



DAN INOSANTO

ON
BRUCE LEE,
JEET KUNE DO TECHNIQUES
FOR GRAPPLING
AND NEW
DIRECTIONS
FOR
JKD TRAINING

Photos by Rick Husted

by Dr. Mark Cheng,
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Kicking, punching, trapping and grappling — the four ranges of combat are mentioned in almost every discussion of Bruce Lee's jeet kune do. But with the exception of Dan Inosanto and the late Larry Hartsell, none of Lee's personal students has focused on the fourth range, which is ironic because grappling is all the rage these days. In this exclusive interview, Inosanto addresses the often-overlooked subject of JKD ground work, both as it was practiced during Lee's life and as it's being practiced now.

A lot of people think that Bruce Lee's jeet kune do was only about kickboxing and trapping, but that's not the whole picture, is it?

Absolutely not. While *sifu* Bruce was alive, he personally researched grappling arts like Chinese *chin-na*, Wally Jay's *jujitsu* and Japanese judo, and he trained with Gene LeBell. Even in *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, he clearly illustrated grappling techniques — throws, locks and submissions. And if you watch the opening scene of *Enter the Dragon* where he's fighting Sammo Hung, how does he finish the fight? With a submission.

Why do you think that so many people can't see past Lee's kickboxing, trapping and *nunchaku* work?

Sifu Bruce knew what looked good on camera. [Most] of the techniques in his movies are striking oriented, not because he couldn't do other things but because he clearly knew that the subtleties of grappling are very hard, if not impossible, for the cam-

era to capture.

Just look at mixed-martial arts bouts. In the early days of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, the referees didn't stand the fighters back up if they were inactive on the ground for too long, but the fans started booing, and the promoters had to acknowledge that the viewing public wanted to see action or else the money would go elsewhere. The action might be a little shift of the hips or fighting for grips underneath, but if the fans can't see it, they can't appreciate it. And if they can't appreciate it, they won't enjoy it.

The other reason he didn't show as much grappling in his movies is it was an area that was relatively new to him. He had tons of hours of kick, punch and trap training, but his research into the grappling arts was still in its infancy. If he was going to show something on-screen, sifu Bruce wanted to really shine at it.

But he was actively investigating the ground range, and he even started developing *chi sao*

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Dan Inosanto (left) faces his opponent (1). The man punches, and Inosanto responds with a left-hand redirection and right-hand face punch (2). The jeet kune do master uses his left hand to reposition his adversary's right arm (3), clearing the path for a backfist (4). The man raises his left arm to defend, and Inosanto intercepts it (5), traps it (6) and applies a figure-4 takedown (7). Once the opponent is on the ground (8), Inosanto steps over his head with the figure-4 wrist lock and applies pressure (9). He finishes by trapping the opponent's head between his thigh and lower leg before employing a prone armbar (10).

from the ground. However, during sifu Bruce's lifetime, fighting was more of a stand-up game.

Was grappling a regular part of the curriculum at the Chinatown school?

Sifu Bruce taught locks and submissions on the ground, and takedowns, but they weren't contested. In other words, we practiced them for technical development and not in a sparring sense, like we did with kickboxing. We didn't wrestle against each other like we did with the kickboxing.

What he did do was work on certain things with individual students during his private lessons. When he taught private lessons, he'd not only focus on what might work best for individuals — their personal JKD — but also train himself at the same time, bettering his own skills in a particular range.

One of the things that made him unique was his ability to move from kicking range to punching range to trapping range to grappling range. At that time, most martial artists really shined in one particular range. If you kicked, you didn't punch or grapple much. If you punched, you didn't kick or grapple much. And if you grappled, you didn't have the same skill level in striking. Sifu Bruce was way ahead of his time in how he was training himself and his students to be adept at bridging the gap between ranges.

Are there different ranges within grappling range?

