

Small-Circle Jujitsu, a Book Report by Randy Vogel

Introductory Critique

Small-Circle Jujitsu is a pleasantly brief text of 250 pages, small enough (4x6?) to fit nicely in the hand for casual reading. While these dimensions are suitable for essays, works of fiction and other word-centered efforts, they are slightly problematic for a book on physical activity, as the photographs and diagrams requisite to such an effort must necessarily be constrained by the limited space chosen for the page size. For a work describing the actions of a martial art, the inability to easily and clearly depict snapshots from an extended event (such as a wrist lock that transitions into a throw with subsequent follow-up) presents quite a problem. Rather than addressing this issue head-on, the author and design team for *Small-Circle Jujitsu* sidestep the problem by jumping between instances of isolated techniques. One result of this approach is that the book lacks the “effortless” flow characteristic of a master martial artist in motion.

The physical layout of the book is easily identifiable as originating from the initial hey day of late 80’s desktop publishing. Unfortunately, the graphic design is rather distracting. The relatively high-contrast backgrounds frequently hinder readability by pulling the eye away from the text. Furthermore, as these backgrounds appear to serve no purpose other than frivolous decoration, the overall effect is one of clutter and noise. Yet another distracting inconsistency is the variance in font typefaces. While this issue is certainly less problematic than the head-ache inducing background graphics, it reinforces the impression that the text was produced by an unseasoned team that did not consider legibility or usability issues. Once again, the simple conclusion is that mastery of martial arts does not necessarily translate to mastery of print communication.

Despite these criticisms, *Small-Circle Jujitsu* is nonetheless a worthwhile book to read. It is interesting to compare and contrast the philosophy and techniques of this art against UCMAP Yongmudo and other related martial arts. When points of common philosophy result in differing approaches to technique on the mat, the curious reader (presumably a practiced martial artist) will be stimulated to reflect upon these discrepancies. Because the text takes a scattershot approach to describing the art and technique of small-circle jujitsu, however, my recommendation to the novice student is to look elsewhere for martial arts inspiration.

Summary

Chapter One: History of Small-Circle Jujitsu

Small-Circle Jujitsu begins in a narrative vein by relating the historical background of Okazaki Jujitsu in Hawaii during the first half of the 20th Century. This essay continues by describing how jujitsu then spread to America in the decades following World War Two, with particular emphasis on people and events in Northern California up through the publication date in 1989. The chapter concludes with a relatively lengthy exposition on the development and guiding philosophies behind small-circle jujitsu.

Recapping the baseline ideas presented in that essay, the principal notion is that circular wrist action is the key to this style: the hand executes a hold, while the thumb pushes forward and fingers pull back, exerting additional torque in a small, tightly focused arc. Techniques performed in this way permit the application of greatly increased pressure on the joint under attack, which consequently reduces the recipient’s ability to escape or counterattack. The following page recasts these base principles in the form of a bulleted outline.

Ten base principles of Small-Circle Jujitsu

Balance

- Balance is essential for nearly every sport.
- Goal is to keep your own balance while off-balancing your opponent.
- When on balance, you need not divert any portion of your strength or attention to recovering your balance.

Mobility and Stability

- Lowering your center of gravity increases stability at the expense of mobility.
- Move and turn from the balls of the feet rather than the heels.
- Stability is essential to delivering strong attacks.

Avoid the head-on collision of forces

- Pivot away from the opponent when blending, redirecting or evading.
- Move off-line or backwards from strikes.

Mental resistance and distraction

- Concentration can help you resist pain.
- Disrupting your opponent's concentration can be key to escaping or countering an attack.

Focus to the smallest point possible

- In order to produce maximum effect, the force of a technique needs to be concentrated into the smallest possible region.
- Pay attention to the location of the fulcrum of a technique and increase the length of the lever arm when possible.

Energy Transfer

- Defined via the example of applying a reverse arm bar – a few good pictures would help here! Something as simple as a cross-reference to the striking technique against the triceps shown on p. 66 would suffice.
- Although not clearly stated, the general notion seems to be to use the biophysics of the body to your advantage.

