-owned-and-operated school in a program that's fully funded by the agency.

Not everyone participated. Of Marietta's 145 officers, 95 enrolled in the additional BJJ classes and began training two hours a week. The department subsequently published the following:

· MPD has had 95 officers attend over 2,600 civilian-operated BJJ classes with one (1) reported training injury.

















WEAPON RETENTION: A popular submission in BJJ, the kimura can serve as a weapon-retention tactic for law enforcement. From the bottom of the guard, Rener Gracie controls the suspect's head and arm (1). If the suspect goes for his gun, Rener can grab his wrist (2). He then uses his knee to lock the man's arm (3) until he can secure his own wrist with his left hand to establish the arm lock (4). Using pressure and verbal commands, Rener maneuvers the man until he's lying facedown (5). He walks his legs away from the suspect (6) and gets to his knees (7). He releases the kimura and begins the handcuffing (8).

• Among the officers training in BJJ, there was a 23% reduction in taser deployments and a 48% reduction in officer injuries department wide. None of the injured officers were BJJ officers.

• Serious injuries to a suspect are 53% less likely when interacting with BJJ officers.

• BJJ officers are 59% less likely to engage in Use of Force than non-BJJ officers.

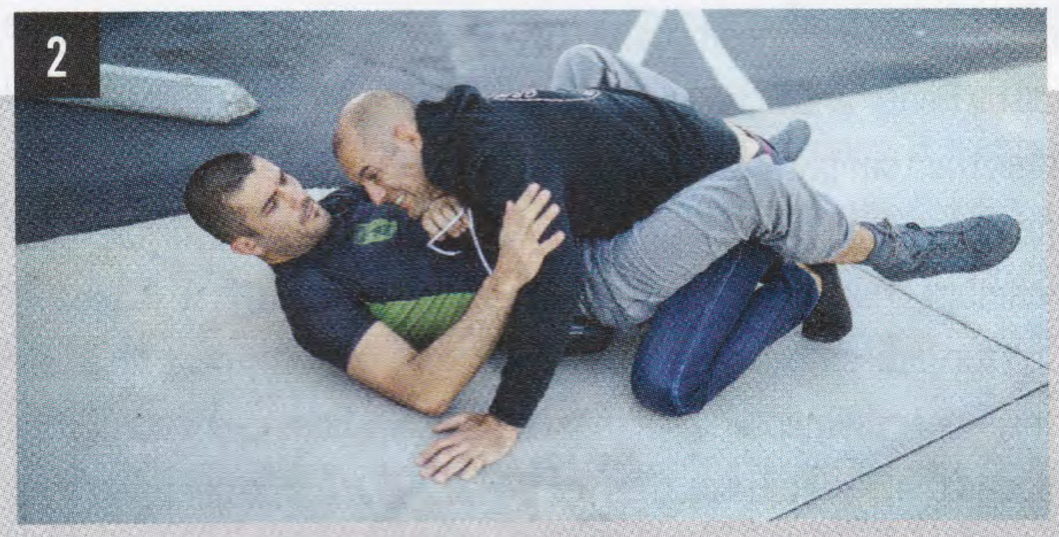
Those last two statistics jump out because they point to desirable outcomes involving the police and the public. Rener explained: "Officers equipped with jiu-jitsu are less agitatable, more confident, more calm in their demeanor and more de-escalatory in their verbal communication, and as a result, they do not use force as often."

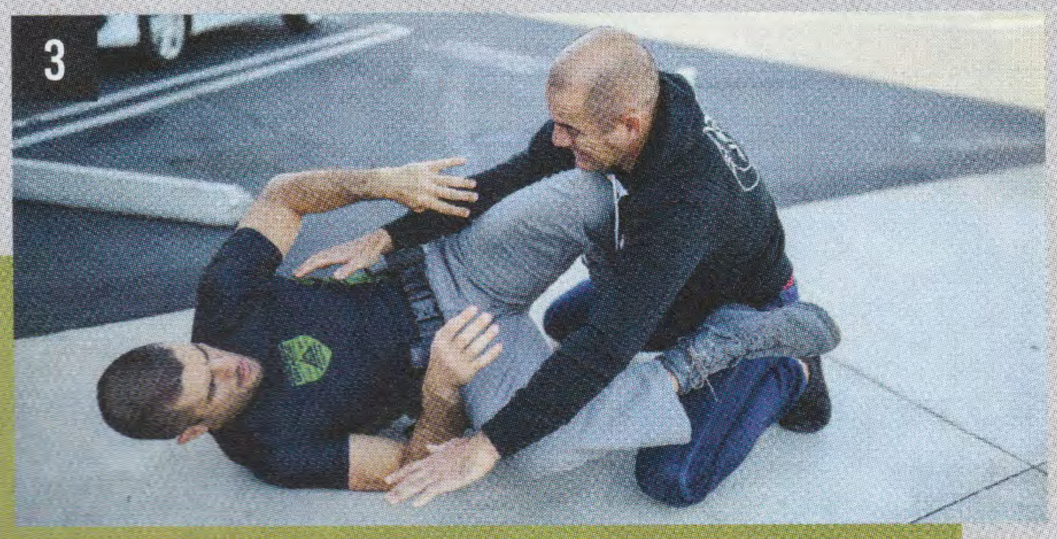
Having other tools gives officers options, Rener added. "Let's say every time they get into an altercation, they use one of their tools. If all they have is a firearm, they're going to use their firearm. If they have a Taser and a firearm, at least a percentage of the time, they're going to resort to their Taser before they resort to their firearm.

