

Metadata: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8x1Cva8hJ8>

Okay guys, I'm here today with the great John Dennerly again, huge honor for me. Guys, today John is gonna teach us how to build the perfect Heffiger game. And guys, John is that type of instructor that he teaches stuff that you do and you don't even know that you do. So in this case, for example, it's very special for me because Heffiger is one of my favorite games and I'm sure that I'm gonna see a ton of stuff that John is gonna show that I use in my Heffiger game and I don't even know that I use. So we just finished shooting one entire instructional all about Heffiger and we're gonna launch very soon on bgjfanatics.com. Maybe by the time you are watching, we have even already launched it, so make sure to check this out. And let's do it John, super excited. You know, you said something very important there Bernardo. There's many, many athletes, you were one of them, who truly specialize in a half guard game and they make it the basis of their entire bottom game. And interestingly, there's an equal number of athletes who specialize in top half guard. You think of people like Rodolfo Vieira, Roger Gracie, their whole game on top was force half guard and do all their passing from there. So there's kind of a paradox involved here. Many players believe that half guard is the single best sweeping position from bottom and they will force their way to a half guard in bottom position and work deliberately from there. And there's an equal number of athletes who believe that half guard top is one of the premier passing positions and they will force their way to half guard and start passing from there. As a coach, I'm known as someone who encourages his athletes when they're passing to force half guard and use that as one of their favorite passing positions. And as a coach, I'm also known as someone who strongly favors the idea of getting to half guard from bottom position and sweeping people. So there's kind of a paradox going on here. How does this work? How is it that half guard top is one of the favorite positions and half guard bottom is also one of the favorite positions? It seems like an overt contradiction or paradox. Ultimately, the way you resolve this paradox is to understand there's a key element that will make half guard either the path to heaven or the path to hell depending upon one thing and that's control of the bottom athletes head and shoulders. If I'm working from bottom half guard and Bernardo Fari gets control of my head and shoulders in a way where he constrains head movement and pins both my shoulders to the mat, half guard bottom is not a desirable place to be under those conditions. It's a desirable place for him as the passing athlete to be. So for example, if we're working here and Bernardo goes underneath my arm on the far side here and underneath my head here, he's locked his hands, he's created a situations where he's got closed wedges around my head and shoulders and as a result I can't move from one shoulder to the other. Both shoulders are pinned down to the mat. This has a very, very detrimental effect on my head position and my ability to move my hips and as a result this, I think everyone would agree, is a very, very fine passing position. So yeah, I pulled half guard but there's no advantage conferred to me as a bottom athlete here. This is a position of disadvantage and it's very easy from here for Bernardo to stop passing. So just getting half guard per se is not a good thing. It has to be half guard with a set of conditions and those conditions are my head and shoulders must be free to move. I must be able to move from one shoulder to the other. If I can't do that, both shoulders are pinned, this is a disastrous position and not one to be highly valued at all. So what we need to do is somehow protect our head and shoulders from our opponent's ability to control us. So that's the paradox of half guard, that it can at the same time be one of the best passing positions for the top athlete and one of the best sweeping positions for the bottom athlete. In addition to the paradox of half guard to understand this position, we've got to understand something else Bernardo, the idea of the appeal of half guard. You were an athlete who had a strong appeal to half guard bottom. There are many others too and we've got to start asking ourselves, okay, as an athlete why would I willingly, actively seek to get into the half guard position? And I think you'll agree with me on this Bernardo, the real appeal of half guard bottom is the idea that it strongly limits the amount of motion and the need for speed in bottom

position. Why is this? Okay, it comes out of something that I often talk about, the iron law of speed and connection. As a general rule in the sport of judo, the more connection two athletes have to each other, the lower the speed of the engagement. So for example, if Bernardo gets mounted position on me, here there's obviously a tremendous sense of connection. His feet and legs control my hips as he puts a cross face on here. Now my head and shoulders can strain. There's so much connection between the two athletes that the speed of the match greatly diminishes and it's going to be a very slow grinding match from this position. Okay, let's contrast this with the situation where Bernardo stands over me. And from here the only connection between us is at the level of the hands. I have hands on him, he has hands on me. And because there's very little connection between the two athletes, you're going to see a lot of speed and dynamics in a position like this. There's going to