Certainly. There's what's referred to in *Tao of Jeet Kune Do* as the tie-up range, which is essentially the standing clinch range. This is like what wrestlers do now with pummeling. They have the collar hold. They grab the biceps, triceps, wrist, neck, forearm, etc. These

clinch tactics are highly useful for strikers because they allow them to tie up their opponents and gain some time to recover from a solid hit or to catch their breath. Grapplers must learn this range, or else they'll be unable to bridge the gap and dominate their opponents on the ground. So they have techniques like overhooks, underhooks and the two-on-one to help them achieve the takedown. That's a different game than the ground game, but they're both part of the totality of grappling.

Did Lee teach drills that included striking on the ground?

No. We put those in later, after his passing, [because] of Shooto people like Yori Nakamura, who taught those to us around 1989 to 1990. Because of working with Yori, I saw the necessity for ground work, and then later when I got into Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* with the Machado family and Renato Magno, I really saw the need for ground work.

I combined a lot of the movements from Shooto and Brazilian *jiu-jitsu's vale tudo* training with the striking, trapping and grappling that I learned from sifu Bruce and others. Not that what I'm doing is 100-percent correct, but those are the sources that make up our ground game, and we give credit for what comes from where.

We also have influences from other grappling systems — *dumog*, which I learned from Juan LaCoste; *naban*, which is the python system of *bando* as taught by Dr. Maung Gyi; and others.

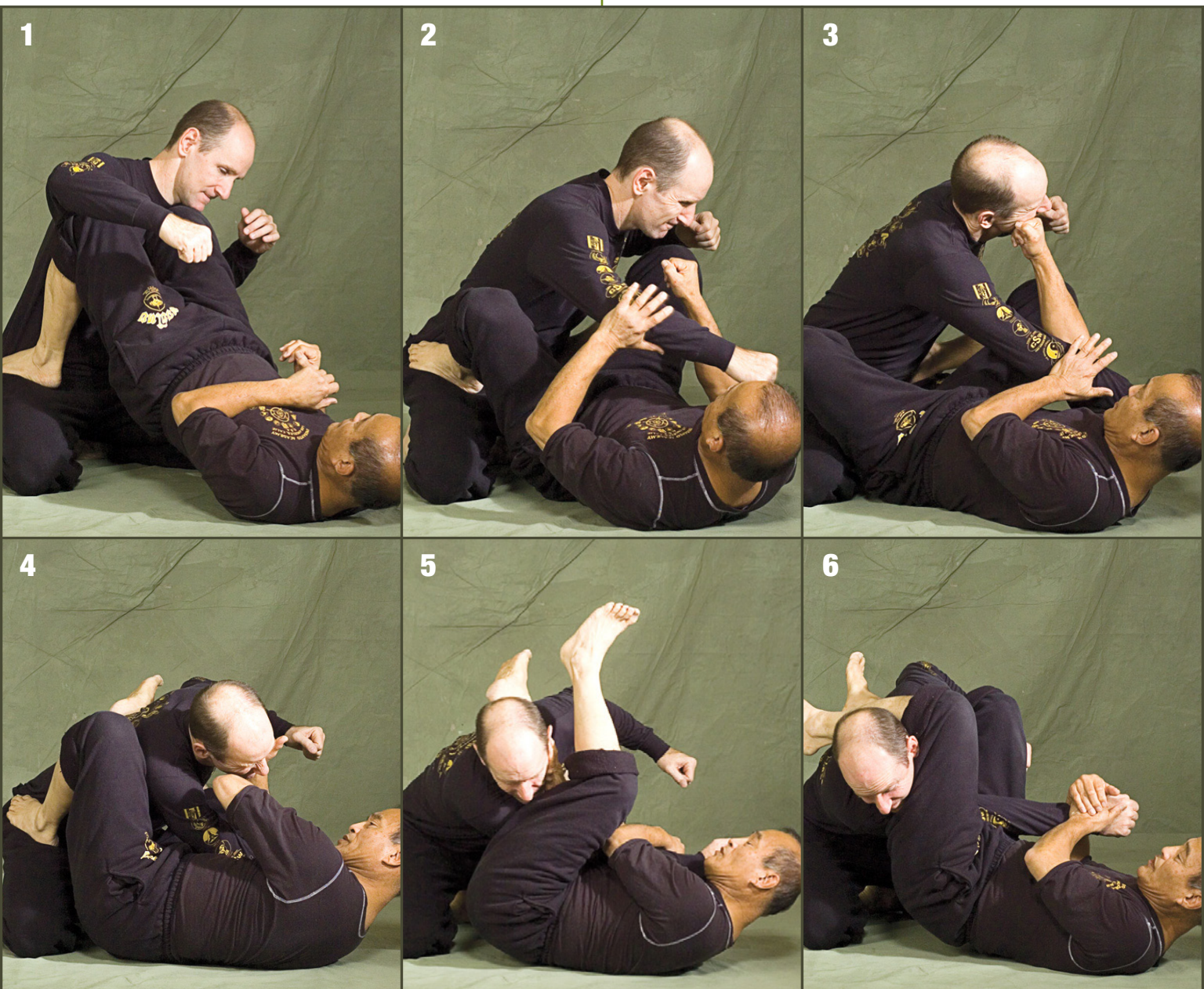
Bando has a grappling system?