"What I'm saying is jiu-jitsu, as we teach it for law enforcement, is the next tool on the tool belt. If they have jiu-jitsu and the 40 adapted techniques we teach and certify them in, that's 40 chances they [have to] resort to an empty-hand control tactic before they resort to a firearm or a Taser. It's just a mathematical equation."

After the Marietta PD released its data, the GST team received inquiries from law-enforcement agencies across the country and around the world.















GUARD GET-UP: Rener Gracie is on the bottom with the suspect in his guard (1). He makes space (2) and inserts his left knee in front of the suspect's chest while placing his right foot on the man's hip (3). Rener controls the suspect's wrist with his left hand (4), then kicks his knee out while driving his hand to the ground (5). Rener extracts his leg and stands (6), at which point he disengages and de-escalates — or uses an appropriate force option (7).

FUTURE PATH

It's easy to think of the GST program for law enforcement as the "new thing" because it's becoming widely recognized through word of mouth and because it was featured in a recent episode of HBO's *Real Sports*. However, it bears repeating that Rener, Ryron and the Gracie family have been working with law enforcement for 20 years. While the program has gained visibility, Rener is the first to point out that it's not a panacea.

"People say, 'Rener, is this the solution to all of law enforcement's problems?'

"I say, 'No. Implicit biases do exist in law enforcement. That's a fact, and I don't have a solution to that. But what I can tell you is that providing each officer with sufficient training in these nonviolent control tactics is the most significant thing we can do to lower the level of force in law-enforcement encounters with the public.'"

He then said that nothing GST teaches will eliminate the rogue cop with malicious intent. "But for cops that do operate with integrity and are in law enforcement for the right reason, can you imagine how many lives will be saved [when they don't] have to resort to a higher level of force because of the confidence they have in their empty hands?"

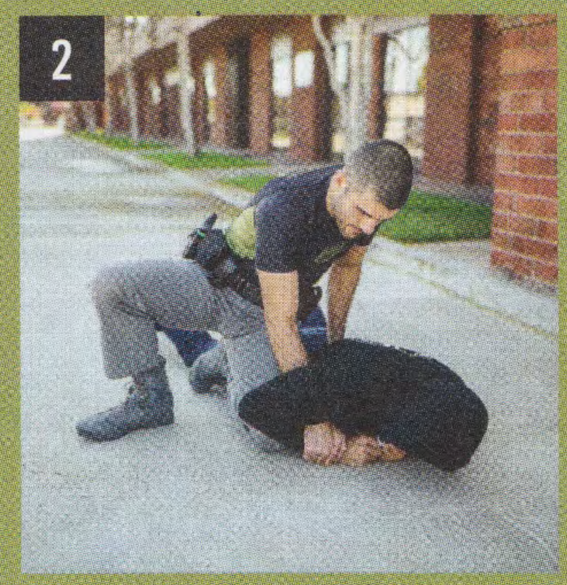
What's next for the program? In the near future, the public may be able to see GST in action. Rener said he's working on a TV program that will illustrate how his family's system works and why he thinks it's the best solution for the police-training deficit.

"My brother and I created a show that will close the gap between civilian expectations and officer-training deficiencies in America," Rener said. "We're very excited about this — it's at a time when everyone is canceling law enforcement. I do agree that change is necessary, but I don't agree with the changes that are being proposed. I think the lowest-hanging fruit when it comes to law-enforcement reform that is necessary and would be effective is the proper training of officers to handle physical encounters with the lowest level of force."

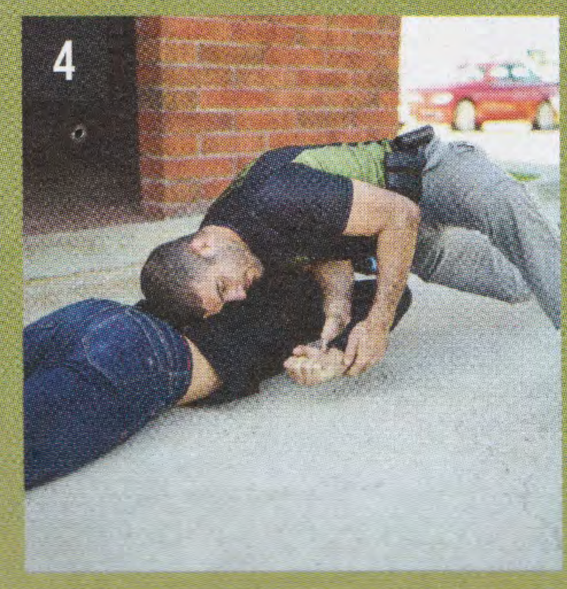
To those skeptics who still refuse to consider jiu-jitsu as an option for law enforcement, Rener had two things to say: "Look at the data and show me a better solution."

Noel Plaugher has studied martial arts for 30 years. He writes fiction and nonfiction and has published short stories and books, as well as numerous articles on health and martial arts. To learn more about GST, visit GracieUniversity.com.















HIDDEN ARM: A common problem for law enforcement occurs when a prone suspect is hiding his hands. Here, the suspect has his hands tucked under his chest (1). Rener Gracie uses his inside knee to pry away the man's elbow so he can insert his outside hand (2). He places his shoulder on the suspect's back (3) and uses his hands to leverage out the man's arm (4). Rener positions the hand behind the man's back (5), then uses pain compliance to get the second hand out (6). Finally, he applies the handcuffs (7).