be left and right movement and from here the two athletes are going to have to move at a pretty high rate of speed in order to be successful. Okay, so you can see something very simple here. The idea that as the amount of bodily connection between the two athletes increases, the speed of the match goes down. Now the beauty of the half guard position is there's a lot of body connection and there's ways to connect to someone else's body in half guard where you can dramatically slow down the speed of the match. And so we often find that athletes whose body type, age or disposition makes them perhaps a little slower than other athletes, these people tend to favor half guard very, very strongly. Your game, Bernardo, was never a speed-based game. It was a control-based game. Yeah, it was always a very slow game. So you were a natural for half guard. So you often see this kind of thing, okay. Speed-based athletes generally like minimal body connection and use dynamicism and movement and side-to-side trickery. That's their natural game. If you're slower, perhaps less physically gifted, perhaps an older athlete, then half guard is custom-made for you and precisely because of this body connection. So if we're working from bottom to half guard, you'll see that in most of the main half guard bottom scenarios, there's a tremendous degree of body connection. We have a tight waist grip that controls our training partner's hips. We have two of our legs connected to one of our opponent's legs. You have an arm connection on your opponent. So it's going to be very, very difficult under these circumstances for an opponent to move around freely. Bernardo was locked on one side of my body once we get here. There's so much body connection between the two athletes, it's going to be very, very hard for the top athlete to exercise any kind of speed and dynamicism to go into a passing sequence. So we've uncovered two things already. First, what is the appeal of half guard? Well, it's an incredibly effective way to slow the match down and take a sort of dynamic quick movement out of the equation, okay. So if that suits your game, your body type, your disposition, that's a wonderful thing for you. We've also uncovered the idea that there's a paradox in half guard. It can either be the best passing position in the sport or one of the best sweeping positions in the sport, depending on one thing. Who controls the bottom athlete's head and shoulders? That's going to be the whole game, okay. If the top athlete can control the head and shoulders, absolutely, it's one of the best passing positions. If the bottom athlete can deny head and shoulder control to the top athlete, it becomes one of the best sweeping positions. So the big question we need to answer here right now is, okay, how do I deny control of my head and shoulders if I'm working half guard bottom, okay. Let's break this down to three main methods by which we can do this. Okay, first, the big problem associated with half guard is that normally most forms of guard permit us to both push and pull with our legs, okay. So if Bernardo comes forward, I have a pushing foot on his hip, makes it difficult for him to come forward. This governs distance through pushing, okay. So if Bernardo pressures forward on me here, it's difficult to go through that pushing foot. When I go into a half guard situation, my legs can only pull. I lose the ability to push with my legs. So if Bernardo gets chest-to-chest on me in a situation like this, my legs have no capacity to push from this position, and as a result, you lose control of distance, okay. Contrast this with situations where we have butterfly guard and I put a

posted foot on my training partner's hip, I can govern distance here. He comes forward, my right foot governs distance between us, okay. I can push on my opponent and use this as a means of monitoring distance. Half guard bottom, chest-to-chest, you don't have that. The only thing my legs can do here is pull people in. I have no capacity to push on my opponent's legs, and as a result, I lose the sense of distance control. That's a serious problem because now the guy can cover distance, close distance, and get control of my head and shoulders, and now you're into all those problems from half guard bottom. There's a reason why many coaches don't particularly like half guard bottom as a method for their students to work, because they're correct insofar as you often do lose control of distance here. So our first means of controlling distance from half guard bottom is always going to be a knee shield. If we bring the camera around in this direction, you'll see that a knee shield, whether I place it low in the hip or high inside the shoulder, it gives a mechanism to push an opponent, okay. So I have a pulling leg, my inside leg is a pulling leg, it pulls in on Bernardo, and I have a pushing leg here, the knee on the hip or the knee on the shoulder. So when he tries to come forward and control my head, it's gonna be difficult for him, okay. You have a means of distance control through the knee shield. So that's one excellent way of protecting our head and shoulders from the top athlete, okay. A second method is for us to take a hand and put it underneath my opponent. If he gets the underhook here, he can pin my far shoulder straight down to the mat, and if you can pin this shoulder to the mat, he can definitely start going into many fine guard passing sequences. If I, on the other hand, get my arm underneath his arm, now when he tries to control my head and shoulders, it's almost impossible. I can stay up propped on an elbow. If I go down to the floor, he has