

How to Build a Dangerous Guard

Date Driven Jiu-Jitsu 06: Core concepts that will make you 10x more dangerous from the bottom position.



CHRIS WOJCIK

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2023 ADCC East Coast Trials—Photo by [Nancy V Photography](#).

Over the last few months, I've done a several technical articles on Jiu-Jitsu and thin I've been working on.

We've talked about:

- [How to Learn Leg Locks](#)
- [How to Get Good at Escapes](#)
- [How to Wrestle For BJJ](#)

And more.

Today, I want to do a deeper dive into the open guard position, what I have been working on recently from the guard, and how a few key concepts in the open guard help make you extremely dangerous from the bottom position.

Also, at the end, we're also going to talk about how ignoring these concepts will lead to you getting worn down, frustrated, and eventually, passed and submitted.

This is "the modern open guard".

Let's dive in.

It's a passer's world, and we're just scooting around in it.

This is the most important thing to understand about today's no-gi game.

Part of the reason is cultural (the rise of ADCC and wrestling in the sport today), and part of it is because of physics.

But either way, for the most part, the guard is *not* as good of a position as the top position. Standing is better than seated. It's better to be on top than to be on bottom. This is true in fighting, and as people get better at grappling, it's also true in grappling.

If passing and guard play are equal and the match goes on for long enough, most of the time, the guard passer will win the war of attrition eventually.

[I learned this the hard way at this year's ADCC Trials in Poland.](#)

Guard passing is also simpler (and also physically easier) than playing guard. It's easier to conserve energy from the top than from the bottom. It's easier to relentlessly pass than to relentlessly retain your guard.

Why?

J-Points. Body locks. Pressure.

Gravity.

Here's a great video that breaks down modern passing concepts from one of my favorite BJJ YouTube channels — Less Impressed, More Involved BJJ. This is what you're up against, folks.

Gordon Ryan's SIMPLE way to be an ADVANCED guard passer - BJJ Analysis



Because of the harsh reality that passing is a “better” position than supine guard (or even seated guard) the longer the match goes on, you have to act accordingly as a bottom player.

You have to get aggressive with your tactics.

You can't be reactive. A reactive guard is a bad guard.

But what makes a good guard, besides just “movement”?

It starts with pushing and pulling.

The first point to remember when building an offensive open guard is to not easily concede the supine (flat on your back) position.

I first learned this idea several years ago from watching John Danaher and Gordon Ryan's instructionals, but it really cemented for me last year.

I've also talked quite a bit about guard retention in my upcoming instructional, so I will skip explaining how guard retention works (for now) and come back to it at a later date. When my new instructional is released, I'll write an entire viewing guide on it for my premium newsletter subscribers.

Anyway — back to business.

An essential concept for building a safe open guard is to build a *dangerous* open guard.

Especially in no-gi, a guard without constant movement and offense is a weak guard that gets easier to pass with each “passing” moment. If you're not attacking from the bottom, because of the absence of grips in no-gi, you're defending.

The guard in the gi is different. This article is not about the gi guard.

The 2 main (only?) ways to initiate offense from the guard in no-gi are by either pushing or pulling your opponent.

If you push them away, you're creating the space for yourself to wrestle up and sweep your opponent. If you're pulling them into you, you're creating the opportunity for yourself to attach to them and create possible submission opportunities.

This is the basic premise of “the push-pull dilemma” — a dilemma a guard player has to give the passer to get them less focused on passing the guard and more focused on maintaining balance and safety. This creates guard “retention” and over time, opportunistic moments for attacks from the bottom player.

Here are a few different ways to initiate a push-pull dilemma from the guard:

- Lower body attachments (like “[Pendejo Guard](#)” for example)
- Attempted wrestle-ups
- Upper body attachments (like arm drags or Choi Bars)
- Double Kouichi (also known as “the dummy sweep”, perfect for an opponent who is standing square with you)

There are more, but the idea of pushing and pulling to create offense is fundamental to building a better open-guard offensive system.

This match between Dante Leon and Nicky Ryan is a great match that illustrates the power of push-pull dilemmas and how to use them to neutralize and sweep even the most dangerous of guard passers.

Nicky Ryan fights through an injury & defeats Dante Leon | 2021 Road to ADCC



Each of Nicky's "wrestle-ups" in this match came from pulling Dante towards him, feeling Dante pull himself away, and then proceeding to wrestle up. Pull to push to wrestle up.

Once you develop an understanding of the push-pull dilemma and how it works, then you need to start understanding how to systemize your attacks on the upper and lower body.