Yes. There's a history lesson here. People often think that something is absent from

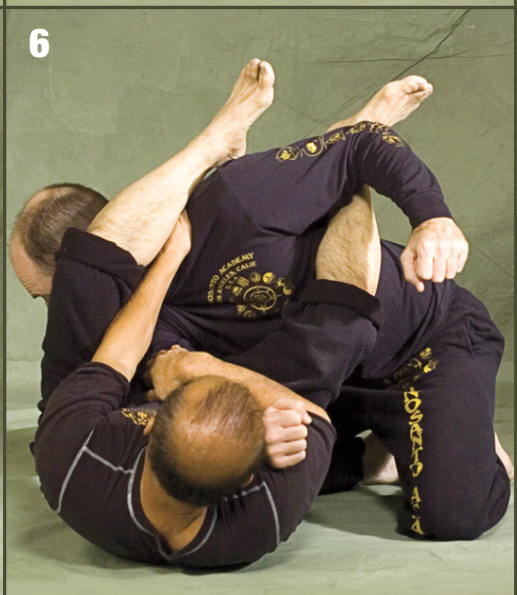
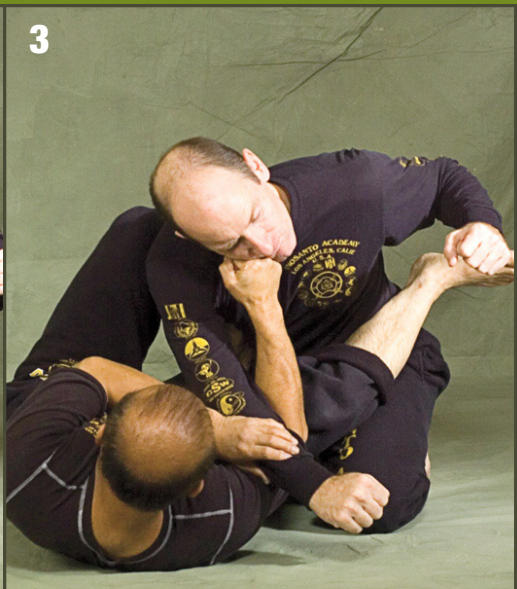
history when they don't have exposure to it in the media, but that doesn't mean it didn't exist. Mixed martial arts have always been around. Bando, for example, has kickboxing, weapons and wrestling, but very few people knew about it before. Why now? Because

there's money involved with MMA, instead of people just doing something as a cultural or family treasure.

Even on the Hawaiian sugar plantations decades ago, the Filipinos were doing MMA. They kickboxed and grappled with sticks and



Dan Inosanto (bottom) bridges, using his legs to keep Joel Clark at bay (1). When Clark reaches over Inosanto's knees to throw a punch, the jeet kune do expert easily parries the blow (2) and counterattacks (3). He then slides his hips to the left, trapping the man's right arm, and pushes his head to the left (4) so he can swing his left leg over his head (5). Inosanto holds the opponent tight with his legs and lifts with his hips, completing the armbar (6).