no capacity to put on a crossface or lock his hands around my head and shoulders, and as a result, from here, it won't be a difficult thing for us to create turning forces that can start sweeping people from bottom position, okay. So that's an obvious way in which we can deny control of our head and shoulders to our opponent. First was the knee shield, that's a method of distance control. This one here is a means of preventing him pinning my left inside shoulder down to the mat, okay. Now, the third method, also very, very useful, is hand control, okay. My opponent, even if he gets an underhook here, if I can control his hand, I can prevent him from actually utilizing the underhook. So this would be his crossface hand. If he can get a crossface and an underhook, he can pin both of my shoulders to the mat and make my life miserable from bottom half guard, okay. However, if I control the hand and he reaches for the crossface, it's very, very difficult from here, okay. Even if he's got an underhook, he wouldn't be able to secure it with the crossface and I can still be very effective in this position, okay. So the hand control taken through this grip here on the sleeve cuff is a very, very valuable commodity when you're in bottom half guard, okay. So we've got three means of protecting our head, knee shields, either low or high, underhook slash tight waist, this prevents him from pinning my outside shoulder down to the mat, and hand control, which prevents him from working a crossface grip, okay. Now, all three of these mechanisms are heavily covered in the video instructional that we've filmed today, but for today's YouTube video, we're going to focus on the idea of hand control and how this feeds into a particularly effective set of reversals out of half guard bottom, the back roll sweeps, okay. First, let's talk about what a back roll sweep is. This essentially is the idea of getting a strong connection to our opponent's body and performing a simple basic movement of jiu-jitsu, a backwards roll. We take our body, knees to chest, and we've created a rounded spine so that our spine takes on the same shape as the bottom of a rocking chair. As my lower leg extends, we get a nice rocking motion. That rocking motion will enable us to get underneath our training partner's center of gravity and start moving bigger, stronger, heavier people with mechanical efficiency. Then we add the idea of a kickover, a splitting of our legs, and we can end up on top of our opponent as a result, okay. So the physical movement behind it is relatively simple and one which I'm sure all of you are familiar with. Usually it's part of a basic warm-up before class. So there's that rocking chair shape which enables

us to move an opponent's body weight and then a movement over, a splitting of the legs, and top position, okay. That's going to be the movement that underlies the back roll sweep, a simple back roll. Now we're going to connect to an opponent and actually force them into the role that we're performing. So the first one we're going to look at involves a situation where from half guard we'll start with a low knee shield. Esponato comes in towards me to get grips. We'll get our grip in just like so. Second hand.

it's going to go here as a cross grip. We convert to a high knee shield. So we've got an excellent means of controlling distance here. Okay. As Bernardo pressures forward, he runs into the high knee shield. If he reaches for me with his left hand, I'm controlling the hand here. We've got excellent initial control. Okay. Now we need to start a back roll motion. So I'm going to punch my leg through. I'm going to bring my head towards his belt. What's my intention here? My intention is to get underneath the center of gravity. Okay. Here's a simple insight you should carry through with you for the rest of your time in jiu-jitsu. If you want to start moving and lifting people, you've got to get under them. In particular, you've got to get underneath their center of gravity. His center of gravity is usually located around the area of the knot of the belt. Okay. So that's exactly where my body is going to be headed. I bring my body in just like so, and then we start an action of bringing our knees in towards our chest. And as a result, you'll see Renato's center of gravity comes up on top of me. So I've curled the body in, and we start a pushing action that gets our opponent rolling over our body. From here, we come up on top, and we're looking good. Okay. Now, there's a very, very important underlying concept that is pervasive throughout all of your sweeps in the sport of jiu-jitsu, and it's strongly shown in this particular sweep, the back roll sweep. Whenever you've got to knock someone over with a sweep, there's something we'll often refer to. This is quadrant theory. The idea that your opponent has four main bases of support. He has a fifth one in the head, but we'll cover that another time. Okay. So if I want to be stable, I have one, two, three, four bases of support. Each one of those bases of support covers a certain quadrant. Okay. I can go from 12 o'clock down to three o'clock with my right arm. So I've got a right upper quadrant, and that's covered by my right arm. My left hand covers the left upper quadrant from 12 o'clock to nine o'clock. Okay. And it covers that very well, and it creates an effective base of support. Okay. My right leg covers the right lower quadrant, and that can go from six o'clock all the way through to three o'clock. Left leg covers left lower quadrant, and that can go from nine to six. Okay. If you try to put a base of support into another quadrant, problems