

# Data Driven Jiu-Jitsu 02 - Becoming an Escape Artist

The true fundamentals.



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Izaak Michell vs. Kyle Chambers at the Who's Next Finale in 2022. A great example of the power of survival.

If no one can submit you, you're going to be very tough to beat.

A great example of this is Kyle Chambers vs. Izaak Michell at last year's "Who's Next Finale", when Chambers nearly submitted Izaak after spending nearly an hour in

bottom mount, turtle, and back control. If you have good defense and escapes, in submission only, you're always in the match.

But does this idea of mastering escapes translate to the rest of BJJ?

I think that it does.

When people ask me what they should focus on as a white belt from a technical standpoint, my difference is a little different than what you'll probably hear from my instructors.

Many instructors put a heavy emphasis on "the fundamentals" of BJJ, which I believe is strange because most of the time when you're training live, you're not able to execute a fundamental technique because you're too busy being smashed by training partners who are more experienced and better than you.

When I was a white belt, my "favorite" positions and submissions didn't matter. Whoever I trained with, I was always in the mount, side mount, or stuck in a triangle.

This article is about escapes and how escaping bad positions can make your offensive threats that much more significant. It's also going to teach you to "become an escape artist".

## Why Do Escapes Matter?

Put simply, escapes matter in BJJ because if you can't escape a submission or bad position, your only options are to either survive or submit.

You are either losing or playing not to lose. You are not trying to win.

Likewise, escapes are a skill that improves your confidence. If you're confident in your skills of escaping, you are going to be more willing to take risks with confidence.

Basically, you know that if you fuck up, you're not fucked.

This confidence is incredibly freeing for your ability to build a more dynamic offensive game.

The Danaher Death Squad, for example, used to do a lot of training from bad positions (years before this was “the trend”), and because of this athletes like Gordon Ryan and Craig Jones emerged as some of the most dynamic submission hunters in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

But...

How do you build your escape game to be as sound as possible?

## **It Comes Down to Doing the Simple Things Right – And Doing a Lot of Them**

There are a lot of techniques in Jiu-Jitsu.

There are at least 2 dozen options for leg attacks and just as many (if not more) options for attacking the upper body. There are a lot of chokes, a bajillion arm takedowns, and 37 million variations of sweeps.

The possibilities for this aspect of Jiu-Jitsu are pretty endless. It’s like chess.

But what about back or mount escapes? How many side control escapes do you really know?

I know a few from each of these bad positions, and a few variations of each, but when it comes to pins and submissions, you don’t have the same options. In these situations you have to learn good fundamental concepts. You need to know proper body positioning, situational awareness, and “how to not make it worse”.

That last part is really important.

You only need to learn a handful of moves from bad positions, and then from there, you can work on building toughness, composure, and discipline.

Escaping submissions and bad positions require you to be:

- disciplined not to make it worse
- smart enough to know how to escape properly
- tough enough not to give up

Luckily, there's a special way that you can train to build these skills.

## Specific Training Is Best Training

A lot of the rounds you should do in training should be specific rounds from bad positions.

Doing this will help you figure out when to tap so that you can train more safely in long run, but it will also help you get better at these positions in the early days of your career.

You will have the opportunity to both defend and attack from these bad positions, which will make you better A) not getting submitted and B) submitting people from the top. People also tend to have less of an ego in specific rounds versus “open rounds”, so you will definitely get more taps.

I believe that grapplers of all belt levels should do more specific training. Taking the time to break down and master a position is what separates world-class grapplers from solid grapplers.

Everyone wants to come to the gym and roll – and you should do that – but what separates you is if you are willing to take the time to do extra rounds with your training partner's sweaty gi or rashguard dripping down into your face. Every single day.

This sucks, but it's very good for your development.

I try to embrace the value of escapes and force myself to train out of bad positions, every day of the week. My only regret is that I didn't start training this way sooner.

When traveling, I've done 10-minute rounds from mount, turtle, arm bar, leg entanglements the back, and more. I wouldn't recommend doing 10-minute specific rounds if you're a beginner, but doing them weekly will rapidly increase your development compared to people who "just roll".

Here are the "bad" positions worth mastering (from top and bottom):

- Back Control
- Mount
- Side Control
- Flattened Half Guard
- Turtle
- Leg Entanglements

If any of these positions are confusing to you, you should ask your coach or look them up on YouTube. I tried to use the most common nomenclature possible.

It's important to note that these are not the only positions you can train from. However, if you're looking to build a more ballsy, dynamic, and threatening submission game.

## **Things to know about this way of training.**

This style of training puts a heavy emphasis on escaping from bad positions and finishing from good positions.

It is not a natural way of training, but I believe that it is maximal for skill development to train this way.

You're going to get submitted a lot and you're going to submit your training partner a lot. The more time you spend in these positions, the better your Jiu-Jitsu will get as a whole.

We spend a lot of time in rolling doing the more “neutral” positions, like the open guard. However, by focusing more on our ability to finish and not be finished from these spots, we remove the guesswork. The last thing you want to do in grappling is to have an incredible guard passing and zero ability to finish from side control. You want to be a complete grappler.

If you fail to do this, it will limit your competition horizons a lot. You'll thrive in points rulesets (hopefully) but you'll struggle in sub-only rulesets (undoubtedly).

**It's not enough to get good at one part of grappling.**

We want to be complete grapplers and training with a heavy emphasis on escapes can help you do that.

For older grapplers, training like this also has a lot less negative impact on your body — as long as you don't have an ego about losing rounds. Personally, ever since I started training this way, I've gotten injured less frequently and improved my skills faster at the same time.

## Closing Thoughts

Learning BJJ is fun.

There are endless techniques that you can learn and endless ways to approach training, mindset, and learning, and the sport does not stop changing.

But basic escapes and defense are essential skills to learn for every single grappler. It's learning to take their skills to the next level. You cannot become a really good grappler without having a really good defense.

Good defense does, without a doubt, give you the skills to build a good offense.

The way that you build a good defense is by:

- working on your escapes in drilling
- practicing escapes in live training
- building a habit of practicing your escapes in live training against opponents of varying skill levels

I, for example, don't just practice my escapes when I'm letting blue belts "work", I practice them when I'm training with the world-class guys who I'm in the room with every day.

If I can escape someone like Nicky Rod's back control, I'm fairly confident that I can escape pretty much anyone else's back control as well.

*Thanks for reading part 2 of my new segment here — Data-Driven Jiu-Jitsu. My goal is really to make these sections as extensive as possible, but about halfway through this piece, I realized that I was really working with 2 different articles.*

*Stay tuned for section 2.5 of Data-Driven Jiu-Jitsu coming next week, focused on designing a training plan for competition.*

*Thanks for reading :)*



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