The opponent kneels in Dan Inosanto's open guard (1). When he punches, Inosanto pushes with his right foot and bridges to strike him in the chin with his knee while keeping him from connecting (2). Next, Inosanto redirects the punch and slams his right fist into the man's face (3). He captures the right arm with an underhook trap and follows up with a tight left elbow (4), then holds the man's head to the side (5) so he can maneuver his left leg over it while controlling his right arm (6). He tightens his legs, lifts his hips and hyperextends the man's limb for the submission — or the break (7).

training daggers. Now we're more aware of it because of the TV coverage and Internet exposure.

Many people say that trapping is its own separate range and is distinct from grappling. What are your thoughts?

Trapping is actually easier on the ground. The ground takes away one vector of motion, so it limits the opponent's motion and forces him to be really elusive. A good shoot-wrestler or BJJ practitioner knows all about trapping at a high level, but he doesn't necessarily call it "trapping." He might call it "clinching" or "pinning" or "holding," but all those terms reflect a form of trapping. For example, if someone underhooks your arm or grabs your arm and hits you or throws you, you got trapped. A trap doesn't have to be a *pak sao* or *lap sao* or something like that.

On the ground, can you employ a variety of percussive or striking techniques?

Absolutely. You have to be able to flow into and out of whatever a situation calls for or whatever energy your opponent gives you. Like I said, Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a strong trapping art, and higher-level practitioners might trap your arm and transition to a position of greater advantage and leverage, then start punching or elbowing you. You have to realize that trapping in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, for example, is about creating control of a limb to create control of the opponent's body before attempting a submission. When I was training with sifu Bruce in stand-up, he'd create a control on two of my limbs just for a moment and hit me at least two or three

times per trap.

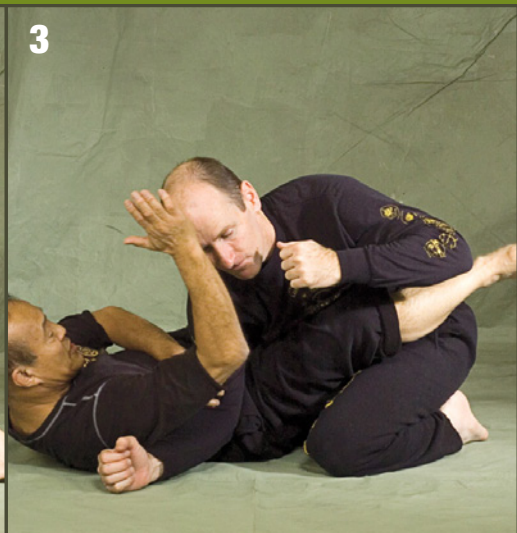
Perhaps because of the earliest UFCs, there was a lot of talk about how boxing doesn't work on the ground. On the other hand, I've heard that Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini would even bob and weave on the ground. Is that true?

Yes. While we were training once, I was watching him hold someone in the guard when he was working on vale tudo. As the person in the guard was trying to rain down punches on him, Boom Boom bobbed and weaved until he found an opening for either his punches or a control and submission. He didn't have to be taught that. He just applied his natural instinct as a world-class boxer. You can certainly employ a great deal of what works in standing range on the ground as long as you understand the context. The clinch skills he learned as a stand-up boxer serve him very well on the ground.

Some instructors claim that it's hard to get power when striking on the ground.

Boom Boom Mancini can uppercut you in his guard, and it will seriously rattle you. It doesn't take a knockout shot each time. All you have to do is get a couple of shots in, and you'll be surprised how greatly your opponent's skill or ability level decreases. The late Carlson Gracie said that the first punch a black belt takes can turn him into a brown belt. After two punches, he becomes a purple belt, and after three punches, he's operating at a blue belt's technical level. After four, he's basically in raw survival mode.

A punch can also be a setup for another



Dan Inosanto lies on his back with his opponent in his guard (1). The opponent punches, but Inosanto parries it with his left hand (2). He then effects a head strike with his right hand (3) as he guides the assailant's limb into an armpit trap (4) and slaps his head into an elbow strike (5). Keeping his trap in place, Inosanto throws his left leg over the man's head (6), allowing him to finish with an armbar (7). If the technique fails, Inosanto can execute a kimura lock on the opposite arm (8).

technique, like an attack-by-drawing sequence. You can use a punch as an irritant, just to get the opponent to put his arms up, which in turn can give you the opportunity to change position, gain control and make a submission.