start. Okay. So if I take my left leg and I try to cover the right lower quadrant, I create a situation where even small forces will knock me down. Okay. If I take away a given base of support, then it's very, very easy to apply forces into that quadrant where the base of support is being taken away, which will put that person down to the mat. So we're always looking at every kind of sweep that we employ from guard to look where is my opponent's base of support, take away that base of support, and then push them into the quadrant that we see. You will see this very clearly in operation in the back roll sweep. Okay. Bernardo has four bases of support once we take him up into the air. Okay. So we start with our grip, just like so. Now, I get underneath his center of gravity, like so. If we bring the camera over here, you'll see that Bernardo has his left foot as a base of support, his right foot as a potential base of support, and his right hand as a potential base of support. But I am controlling Bernardo's left hand. So if we bring the camera back on this side, you'll see I am in control of Bernardo's left hand. So of course, that's the quadrant that I want to take him towards. So I bring my head forwards, we create momentum, and then from here, that's exactly the area that I want to come over. And then we get our pin down to the mat. Okay. So, as always, we identify where are we controlling our opponent's forelimbs. We have one of them, he's got three left, so we have to take him into that quadrant. If we misdirect the energy of the sweep, failure is absolutely inevitable. Let's have a look at an example. Okay. Now, left hand means left upper quadrant is where we're going to be sweeping him. If I get into a situation where I try to

take Bernardo directly to my left, he just puts his right hand up and it covers the base of what we fail every single time. Okay. So directionality of force is extremely important here. We want to make sure in these circumstances, okay, it's going to, left hand is blocked, so it's left upper quadrant, that's going to be the direction of force. So that's exactly where our back roll gets directed. We bring our head in close towards our training partner's hips. And then from here, we bring our center of gravity all the way through this and send the man over. And as a result, we end up in top position. Okay. Now, a great thing about back roll sweeps is they're pretty versatile. They can be done with many different grips, but the two I want you focusing on are first the cross grip and sleeve cuff. And the second is where our opponent forces a chest to chest position. Then we use an over back grip and you can get spectacular results out of this one too. So previously, we had control of the hand and we had a high knee shield. Well, what if I don't hit that high knee shield and Bernardo gets chest to chest on me? Okay. Well, the bad news is his weight's on top of you, but the good news is he doesn't have a cross face to solidify his weight in place. So from here, I'm going to take my armpit and go over his shoulder. If you can see the shoulder, when you reach for the belt, that's going to be problematic. So we make sure we go over and then we access the belt. If you bring the camera in this direction, when we go for the belt, we go for the far side of the belt. Don't grab near side. The far side, you get a stronger pull. Now, just like before, we want to bring his center of gravity up on top of us. And just like before, we want to push off our two shoulders so that we end up in top position, ready to go on the other side of the sweep. So once again, a word to all you guys out there, this belt around your opponent's waist is one of the single best ways to get direct control of your opponent's center of gravity. Your opponent's center of gravity is always located right next to the knot of the belt. You get hands on that belt, you control the center of gravity, regardless of whether you grip the back of the belt or the front of the belt. It's an incredible connection to your opponent. We want to use it as often as we can. So once again, half guard situation. Good news is you've got hand control. Bad news is he comes in and gets chest to chest, okay? Now, if we lost hand control at this point, everything would get worse and worse. Now, this man goes up to control my shoulders, okay? So it's important we keep a good calm head and make sure we keep that sleeve control so that when he reaches for a crossface, he can't do so. Now, I cover his shoulder and we get down and control our training partner at the belt just like so. Now, even when Bernardo makes a strong base, we want to make sure in these circumstances we use that belt grip to maximum advantage and then from here we pull his center of gravity up on top of us. We hit that nice roll back. As a result, we're in perfect position on top of our training partner and ready to start our passing game. So, there we have one of the favorite sweeps from half guard bottom, a back roll sweep, which is often seen in competition. It's a good sign that it's going to work well for you out there in the gym. It's a beautiful sweep to look at. It has that feeling of mechanical efficiency. It also has something which is very, very important for sweeping in general. It's the idea of an action I always recommend, I'm certainly not alone in this, whenever you want to take people forwards, start by pushing them backwards. Okay, jiu-jitsu is a competitive combat sport. Anytime you try to force something on an opponent, they're going to push back. So, if I want to take my opponent forwards, almost always we initiate with a push