This last point is really the key to "saving" the open guard. It's become very popular over the last few years.

Lower to upper.

Probably my favorite upper body submissions for no-gi are the Choi Bar and the triangle.

However, in terms of the best upper body attack for no-gi, I think it all starts with the 2 on 1 grips.

The reason?

This is where all of the options originate — a dominant grip from a non-dominant position.

I don't post a ton of my own comp clips on this newsletter, but there's a good example of using an arm bar to set up a triangle in the post below. In this match, I get a 2 on 1 grip to initiate contact, attack the arm, and then finally switch to the triangle and get the submission.

combat_sports_coverage



A post shared by [@combat_sports_coverage](#)

You can find a lot of offense off the 2 on 1 grip, like the Choi Bars and arm drags I mentioned earlier. Lachlan Giles is one athlete who plays this style of guard very well and I think he has one of the best guards in the world.

Kade Ruotolo vs Lachlan Giles | 2022 ADCC World Championships



This is the last match I'll include in this article, but it's probably the most important. It's also the only one where the person that I want you to study actually ends up losing the match.

Lachlan Giles has one of the best guards in the BJJ world today, and a big part of that is because he attacks both the upper and lower body of his opponents.

If you watch Lachlan's run at the 2019 ADCC Worlds (against guys like Kayan, Gaucho, and Mahammed Aly), he barely attacks the upper body and focuses entirely on K-Guard. This indicates to me that his use of things like the Choi Bar is pretty new for him in the last 3-4 years.

In this match with Kade, Lachlan actually had a lot of great offensive looks.

He used K-Guard to enter 50/50, had a heel hook attempt, attacked the Choi Bar to counter guard passing, and when he fell "behind" (Kade getting to standing north-south), he used the Reverse Choi Bar to retain his guard and make attachments.

In all cases, once he has an attachment, he forces his opponent to react by either attacking the arm or the leg.

If you attack the leg and they try to base low, go for the arm or neck. If you attack the arm or neck and they try to stand up, get after the leg. The key is to not become married to one attack option and to create dilemmas within your offensive system.

This is also, unfortunately, the concept that was Lachlan's downfall in the match above.

He spent literally *the entire match* attacking from the supine guard. He had a lot of really good looks, but he also got worn down. He nearly got passed several times. Kade camped over him in north-south for more than a minute before diving back for the arm bar that finished.

I get that he probably wasn't going to take Kade down and it's easier said than done but threatening wrestling up might have been a great tactic to help him get in on Kade's leg.

You can't get married to anything from the open guard. You need to remain versatile and aggressive. You need good cardio.

If you attack a leg and they try to disengage, find the wrestle-up or sweep. If you go for the arm and they try to posture, find the leg. If you go wrestle up and they bring weight forward hunt for the leg, arm, or neck.

Upper to lower, lower to upper, push to pull, pull to push.

You can never truly "rest" if you choose to play from the bottom.

Closing Thoughts

I've written one prior article on this topic, but that article focuses more on the push pull dilemma than on chaining upper and lower body attacks.

It's a good prequel to this article, if you liked reading this one.

The Changing of the Guard

CHRIS WOJCIK • OCTOBER 19, 2022



Jiu-Jitsu is constantly evolving. In the last few years, with the growing popularity of ADCC and other big submission-only events like Who's Number One, the no-gi side of the sport is growing faster than ever, and as a result, technical evolutions are also happening faster than ever.

[Read full story →](#)

The problem with that article was that it didn't have an understanding of the Choi J or upper body attacks, which is something that if I'm being honest, I didn't really have a great understanding of last year.

I was a bit too married to the leg locks. This is why I struggled early this year when I started competing against higher-level and stronger opponents.

My game was behind.

In the last 6 months, I've really started to add a lot more upper-body attacks to my guard. I've been very hungry to catch my first Choi Bar in competition.

And what's happened as a result of this new tactic?

I've pretty much just gone back to leg-locking people and using leg locks to get on top. My tactics have evolved, but my game looks very similar from the outside.

However, if I was married to using my legs to simply wrap my body around other people's legs, I'd be stuck in the mud with my guard. I'd be wearing myself out and scoring any sweeps or submissions. I'd be getting passed and worn out more.

If you want a dangerous open guard, you need to understand the key concepts that are illustrated in this article.

Here they are one more time before we call it a day:

- When all things are equal, passing beats the guard.
- The push-pull dilemma.
- Attacking upper body AND lower body.


If you implement these key concepts plus strong foundational guard retention (which I will talk about in a future post), your bottom game will become levels more dangerous.

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Camille Lovering  Dec 11, 2023

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