

THE THROWS & TAKE-DOWNS OF
GRECO-ROMAN
WRESTLING



GEOFF
THOMPSON

SUMMERSDALE

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He has published articles for *GQ* magazine, and has also been featured in *FHM*, *Maxim*, *Arena*, *Front* and *Loaded* magazines, and has appeared many times on mainstream television.

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Introduction

The first time I experienced Greco was under the watchful and expert eye of master wrestler Kris Wheelan, my very good friend from the USA. I'd been training in freestyle at Birmingham Wrestling Club under the auspices of Jim Ault and had expressed an interest in this somewhat forgotten art. He suggested that I travel to Manchester, to the wrestling academy there, and train under Mr. Wheelan who would take me through a level one instructor course. Normally when I study an art I find myself sifting through the material offered and thinking, 'Would this work in a real fight?' Normally I am disappointed by what I see and end up disregarding up to 95 per cent of the material on offer. Whilst a lot of it may be practical within the periphery of a sport, or even the dojo, it doesn't normally stand up to what I believe and know to be the pressure of a real encounter in the street. Not so with Greco. When I first encountered the techniques on offer my initial thought was not the usual 'Will this work?' rather it was, 'These techniques are scary! Do I really want to learn something that has the potential to break necks and split spines?' It was frightening and so applicable to a real encounter.

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So it is with these words of warning that I offer this text as a reference book only. Some of the movements involved are recommended only under the tightest supervision. Join a good club and learn under the watchful eye of an expert.

Grappling, as I am sure you are aware, is the current flavour. In the martial arts everyone and their dog is enlisting in grappling classes in their bid to become the next Rigan Machado or Gracie. And in that sense I don't blame them. I was one of the many who fell under a similar spell in the seventies when a Bruce Lee film hit the screen and started a martial avalanche, the effects of which are still being felt some thirty years on. They say that things come in cycles, and it's true. The last time real wrestling was this popular was at the beginning of the century, between 1898 and 1914, when some of the greatest athletes in history donned their wrestler trunks and took their place in the Golden Age of Wrestling. The Great War was probably responsible for its early demise. Since that time it appears that grappling has almost disappeared from the public gaze. Judo was still there of course but, for some reason, people didn't see judo as the potent art it really is. They mistakenly thought of it as merely a sport. For those

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of us who have practised the art of judo we know better. I'd go as far as to say that judo is the best kept secret in the martial arts. But we were talking about wrestling (I see them all as wrestling, some jacketed and some not) and specifically the Golden Age where people like George Hackenschmidt (primarily a Greco fighter) brought this often maligned art to the world stage. Then there was Karl Pojelo of course, another great Greco fighter who was invited to America by President Eisenhower to test his wares against six of the top Japanese karate exponents of the time. Pojelo took each of them on in succession, and using only his wrestling skills he beat them all within minutes.

For those in the know the grappling arts have always been held in awe, the uninitiated are just catching up. Why are people suddenly catching on? Well, I've been trying to plug the cross training in Britain for the last ten years, and hopefully people like myself, Peter Consterdine and Rick Young have contributed to the renaissance, but it was the introduction of wrestling via the UFC (Ultimate Fight Competition – cage fighting, reality combat and extreme fighting) that really caught the imagination of the martial arts world. After one viewing

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of the Gracies (a legendary ju-jitsu family from Brazil, now residing in the USA) taking on opponents from every and any system and beating them almost effortlessly, everybody suddenly wanted to start a grappling class. Which is great, but unfortunately they did so to the detriment of their own arts and other valuable, nay vital ranges (and not unlike the Kung-Fu craze in the seventies and the Ninjitsu craze in the eighties). I can understand this to a degree, ground grappling has been missing from martial arts for so long, and the UFC type tournaments advertise grappling supremacy so well that it is natural that people should be drawn to it.

My time as a nightclub doorman taught me the necessity of close range grappling. From my first night on the pavement arena I knew how vital grappling was as a part of the martial armoury. You notice that I say 'as a part' and not 'as a whole.' Grappling is a vital means to an end but is not the end in itself. This is where the problems begin. Whilst it is important, even imperative, to include grappling on the curriculum it should not be to the detriment of the other ranges. With the advent of reality fighting, shoot and vale tudo, martial artists are leaving behind all their hard earned base to pursue a

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knowledge of grappling, most are abandoning their other disciplines, such as punching and kicking, to concentrate all their time and energy on the art of floor fighting. Not good if your intention is self-defence because outside the chippy, where the arena is concrete and the opponents come in groups, and armed, the floor is absolutely the last, and the wrong place to take a fight. A good 3-second fighter or an ambush fighter will take most trained fighters out of the game – no matter how good their ground fighting – before they are even aware that there was a game. And the fellow that goes to ground to take a strangle will likely get his head kicked in by the mates of his opponent. It is an arena that does not tolerate mistakes. So I think that it is vital to keep things in context when you practise Greco, or any art, it is just a part of the jigsaw; it is not the whole picture.

The main reason that I decided to write this series of books and make the instructional videos on throws and take-downs is because people are going mad for ground fighting, but they are taking little or no notice of how to get to the ground in the first place. You don't just end up there. You are either thrown down, dragged down, kicked down, or (if you are in