What are your thoughts on the grappling legacy of Lee?

My personal thought is that sifu Bruce would think that it's OK to research other grappling arts, like *shooto* and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. I think that if he'd had information on those systems, he'd have researched them to find out what was valuable.

These days, we use some of their techniques and moves in our JKD. When I teach, I always say, "This move came from shoot-wrestling," "This series came from *kali*," or "This move came from Brazilian jiu-jitsu." We maintain the integrity of what was passed on from sifu Bruce while not closing our eyes to the good points of other systems.

I hold the rank of senior shooter under *sensei* Yori Nakamura, black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu under Rigan Machado and sixth-level black belt in bando under Dr. Maung Gyi, but regardless of those achievements, I realize that I have to be more proficient and knowledgeable. Even though I learned grappling from masters such as LaCoste, Tenio and Subing, the arts of shooto, BJJ and Erik Paulson's Combat Submission Wrestling refined my understanding of grappling.

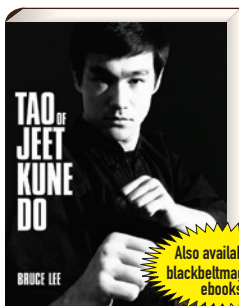
It's like when you go to someone's house, you don't walk in the door and see that every little thing [comes] from only one store. You might see one piece of furniture, like

a couch, from one store and an end table from another store. As long as the ensemble works well together visually and functionally, nobody makes a big deal out of it. *That* is JKD. You don't have to embrace everything that comes from one source or rely solely on one source for everything you need. What we have and what we use as individuals should be customized to our tastes and abilities. Rigan Machado said to me: "You don't embrace the entire system of BJJ but rather embrace what works for you in BJJ. You don't adapt to BJJ but take out of jujitsu what adapts to you."

Some critics will say, "Don't call that 'JKD grappling,'" since what we're teaching might be only 40 percent of what sifu Bruce taught, but what worked for him might not work for you. JKD grappling is a result of research, experimentation, creation and development in order to tailor-make a system of grappling that suits the individual. It is a sharing, experimenting and learning process at my academy and is under constant evolution.

Street fighting is evolving. Back in the 1960s, nobody knew how to kick like the average street fighter does now. And nowadays, because of media exposure, the average untrained assailant is more familiar with grappling. War, conflict, combat, fighting — however you want to put it — it's in constant evolution. If your combative technology and strategies don't evolve, you risk extinction. The spirit behind JKD is still intact and very much alive, but the body and the usage of it have evolved to be aware of the entirety of combat. ✖

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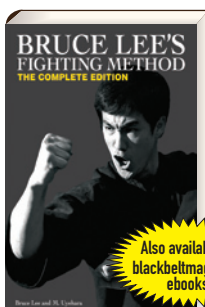
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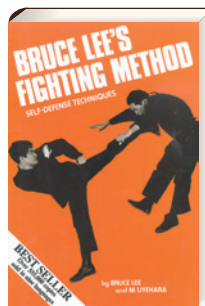
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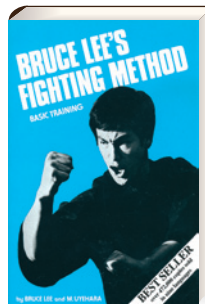


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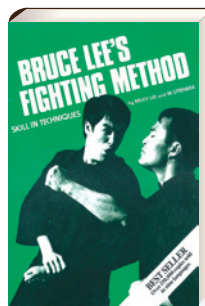


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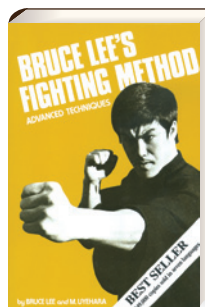


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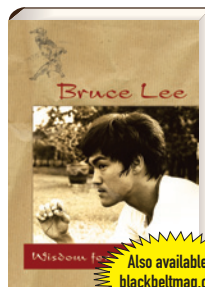


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