

How Cell Phones and MMA Impacted Law Enforcement

While there is always an event that changes the landscape of every era in law enforcement, none have had a greater affect than what we are experiencing currently, the combined forces of two ostensibly unrelated phenomenons: Cell phones and MMA.

How MMA affected police work

I can remember as a child in the 1970's, I would hypothesize with my friends the eternal question, who would win in a fight between a Karate guy and a Judo guy. We would debate whether the Judo guy, i.e. 'the grappler' could takedown the Karate guy, i.e. 'the striker'. We would try to imagine how this hypothetical fight would go down. The only point of reference we could go on was T.V.'s Captain Kirk's and James West's fight scenes, as well as the occasional playground brawl between two flailing children. However, we were not the only ones that were ignorant of how a real fight occurs between trained fighters. I saw how the whole country gasped in 1993 as the Gracie Family bought MMA to American viewers. A real fight between two trained individuals did not look anything like we imagined it. Then in the ensuing 22 years, the whole country has gotten a continuing education on how two trained individuals fight each other. They also got to see all the individual styles in action and how each style approaches a fight. Viewers then, through the course of hundreds of fights, began to notice how some techniques tend to work more than other techniques. They also began to mimic these techniques. They found that some of these mimicked techniques, such as the Guillotine and Rear Naked Choke tended to be functional even with no training. Just by watching SPIKE T.V. they found they could choke out their friends during a living room wrestling match.

With this genie out of the bottle, Law enforcement personnel had a new challenge. They no longer had the advantage with their tactics training. Before MMA, the average officer's 4-8 hours of training per year offered them an upper hand against suspects. Now the average Joe's limited MMA knowledge gave them a more realistic view of a fight than the average police defensive tactics system. Police departments must adapt to the changing landscape and offer their officers a more effective option.

Enter the cell phone

When I started Police work 23 years ago, there was always the possibility of someone, who happened to have a 30 pound camcorder balanced on their shoulder, catching the action of a police arrest. This was the case with George Holliday, who happened to be in the right place and time with his camcorder when the police pursuit of Rodney King happened to end right outside his apartment. Nowadays, I routinely witness people "quick drawing" their smart phones to video any incident they please. Officers must always assume they are being filmed. No matter how justified their choice of force options might be, the public will judge the officer's actions based on whether it 'looks bad' on the video. The public outcry can exert a tremendous amount of pressure on police and city administrators, elected leaders as well as the court system. Officers have to be "camera friendly" in this new environment.

The Solution

Now we have two independent trends that are converging on the officer at the same time.

- 1) The offenders who are more dangerous by being more functional in a real fight
- 2) The increased scrutiny of a constantly filming public who expects the officers not to appear too aggressive in response to this new threat.

The officers need a proven street effective system and they must look gentle and humane while using it.

What better solution can we find than “the gentle art”? Jiu-jitsu literally means “the gentle art” in Japanese. It is not based on out-striking and overpowering the opponent. Furthermore, Gracie Jiu-jitsu is an even “gentler” version of its Japanese ancestor as the result of Helio Gracie finding that the Japanese Jiu-jitsu required too much power and athleticism for his 5’6” physique. His lifelong quest of constantly refining the art led to it being based on only leverage and natural body movements. It’s now the farthest from a power-based, aggressive system as possible. Coincidentally, the finesse of using leverage happens to be extremely camera friendly. To the average Joe, it looks like the kind, professional officer is only “controlling” the suspect by “holding” him. However there is much more to this system.

The whole reason for the system’s popularity with the martial arts enthusiast is that it works. The typical martial artist does not care that Jiu-jitsu looks gentle, only that it is proven to allow them to defeat their opponents. There are countless documented cases of smaller, less athletic people defeating bigger, stronger, more aggressive opponents. This happens to be the perfect fit with the Police industry which generally hires people of all sizes. The 5’4” officer must first be able to overcome the physically superior offender and get him in cuffs, and he or she must look gentle doing it. This method can reduce injury to not only the officer but also the suspect. The Gracie Academy not only teaches the art as based on the founding principles of leverage over athleticism but also teaches Gracie Survival Tactics which is a sub-system of Gracie Jiu-jitsu specifically tailored to train law enforcement officers of all sizes to not only survive an attack by a bigger stronger opponent, but to also be able to successfully handcuff them from any position they end the fight in. Since teaching Gracie Survival Tactic in my agency, there have been some field applications that illustrate this. In the past, when a suspect would violently resist arrest, it would mean that the officers would have to escalate to more injurious forms of force. Now using G.S.T. in these cases, the officers obtain a position of advantage which enables them to overcome the resistance with technique. For example, in a recent case, while serving a weapons related warrant, one of our SWAT officers obtained the position of a G.S.T. vascular restraint against a resisting suspect, which caused the suspect to immediately put his hands behind his back and comply before the officer needed to apply any pressure with the restraint. With the suspect’s guns nearby, if the officer was ineffective at controlling him, the officer might have had to shoot him or worse, the suspect might have shot the officer. Thanks to the officer’s quick thinking in applying this G.S.T technique, the officer stayed safe and did not have to escalate his force. These effective G.S.T. techniques are good for the officers, the police department, the community, and even that suspect (who is uninjured).

Even if that officer were to have fully administered the vascular neck restraint, the latest research by various experts (including Force Science) reinforces what the Gracie family has observed for

almost a century, that a humanely and properly applied vascular neck restraint is much safer than the Law Enforcement community has previously believed (Force Science Institute, 2012).

Although the original and most important aspect of G.S.T. is officer survival, the humane appearance of the techniques has tremendous benefits for Law Enforcement. While the police administrator and the street officer face different types of challenges, the tactically effective and camera-friendly techniques resonant with both the officers and administrators alike. Remember, current case law holds officers to the objective reasonableness standard [Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386 (1989)]. Who decides what is objectively reasonable? The courts do. Who comprises the courts? Juries are comprised of regular people and it is rare that a judge will have street experience as a police officer. So do not underestimate the power of being camera friendly. Remember that when the state court acquitted the officers in the Rodney King case, the Mayor of Los Angeles stated: "*The jury's verdict will not blind us to what we saw on that videotape*". Even the sitting president of the United States said: "*Viewed from outside the trial, it was hard to understand how the verdict could possibly square with the video.*" Statements like these were indicative of the public opinion. It was only after the public outcry, brought on by the inflammatory nature of the video, that the officers were tried again in federal court. We must ask ourselves if the result would have been the same had the arrest appeared more benign, i.e. the suspect being held in a position of control.

When an officer attends a GST course they will be given the tools that allow them to utilize the proportional force concepts that the courts and community are currently holding the officers to. Furthermore, the system has recently been legally and medically reviewed for Law Enforcement. For those who wish to obtain the reviews, they are available through the Gracie Academy. Additionally, at both the GST level 1 and level 2 courses, the students are given a significant amount of instruction on how to effectively teach the officers in their departments as well as secure access to the entire system on video via their own online password-protected account. This assists the newly certified instructors to not only spread the life-saving techniques, but also the idea, throughout their respective departments, that officer survival and proportional force are not mutually exclusive.