

An older interview with John Will

1. How often do you train with the Machado bros why do you choose them?

JBW: Why the Machado's? Well ... Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, like any other martial art, has its own internal hierarchy. It took me a couple of years to figure that out, and see it all from the inside, so to speak. I began my training in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu at the beginning of '89, and it took me to the end of '91 to figure out who was who. It was then I chose the Machado clan. Rigan Machado, in particular, was a great help to me at that early stage of training. He took me to Brazil, arranged training with several of the top coaches down there for me; he really took me under his wing. He is so well respected down there; all the top competitors will sit and listen when Rigan is on the mat. It was the best possible introduction one could have into the world of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. About the same time, Chuck Norris had gotten his first taste of BJJ, and so he set out to find the very best coaches with the intention of bringing one or two of them to the States to open up a school. It wasn't long before he had found the Machado's, largely through the help of Richard Norton who already had begun training with Rigan. Within the next few years all five of Machado's, Rigan, Jean Jacques, John, Carlos and Roger, were living stateside and teaching non-Brazilians.

2. Didn't Rorion Gracie already have a school up and running in LA at that time?

Oh yes .. in fact there were already several Gracie schools in the States, but the importation of the Machado's was something fairly special. All five of them were Brazil National champions; in fact several of them held the National title for nearly ten consecutive years before coming to America.

But apart from their obvious qualifications as fighters, they are really great coaches. They hold nothing back; they have an honest desire to see their students maximise their potential. They are out to create technical, competent and competitive fighters; and they are good at doing that! They coached many great champions in Brazil and they now want to do that outside of Brazil.

All that, though it looks good on paper, is only a part of the reason why myself and many others have chosen their particular camp. The other half of the reason, and ultimately, probably the most important part, is that they are honest, caring, and genuine people. They are the nicest of guys.

They are at odds with the 'Challenge ethic'; they're not about confrontation at all. These are some of the most wonderful people you'll ever meet; and bottom line, life's too short to waste time with anyone but 'good' people.

3. Who from the Gracie family have you trained with and what are your impressions?

I've trained some with Rickson Gracie, Rilion Gracie, Crollin Gracie, Renzo Gracie, Rauf Gracie, Cesar Gracie, Carlos Gracie Jnr, Rorion Gracie and Royce Gracie. They are all very, very good at what they do. Some are better coaches than others; some are better fighters.

In Brazil right now, Carlos Gracie Jnr is probably one of the best coaches. Renzo, Rauf and Crollin are all now living stateside, and they were also great. I had several very fun sessions with Rauf and Renzo Gracie; they are both excellent teachers and great Brazilian Jiu Jitsu fighters. I have much to thank them for. But I must reiterate, I believe strongly in loyalty and friendship, and since having made the choice to

seriously train with the Machado's, I feel disinclined to talk too much about others BJJ stylists!

4. In the last couple of years, since the UFC type of event has been publicized, there seems to be BJJ schools and organizations popping up everywhere. Even here in Australia, apart from yourself and the Machado Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Association, there's another 'federation' ...

The Australian BJJ federation; yes. It was formed by one of my ex students. He's a legitimate BJJ stylist, and is aligned with Carlos Gracie Jr in Brazil now. The Machado's though, saw it as a bit of a slap in the face; and at the time it happened, I did too. But now I wish him well; I know that he's more than likely doing the best he can in promoting and teaching his Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Still, politics and business, they creep into every facet of life eventually; the thing is not to let it get in the way of good honest training.

In America, there are Brazilian Jiu Jitsu instructors beginning to show up everywhere. It's a pity people want to go off 'half cocked'; I believe that before one starts teaching Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, one has to get the proper qualification. That takes time; many people just refuse to take that time. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is not a quick route; those looking for an instant qualification will not find it with any serious BJJ coach. There are people out there selling memberships to associations and for a couple of hundred dollars; how else are they going to spread and multiply quickly? BJJ is a great thing; and like many great things; it is being copied quickly and sold cheaply by those looking to capitalise. People have to ask, what are they getting for their money? And what qualification does the salesman have?

5. Who do you consider to be the greatest of all the BJJ fighters? Many people say Rigan and Rickson are the best two, do you agree?

Well, I don't too much like to get into this whole 'whose the best' thing? Anyone whose made it through to black belt level in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, has to have had literally, thousands and thousands of matches on the mat. They are pretty much all good!

