

JOINT MANIPULATION 101

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When a Hollywood fight coordinator wants to spice up a martial arts fight scene, nothing looks prettier than well-executed joint lock and throw. Go to any Steven Segal film and listen to the “oohs” and “aahs” when, in the midst of the kicking and punching and shooting, Segal does a classic aikido wrist lock and then flows into an arcing throw that sends his assailant flying. Hollywood aside, many martial artists today are being exposed to the effectiveness and versatility of incorporating joint manipulations into their personal fighting style. Law enforcement and the military are two professional fields that have relied on these techniques for years as a way to teach effective controlling and disabling moves to their people.

The purpose of this article is to give you, someone interested in the art of joint manipulation, the ground rules that will enable you to use these techniques to their greatest potential. This is not a how-to on reacting to specific scenarios, but an overview of the concepts you’ll need to know to be effective in this area. As with any aspect of the martial arts, the only way to insure that you’ll be able to actually use joint techniques successfully is to practice, practice, practice. This will ingrain the moves into muscle memory through repetition, allowing you to react spontaneously and quickly.

Joint manipulation techniques are effective because of the pressure placed on the body’s joints, causing extreme pain. The opponent’s body will instinctively move in the direction it needs to in order to relieve that pain. This pressure can be applied two different ways 1) a joint is forced to bend in a direction it is not designed to bend (hyper-extension) or 2) a joint is bent beyond

the normal physical limits it is designed to bend (hyper-flexion). As opposed to breaking bones, an effective joint manipulation taken to its extreme will separate a joint, tearing ligaments, tendons and muscles around the joint.

There are two types of joint techniques, static and dynamic. Static techniques are those techniques that are done in response to attacks such as wrist grabs, bear hugs, hammerlocks, lapel grabs or pushes, etc. The offending weapon is not moving, but remains in place. Static techniques make up the majority of the basic joint manipulations most martial artists learn. On the other hand, dynamic techniques are those where the offending weapon is moving, such as a punch or kick and the manipulation takes place in the course of a larger, moving technique. Using the natural flow of the technique, they are excellent ways to extend a technique or bring it to a rapid end. The basic concepts are the same for both static and dynamic techniques.

Learning the ground rules for anything is easier if we have a “hook”, something that will enable the material to stick in our minds. For executing proper joint techniques, all you need to do is remember the “4 D’s”; Distract, Disarm, Displace, and Disable. All effective joint manipulations will include the “4 D’s”.

“4 D’s”

Distract: Know the Lead-in Move

Initial distraction is essential to insure at least a momentarily relaxed joint. A relaxed joint is much easier to manipulate, and will eliminate the temptation to try and “muscle” the technique which virtually guarantees failure.

The primary reason for the distraction is to draw the opponent's attention away from the joint area you are about to manipulate. The further away from the targeted joint the distraction is, the better. For static techniques, the best distractions are ones that stun the opponent momentarily and ideally affect the center of gravity (CG) as well. For example, a quick palm heel to the lower forehead or under the nose will force the head up and back thereby raising the CG; a firm backhand slap or ridgehand to the groin will usually result in the lowering of the head and hunching of the shoulders thereby bringing the CG forward and down slightly; a shin kick or shin scrape and arch stomp will also bring the upper body forward and down. When executing dynamic techniques, your distraction is the strike, kick or move immediately preceding the manipulation. It is crucial to remember that speed and timing must be perfect to prevent an opponent's counter. There can be no hesitation once you commit to the technique. You must execute firmly and completely or you will lose the advantage gained by the distraction. Your opponent will not stand still and let you slowly make sure all your angles and precise movements are correct before proceeding, guaranteed. When you move, move swiftly.

Disarm: Know the circles; know the angles

The next step is to render the opponent's weapons useless. This is done by using the flow of the technique to position the joints. All joint manipulations are based on a series of circles. Some are small circles, some are large circles, but all are necessary to position the opponent's joints for manipulation. When learning a new technique, break it down and look for the circles. They may be full or partial circles, some for grabbing and some for footwork used in putting

the opponent in the desired position. This circular maneuvering on your part results in the circular movement of your opponent contributing to the maximum effectiveness of the technique. Use the contours of your opponents body to aid you in executing these circles. For example, rotating around your opponent's wrist to position your hand for a regrab, or sliding your hand along your opponent's bicep to the shoulder and past before pivoting to the front for a shoulder crank and open body throw.

All joint manipulations fall into one of two categories concerning angles. Single joint manipulations consist of those techniques where the desired result is localized to one specific joint. Multiple joint manipulations are those techniques where the desired result is intended to affect additional joints moving toward the centerline of the body. The simple rule to remember is this: Single joint techniques—the joints need to be at different angles—the greater the angle the more effective the technique; Multiple joint techniques—the joints need to be in-line—the straighter the line the more effective the technique.

When practicing or executing joint manipulation, remember there is a *hierarchy of joints*. This simply means when you grab an opponent that 1) the joint that will be affected most is the joint above your grab moving toward the centerline of the body and 2) the pressure on the affected joint is increased the closer your grab is to the next joint moving away from the centerline. For example, wrist hyper-extension or hyper-flexion will be increased the closer you grab or push to the base of the fingers. What you are doing is maximizing the fulcrum points of the technique.

Displace: Know and Control the Opponent's Center of Gravity (CG)

All joint techniques are designed to directly affect the CG of your opponent so you can control the situation. This action displaces the opponent from the plane or level they intend to be on, and moves the opponent where you want them to be. The CG maneuver is where the true power of joint techniques rest. Realize that some techniques can be a combination of maneuvers at different points in the technique.

There are three types of CG displacements: 1) Gravity maneuvers—these techniques force or lead the opponent's CG down—toward the ground. 2) Lifting maneuvers—these techniques force or lead the opponent's CG up—toward the sky. 3) Shifting maneuvers—these techniques force or lead the opponent's CG forward or back, left or right. The same basic technique can accomplish all of these maneuvers. For example, an elbow lock/arm bar will result in different CG displacements depending on where the back of the elbow faces when pushed or locked.

Disable: Know the Follow Up Possibilities

The essence of joint manipulation is control. Control of your opponent disables them from continuing the attack. This is accomplished by either the presence of pain or the threat of pain. You need to know what you want to accomplish with any joint technique. Do you want to use the technique to control and hold your opponent until help arrives? Do you want to use the technique as a transition to further strikes or maybe a finishing disabling move by the complete

dislocation of the joint? An effective joint manipulation “persuades” the opponent to do what you want him to. Analyze what your physical response options are. Obviously situational awareness plays an extremely important part in deciding what the final results should be, and no two situations will be identical.

We’ve covered the four phases that need to be present in any effective joint manipulation technique. If any of the four are missing, then the effectiveness of the technique will be limited. Let’s sum up what we’ve learned with four basic rules:

Rule #1: The distraction move must draw attention away from the targeted joint.

Rule #2: Fewer joints=increased angles; More joints=decreased angles.

Rule #3: Control the opponent’s CG.

Rule #4: Weigh your finishing options.

Joint techniques can be a worthy addition to any martial artist’s knowledge base. They are a tool that can be used to expand your options in many different situations. As with any technique, know their limitations and use their strengths. Above all, keep training!