Create a base

- Rather than referring to the standard judo or jujitsu stance, Professor Jay uses this phrase to describe the need to develop a stable fulcrum for the application of small-circle techniques. He points out that a joint lock which shows free play is no lock at all.

Sticking, control and sensitivity

- By sensitivity, Professor Jay emphasizes the need to be able to read an opponents intent through physical contact – contact that is engaged by the use of sticking skills and controls rather than sheer strength.

Rotational momentum

- Taking advantage of sensitivity to note the motion of an attacker, Professor Jay also proposes using rotational momentum to facilitate off-balancing moves.

Transitional flow

- The master martial artist will have developed the ability to move effortlessly from one technique to another, as demanded by the situation at hand. This is Professor Jay's definition of transitional flow. Jay goes on to amplify this thought with three concrete suggestions:
 - First, exert continuous pain throughout transitions to deter both retaliation and escape.
 - Second, maximize pain without causing injury – this will stimulate fear in the mind of the opponent
 - Finally, note that in transitions, mobility is more important than stability.

Chapter Two: Preliminaries

While accessible to the lay reader, the preliminary and basic techniques under discussion in chapter two are probably of more interest to the advanced student who is learning to teach rather than the beginner seeking hints and help on standard exercises. The material is presented in three groups.

The first, Learning How to Fall, begins with a brief essay on the reasons for presenting these techniques, then proceeds to introduction of a half-dozen basic activities: back fall, forwards and backwards shoulder roll (into slap), side fall, and falls with air. Although there is slight variation against the versions taught at UCMAP, the typical UCMAP Yongmudo student ought to easily recognize each of these techniques!

The middle portion of the chapter jumps ahead to slightly more difficult territory, addressing nine Key Movement Exercises that help to differentiate small-circle jujitsu from other arts. As with the first section, this one begins with a very brief explanatory statement, here focusing on the need to develop finesse and quickness rather than strength. This section also provides the reader's first encounter with photographs of Professor Jay in action as he demonstrates proper form for these techniques. The primary focus in presenting these exercises is to encourage the student practitioner to develop facility in quickly applying holds and chokes. Another point emphasized by the text is that acquiring expertise with these moves will permit the practitioner to reduce their reliance on strength during delivery of the technique. The concomitant reduction in sensory feedback to the opponent should serve to make the techniques even more effective, as an opponent who fails to detect an attack is that much less likely to offer up useful resistance.

The third and final section of the chapter skips ahead even further in the curriculum of small-circle jujitsu to address resuscitation techniques. It is gratifying to note that Professor Jay requires mastery of these techniques before promoting his students to instructor-levels. On the other hand, it's somewhat frightening to read his portentous comment that "reviving unconscious victims is a common sight" One can only hope that this is either a bit of misguided braggadocio or a comment based on Professor Jay's formative experiences in somewhat less litigation-prone times. It's hard to imagine this situation as common in the UCMAP dojang! Furthermore, while it seems clear upon surveying the chapter that the intent has been to present a small sample of basic, regular and advanced techniques, the text lacks notification of this fact. That is, no mention is made of the graded nature of the presentation, nor whether the last exercises might be inappropriate to share with beginners.

As with the summary of chapter one, what follows is an outline summary of the techniques presented in chapter two.

Learning How to Fall

Backward Fall

- Beginning from standing position; same as taught at UCMAP.

Forward Shoulder Roll

- Same as taught at UCMAP, ending in side-fall position with a slap.
- It seems a little odd to present the technique here (prior to introduction of side fall, below).
- The example shown is left-sided; presumably the student will practice the right side as well!

Backwards Shoulder Roll

- Same as backwards posting roll, starting from standing position, as taught at UCMAP.
- The photos depict a right-sided roll; mention of practicing the opposite side is again omitted.

Side to Side

- This basic side-fall drill is identical to that taught at UCMAP.

Exercise Used To Learn Proper Landing

- Drill for practicing a mid-height side fall, similar to, but differing in detail of grip from the Cactus Drill we use at UCMAP to teach high side falls.