The likes of Rickson Gracie, Rigan Machado, Jean Jacques Machado ... they are a whole other league unto themselves though! These people have had tens of thousands of matches, and won most of them. This is an almost inconceivable amount of experience.

As far as Rickson goes; no one can take it away from him; he's a fantastic fighter and great BJJ ambassador. If he and Rigan go to the mat today though, I'd have to put my money on Rigan. Rigan is at his prime, he represents the cutting edge in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu today. Besides, he's my coach and good friend, and as such I have total faith in him. But why bother to compare the two, it's like asking whose the better kickboxer, Benny Urquidez or Pete Cunningham? Who cares, they have both paid there dues, they are both great!

6. John, you are without doubt the premiere Grappling and groundfighting coach in the country, how do you compare

Most of the strong grappling styles that have evolved over many years through the vehicle of strong competition are good; but most of these are quite different in terms

of what they are setting out to achieve. For example; in terms of jacketed wrestling where the emphasis is to throw the opponent, you can't go past Judo. When takedowns and pinning an opponent wearing no jacket is concerned, Freestyle wrestling is the number one. Upper body controls where no leg shoots are allowed, then Greco Roman is the thing. When it comes to 'submission finishing' once the fight has hit the floor ... it's Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

What makes these systems different is the differences in their respective goals. Each system places a different emphasis on the match. A Brazilian Jiu Jitsu stylist is always looking for the 'finish' (the choke, armlock or leglock) and is not interested in whose underneath, who took who down, who has the most points, etc.

Whenever you have a situation where hundreds of thousands of people have practiced an art with certain very specific goals in mind, over many years, the art evolves and the practitioners get very good at what they have been doing. This is the way it is with Muay Thai, Boxing, Judo, and so forth. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is exactly the same. It has evolved in of a very competitive environment. The goals are very specific. Many people practice it; and by this I mean they are wrestling (sparring) hours each day, very competitively, and are not just doing drills. I think the four main technical grappling styles today are Freestyle wrestling for the takedowns, leg shoots and pins; Greco Roman wrestling for the upper body takedowns with no jacket and no leg shoots; Judo for the jacketed throw and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu for the submission finish!

7. It's been a while since you've given an interview, can you tell us what you've been doing since handing the reins of Blitz Magazine over to Silvio Morelli?

That was a while ago. Firstly, I must say that Silvio has done a great job with Blitz; he's done much to improve on the original product. It's a good thing for our Australian martial arts industry.

Since that time, I've been travelling overseas and doing a lot of training. Of course, when I'm here I'm very busy teaching at my two main schools in Melbourne and Geelong; and I've a good stable of private students as well to keep me occupied in between. The classes, interstate seminars and training overseas seems to fill much of my time. There are a couple of projects I've got in the pipeline at the moment with Richard Norton; my long-time friend and training partner. Some writing, movie-scripts and so forth. We'll see what happens in the next twelve months or so.

8. You recently received an award as Grappling instructor of the year, as voted by readers of Blitz Magazine, what are your thoughts ...

It was a nice to receive the award in that it illustrates that people out there appreciate what I am trying to do. It was an honour to be nominated for it, let alone win it! I'm not that big on advertising and promotions; I'm just usually very busy out there trying to do it; so I was surprised when Blitz notified me of the numbers of people that had sent in their nominations. It's always nice to be appreciated!

The night itself was a lot of fun. There were many great martial artists there, some whom I have never met but had wanted to for some time. I look forward to next year!

9. As far as your own schools go, will you continue to teach a full Shootfighting curriculum; ie: Stand up fighting as well as the grappling, or will you switch to just teaching Machado Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and concentrate purely on grappling? How important do you consider the stand-up fighting skills to be?

For myself personally, I'd be happy at this time of my life to concentrate totally on the Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. But I do recognize the importance of a stand-up component if the goal of one's training is to address the issue of fighting skills for realistic situations. There are times when it just doesn't make sense to willingly go to the ground. It may be more prudent and more efficient to put someone out of the fight with a leg kick and a right cross. So I'm not happy to completely abandon the idea of stand-up fighting skills. I feel that people should look at the whole of what a fight is about, not just a portion of it. It's not just about stand-up fighting, it's not just about ground fighting, it's not just about sparring, it has to be a complete approach if the goal is to deal with realistic assault. The dynamics of how the fight begins; how to set up those initial moves, king hits, and such; all these are facets of what real self defence should be about.

