

Metadata: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpLKrhwGavU>

My name is John Danaher, I'm one of the assistant instructors at the Henzo Gracie Academy in New York City. I think it's fair to say that there was a fundamental difference in the manner in which people from my generation in Jiu-Jitsu in the United States started doing Jiu-Jitsu versus most people today. Nowadays Jiu-Jitsu is a fairly well established sport and it would be difficult to grow up in North America now without knowing what Jiu-Jitsu is. I on the other hand, along with everyone of my generation in the sport, started largely because of the early UFCs. Most of us grew up doing martial arts of some kind, usually what most people would call traditional martial arts. The early UFCs, it's difficult to describe to someone doing martial arts today what an enormous shock they were to the martial arts world. People now, they've grown up with it. There's these young students that I teach today who think that UFC is the way martial arts always was, always were. So it's difficult to convey to an audience just what a radical shock those early UFCs were. In the history of martial arts, it was analogous to the discovery of America. It was something so mind-bogglingly different from people's preconceived ideas of what martial arts fighting would be like, that it was just an absolute shock to the system. And there were two responses to it. There was either denial, some people would just straight up say, nope, that's not real fighting and just turn their backs on it. And the other half was, let's get on board as quickly as possible, let's see if we can do it. I think it's also fair to say that the state of jiu-jitsu was stunningly primitive in those days. If you knew what an armbar was or what a triangle choke was, you were god of the mat, you could crush people. For the first three years of my training, I never saw a purple belt. We were all white belts together, and belts were given out very slowly in those days. And I remember the first time I saw a purple belt, it was like I'd just seen Jesus walking on water. It was just a real purple belt, it was amazing. So they were exciting times, it was characterized by the sheer newness of it all. You were talking about a situation where you had to go from one idea of what fighting would look like to the complete opposite. They were early days and exciting times. That was the era in which I started. Nowadays someone can hear about a fight which took place in, say, Europe, and watch two of the very best jiu-jitsu players in the world, they can watch that fight 24 hours later on YouTube, and from that, learn. Nowadays people are truly spoiled with the amount of information they're given. It's up to them to interpret it successfully. Learning, no matter what area you're learning in, has similar aspects to it, and probably the quintessential example of professional learning in the Western world, or the world in general, comes from university systems. These people have been teaching and relaying information to young minds for generations and they're damn good at it. And there are certain elements which you pick up from a formal university education which make you a good learner across the board, and jiu-jitsu is no exception to that. Let's look, for example, at a metaphor which you may find helpful. Sometimes students are surprised by the degree to which I will insist upon nomenclature, the naming of moves. Now why would one insist so much on nomenclature? Well, consider an example. Let's say you and I were charged with a complex task, repairing a car engine. The task would be made much easier if you and I had a very clear vocabulary as to the various parts of that engine, and in that sense, the task gets done very, very quickly and in a very orderly fashion. Your actions, no matter where you are, are only going to be as orderly and efficient as the thoughts that govern them, and a very, very good way to have a well-ordered and well-governed mind in the sport of jiu-jitsu is to have a clear sense of what the moves are. Be precise. If your thoughts are vague, your actions are going to be vague, and as a result, you'll have less success on the mat. Any lack of clarity in your mental process on the mat will always manifest itself as lack of precision in your physical movements, and that lack of precision is fatal at the highest levels of competition. Coaching versus being a sensei. I came up under Henzo Gracie. He's more than just a coach. You must differentiate between someone being a coach versus sensei is a wide-ranging kind of term where it's more than just a teacher. Henzo was more to us than just someone who taught us technique.

When he fought, he fought with bravery and confidence, which was inspirational. In that sense, we must differentiate between someone who's running the room who's just a coach, that's predominantly what I am. For me, a coach is someone who increases people's technical performance, makes them better at what they do. In that regard, I have a very set idea about what I should be doing as a coach when I'm working alone. At the level of fundamentals and basics, I'm a dictator. I won't let anything go at the basic level. You've got to have good escapes. The fundamental movements of the sport, elbow escaping, the fundamental body movements, bridge and tripping, I won't let you go with your own individual initiative on these things. These are fundamentals that everyone, regardless of body type, regardless of age, regardless of belt level, everyone has to have them. If you don't have them, you're never going to amount to anything. At the level of fundamentals, I'm a dictator. No one gets through that. At the advanced level, I'm a libertarian. I'll let you do whatever your personality and your body type make you favor. I've always said with students that ultimately, in the long run, the game that you favor will be determined by your body type and your personality. Some people are more aggressive. Some people are more risk takers. Some people are more introspective. Some people are short, tall, fat, et cetera, et cetera. I never try to enforce what kind of game you'll develop at the advanced level. Yes, I'm a dictator at the basics, but at advanced level, I'm very much a libertarian. I'm currently facing something of a crisis in my life. I've been diagnosed, I don't know if you know this, I've all my life struggled with a crippled leg. In my early adulthood, I had a series of dislocations to my left knee, which culminated in a disastrous knee operation, which left me with a leg which doesn't fully extend or bend and is misshapen. Over some 25 years of walking and performing jiu-jitsu on that leg, I've developed a chronic hip arthritis. So several surgeons have said the only solution to this is a complete hip replacement, which I may have to do this year. So this is something of a crisis for me since there's considerable doubt as to whether I'll be able to do jiu-jitsu at all with a hip replacement. Going ahead into the future right now, I don't know. Let's look a little bit at the past. I always had two very clear goals as a coach. I knew with a crippled leg that being a competitor would be difficult for me, but I was always very confident in my ability to make other people better at what they do. My first initial goal was to take the sport of mixed martial arts, take on a young athlete and make him the best in the world at what he did. And fate threw me the greatest gift that I think any coach could have received, which is a truly talented, truly driven, and truly good person in the form of George St-Pierre. And I had the very, very good fortune to coach him from the very early stage in his career through to what I personally believe was the all-round best performer in the sport of mixed martial arts. Of course, I'm biased in that regard and people will point to other people, but I truly believe that in my heart. And that was an absolute coaching highlight for me. Unfortunately, that goal was somewhat messed up by the arrival of Anderson Silva. And many people contended that no, Anderson Silva was the greatest mixed martial artist of all time. So I formed a second goal, which was to work with another athlete similar in spirit and game to George St-Pierre, but Anderson Silva's size. And once again, fate threw me an opportunity, which I probably didn't deserve, in the form of Chris Weidman, who was every bit as talented as George St-Pierre, another amazing athlete, driven, one of the fastest learners I've ever met in my life. And so in the last few years, I thought about a third goal, which is to take two grapplers and try and imbue in them a spirit of what I think jiu-jitsu should be, which is to take jiu-jitsu back to being more of a martial art rather than a sport of control. And again, fate intervened and gave me two very talented young students, Gary Tonnen and Eddie Cummings. And my intention, my third goal, is to push these young men and take jiu-jitsu in a direction which I think is going to be beneficial for the sport long term, where it becomes a more exciting sport for people to watch, a more exciting sport for people to play, and takes it back to its earliest roots, which is more of a martial art rather than just the science of controlling people. And I'm hoping that through these talented young students applying, that we can create maybe a shift in

direction in jiu-jitsu that many people will find interesting and entertaining, and hopefully result in a growth of the sport. More people will be attracted to the sport, which is a healthy thing. More people will be attracted to the sport, which is a healthy thing.