Exercise Used To Learn Free Falls

- Drill for practicing an assisted air fall, fairly similar as done at UCMAP.
- In the example photographed, the uke initiates the fall by pulling on the head/neck of the faller, presumably to prevent the inexperienced faller from diving head-first into the mat.
- It is obvious from the photos that the uke is supporting the faller, but no mention of that assistance is made in the text (don't try this at home kids!)

Key Movement Exercises

As noted previously, this section presents basic warm-ups and exercises that focus on the essential elements of small-circle jujitsu.

Basic Wrist Extension Exercise

- This first exercise does not seem to be in common usage at UCMAP, perhaps because it is skill-focused rather than range-of-motion focused.
- Although many interpretations can be applied to the exercise shown, the two-handed motion seems quite similar to that used for tightening a choke.

Wrist Extension With Rotational Twist

- Again, this exercise does not seem to be in common usage at UCMAP.
- As the photographs show it in one-handed form, it appears more like some of the standard one-handed wrist techniques as practiced at UCMAP.

Wrist Extension Exercise Using Sleeves

- This exercise depicts preparation for a forearm choke.

Outward Wrist Stretch

- A range-of motion exercise, this stretch is commonly practiced at UCMAP.

Inward Wrist Stretch

- Another range-of motion exercise commonly practiced at UCMAP.

Thumb Wrist Entry Exercise for Arm Bars

- Given that the exercise depicted is not in common practice at UCMAP, it is difficult to analyze, but presumably this sequence is included in order to depict practice in sticking, control and sensitivity (part of the key tenets of small-circle jujitsu).
- The sequence of three photos show very limited motion – only the ‘attacking’ hand appears to be moving.

Thumb Wrist Entry Exercise for Arm Locks

- This sequence depicts an elegant defense against front punch, ending with a chicken wing elbow lock – quite similar to that practiced at UCMAP.

Thumb Wrist Entry Exercise for Leg Bars

- At UCMAP, this ankle lock exercise is practiced as a finish-off.
- Note that Professor Jay is crouching and leaning in as the lock is applied, reducing the ability of the opponent to flex or rotate the hip as a means of relieving pressure on the ankle.

Thumb Wrist Entry Exercise for Chokes

- The photos here depict a choke from behind against a compliant victim.
- It is interesting that the choke shown is described as being placed against the windpipe rather than the carotid arteries, as more commonly practiced at UCMAP.

Pivoting Exercise

- The photos on these two pages show stepping and sliding footwork exercises commonly practiced at UCMAP.

The Art of Resuscitation

It's reassuring that Professor Jay asserts all jujitsu instructors will have these skills, but as mentioned previously, it is unclear why they have been selected for inclusion here in the text given the unspoken leap in prerequisite ability required as compared with the relatively basic techniques presented in the previous two sections.

Knee on the Back Resuscitation

- The action photographed, described as ‘common at judo contests’ (!!) appears to be aimed at assisting the victim's respiration by repeated flexing of the interstitial muscles.

Resuscitation from Groin Strike, Methods One, Two and Three

- As these are the only other resuscitation techniques included in the text, the natural conclusion is that this section is meant only to provide a glimpse of such skills rather than a practical introduction.
- Another conclusion might be that a small-circle jujitsu student should be assured of receiving reasonably proficient first aid care in the event of an accident.

Chapter Three: Physical Weaknesses of the Human Body

Professor Jay begins this chapter with an introductory comment that Small-Circle techniques tend to focus on tendon attacks over other targets due to the relative weakness of those locations in comparison to the muscles and joints. The chapter goes on to describe 24 vulnerable targets on the body, highlighting the nose as the single most vulnerable target of all.

The material is presented fairly well, though a few oddities crop up here and there. For example, the photo accompanying discussion of a blow to the temple depicts the strike landing somewhat low at the side of the jaw, with an overlaying arrow pointing at the temple instead. The reasonable reader might assume this to be a choice of illustration, but it is disappointing that no explanation is forth-coming.