In my school, we usually address the stand-up skills as the warm up for our Brazilian Jiu Jitsu class. Why do star-jumps when you can weave and throw some uppercuts, leg kicks, etc? The advanced classes at my schools are basically just groundwork; pure Brazilian Jiu Jitsu as taught by the Machado's. My beginner classes on the other hand, contain a good portion of stand-up fighting skills. The basic punches, kicks, knees, elbows, headbutts, etc. This acts more or less as an overall introduction to what fighting is about. After several months in that class, students move into the intermediate class, where the BJJ training really starts to pick up. From that point on in, once people get a handle on the BJJ basics, life for them is never quite the same!! Hey .. it's not my fault!

10. If you were confronted and forced to engage in a streetfighting situation, would your first preference be to punch and kick or go to clinch, forcing your opponent to the ground? Or would your defence be based instinctively upon your opponents attack?

Each situation is unique; and as such each has to be addressed upon the prevailing circumstances. If it's one person, and few or no other people close by, I may well clinch and go to ground. There I can control the fight easily, to the point where I don't have to hurt him if I choose not to. The downside of stand-up techniques, is that I really do have to hurt the person to win, most of the time. Apart from the fact that some people can just take a lot of pounding; it's not very 'court friendly', particularly if you do serious damage and the guy has a good lawyer who finds out your a martial artist! It's a tough question to answer, and as I said, each confrontation has it's own unique dynamic!

11. What are your plans for the further development of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu here in Australia?

Although competition isn't everything, it is an important part of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, in that it forces people to address their weaknesses on a regular basis. Late last year we had our first open Vic titles. It was well attended with nearly a hundred people entering. In May this year we intend to hold the Nationals. It will be held in Victoria this year, with next years being planned for NSW. One or more of the Machado's will be coming out to officiate and probably conduct a few seminars as well. We are interested in getting other Brazilian Jiu Jitsu schools up and running in various locations throughout the country, but as you can appreciate, it's a slow and time-

consuming process. It's really starting to happen through regular seminars I'm holding for small groups here and there. These groups get me up regularly throughout the year; I run them through a series of techniques; they work like crazy on those ideas until I return and gauge the progress before adding more. This way we've been able to establish a network of blue belts in four states. These people in turn will create students, and eventually the whole thing will unfold.

There are several other Australians that have lived over in the states for several years now. Both are gearing up for brown belt. And that only after six or so years of training. One of them being Richard Norton. So things are progressing both here and abroad for the Australian Brazilian Jiu Jitsu scene down the track. Right now we have about ten blue belts and one purple belt in states other than Victoria. That's a great start. Eventually those 'blues' will become purples, and their students will become 'blues'. This is the only way that Brazilian Jiu Jitsu can spread in a legitimate fashion. Slowly ... but surely; with the quality being compromised in no way whatsoever.

12. What does the future hold for John Will, it seems you've spent over twenty years travelling and training with some of the worlds best martial artists; you've founded the countries most succesful martial arts magazine, and now in 1997 you are at the forefront of what seems to be the next great leap forward in evolution of the martial arts, the grappling systems. What are your plans and goals?

To keep doing just that. I enjoy training overseas with my friends. I also enjoy teaching my students here; many of whom I am lucky enough to be able to count as good friends also. Several of my fellow 'browns' in the states have recently been given their black belts; they are all telling me that I'm likely to be next; so that's something I have to train hard for in the short term; it's a lot to live up to. I've got to get over there sometime fairly soon.

I enjoy coaching a lot. I feel that it's something I can do well. So no matter what else happens, that's something I'll continue to devote much of my energy into over the next few years.

Apart from that, I've decided to do some serious writing over the next couple of years. So in between mat sessions, personal training and time with my family and friends, I'll be hitting the keyboard fairly hard when time and tide permit. With perseverance I'll get a novel on the stands yet; or if not on the stands, then maybe on the screen. Exercising our creativity is very important; like anything we'd like to improve, it needs hard work and constant attention. Whether writing, wrestling or whatever, it's that need to make fresh discoveries, the desire to achieve new levels, the compulsion to redefine what works today; it's these types of things that fuel the fire in artists heart. My plans and goals ... to live and work with integrity; and to participate in life in the most enjoyable and productive way I can! .