backwards and then we switch to a pull. Let's have a look at how this occurs. The good news is, whether we use cross grip or belt grip, both grips give an ability to push. Okay, so what we typically do in these situations is we, I know that ultimately I want to pull my opponent. Okay, but we want to accentuate the forces we can develop here by starting with a push, even though I know I'm going to terminate with a pull. So, I can initiate with a push by starting with a push, even though I know I'm going to terminate with a pull. So, I push into my opponent and when I feel the push back, that's exactly when we go through. The beauty of practicing back roll sweeps is they make this into a habit on your part. One of the greatest habits that you, as a developing athlete, can build is this capacity to use the action-reaction of push-pull dynamic and

build them into your sweeps. I promise you, your sweeping game will greatly increase just on this simple inside alone. So often, you see people play a very direct game, okay, and they become predictable. Okay, once I get those grips on my opponent, we all know what's coming next. And so, they know that ultimately we're going to be pulling an opponent forwards and they just go straight to a pull. Build some subtlety into your game. Start using misdirection as the basis of your attacks. If you want to pull people, start with a push, okay, and when you feel them pushing back in the action, that's when you come back in the direction you really want. Always have a clear understanding that there's two things going on here. You have to create the illusion of what you want, which you try to sell to an opponent. And then, in the back of your mind, you have what you really want to do, which you keep to yourself. Always try to use this subdiffusion, all the major moves that you employ. Don't go directly to them. Go indirectly, often in the opposite direction, and you often get far, far better results. So, it's a beautiful sweep for developing athletes to work with for those reasons. It teaches you a lot about body movement. The back roll is a foundational movement of the sport and it's used in a very practical way. It's used by top athletes in competition and is often seen working on some of the best athletes in the world. That's a great sign to you that it's a high percentage move. And it employs these valuable insights of action and reaction, which permeate throughout the sport of Jiu-Jitsu and will create a habit in you that will just make you a better sweeper from part of position overall, as opposed to just this one move. Yeah, so, John, things that caught my attention here was the idea of the action and reaction in the half grip, that sometimes you don't think so much about it in the half grip, right? You know why? Because it's mostly seen as a static position. Most people say, oh, in half grip, you just hold on tight, you get connection, but even there, there's a subtlety of push and pull. I agree. So, this thing, also the thing you just mentioned in the beginning about how it's the type of game that you don't need speed, so you can go very slow, I think that's probably why so many old grapplers play half grip. I agree. You know, a fascinating thing about watching your matches, Bernardo, is how you've fought some of the most dynamic athletes in Jiu-Jitsu history, like, for example, Leandro Lowe, he's known for his dynamicism, but when they fought you, the matches looked like slow motion. Yeah, no, that makes sense. You could literally take the fastest people in the sport and make them look slow, and half guard is one of the few positions where you can do this, and you built a career on this. Yeah, and also, yesterday we were talking about it, like, how good is half grip for connections, right? Like, how you can connect things from half grip very easily, like connecting half grip with passing, and etc, etc. And contrasting that with many other popular guard positions, where once you complete a sweep from certain kind of guard, for example, spider guard, then you have to switch to a completely different set of operations. Okay, here's the sweep, now I've got to completely change, there's no real connection between the sweep and the follow-up, whereas from half guard, there's so much physical closeness to your opponent that you're right in on the action, the minute you finish the sweep, you're ready to start passing. I agree, and guys, yeah, we know that most of the audience who follows us, like, older grapplers, and I think half grip is the game for them, because you don't need to be fast, you don't need to be explosive, and in my case, I have a crippled leg and a hip replacement, so, yeah, so, on the other hand, we also don't want to say, like, you know, you've got to be old or crippled, yeah, everyone can do it, but you were young and strong, but it has the potential to take situations where you're faced with someone who you believe is more athletic than yourself, and shut down their athleticism, and that's a wonderful thing, it's only what you do is about. I agree 100%, and guys, yeah, we just shot an entire instructional all about half grip, that's going to be part of the fundamental series from John, the go for the faster, so make sure to check it out on [bjjfanatics.com](http://bjjfanatics.com), we're going to launch it soon, and maybe by the time you're watching, we have already launched it, so make sure to check that out. What was John? Great stuff, thanks so much. [bjjfanatics.com](http://bjjfanatics.com), use the promo code [youtubefaria](http://youtubefaria) to get 10% off any instructional video. Improve your jiu-jitsu faster.