Another odd notion crops up on page 64 where Professor Jay asserts that all choking attacks target the windpipe. While this is consistent with the photographs shown both here and earlier for the choking exercise in Chapter Two, it seems odd to ignore the vulnerability of the carotid arteries nearby, particularly in light of the many jujitsu attacks that make use of the sleeves and lapels to deliver attacks to that area. My guess is that Professor Jay's comment arises from a self-defense orientation: when there are no competition rules to lay out a foundation for safe combative play, the favored techniques will be those that produce quick, instantaneous incapacitation of an opponent. Techniques that forcefully target the wind pipe surely fall under that rubric!

Chapter Four: Small-Circle Jujitsu Techniques

Comprising just over 100 pages, Chapter Four encompasses the majority of the book. As with the two preceding chapters, the emphasis is on a photographic presentation. Typically, one or two pages are devoted to each technique, though in some cases, a single two-page spread may share two or three techniques, each spread horizontally across the double-width layout. The number of photographs varies quite a bit; some techniques offer as few as a single large photograph (eg., p. 83, the Palm Press Wrist Lock, or p. 94, Reverse Two-Finger Lock), while others (eg, p. 110, Hammer Lock, or p. 116 One Leg Step Over) include as many as nine smaller photos, and one, the Leg Screw Combination on p. 120 uses ten photos to try and depict the requisite motion. On occasion the photos are supplemented by a detailed inset showing a close-up or alternate view; at other times, the photos are augmented by arrows depicting the direction of motion or application of force.

Topically, Chapter Four is divided into six sections of roughly equal length and weight, as summarized by the table below.

Topic Category	# of Techniques	# of Pages
Wrist Locks	11	13
Finger Locks	7	10
Arm Bars and Arm Locks	10	15
Leg Bars and Leg Locks	5	10
Throwing Techniques	17	34
Chokes	12	20

For the most part, the Yongmudo student will uncover no great surprises in this section, although numerous variations and alterations of techniques ought to be obvious. Careful review of the techniques with accompanying analysis of one's own approach should be beneficial to most

YMD students. Interestingly, the section on chokes continues to emphasize wind-pipe attacks, and though at least four of the techniques shown can be seen from the placement of the choking hands, sleeves or lapels, to be carotid attacks, the explanatory text matter-of-factly skips over the difference in nature between these two targets.

Chapter Five: Self-Defense

Chapter Five is divided into four sections, varying by the type of attack being defended against, as summarized by the table below.

Topic Category	# of Techniques	# of Pages
Against Strikes	8	16
Against Chokes	13	24
Against Body Grabs	11	16
Against Wrist Grabs	13	22

This chapter begins with a brief and sensible essay that characterizes the nature of most mugging attacks (cowardly, multi-assailant assaults at close quarters), and speaks to the difference between self-defense and regular martial arts practice. In this respect, as in many other points made earlier in the book, small-circle jujitsu runs parallel to Yongmudo: most importantly, it is better to be aware of one's surroundings and to avoid attack in the first place, and secondly, it is important for self-preservation to avoid going to the ground.

As with the techniques of the previous chapter, a Yongmudo student with a few years of experience will find this material to be engaging, but mostly for its similarity to the art practiced at UCMAP rather than as a source of new and different techniques to try on the unwary!

Conclusion

As laid out in my introductory critique, I found *Small-Circle Jujitsu* to be an enjoyable book despite its short-comings. I wouldn't recommend it to the novice Yongmudo student except as a means of gaining a glimpse of a related art, but I would recommend it enthusiastically to a more experienced student or junior instructor such as myself in order to stimulate both internal and external dialog about the commonalities and contrasts between Yongmudo and jujitsu as presented by Professor Jay in *Small-Circle Jujitsu*. Moreover, I would be interested in reading an update or second edition now that another generation has passed, particularly as this text predates the explosive growth in mixed martial arts competition during the last two decades. While the underlying philosophy might remain unchanged, I suspect that the presentation might be much affected by the notion of martial arts as sport entertainment.