**INTRODUCTION**

On March 2, 2023, the Use of Force Committee (UOF) of the Santa Monica Public Safety Reform and Oversight Commission (PSROC) met to consider whether city-funded Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) training for Santa Monica Police Department (SMPD) officers would be beneficial to officers, suspects, and the community at large. Attending this meeting were the following subject matter experts:

Sgt Mike Chun: Sgt Mike Chun is a SMPD officer and a use of force instructor for the Department. He is also a BJJ Black Belt under Rener Gracie.

Detective Ben Thompson: Detective Thompson is Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officer. He is also a BJJ Black Belt under Jean-Jacques Machado and a former college wrestler.

Rener Gracie: Rener Gracie is a BJJ/Gracie black belt. He is also the grandson of Helio Gracie, who is one of the founders of BJJ/Gracie Jiu Jitsu. At his gym in Torrance, he runs a training program designed to address police officers' needs in a physical confrontation. His expertise is world-renowned.

On March 28, 2023, the PSROC UOF met again with members of the city manager's office to discuss the logistics of implementing a program that allowed officers to train in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu in their home communities and have it funded by the city of Santa Monica.

The UOF concluded that BJJ training would significantly benefit SMPD officers by reducing injuries (to officers and suspects) arising from instances where force is required and preserving officers' physical and mental health.

CURRENT TRAINING

In 2000, while batons were authorized for use, SMPD began teaching alternative control methods—specifically, Sgt. Chun covered the control techniques and practices associated with Krav Maga (KM).

KM is an Israeli Martial Art made famous for its use by Israeli Defense forces. While it incorporates some grappling techniques from BJJ, it often relies on strikes originating from Western boxing and muay thai (Thailand kickboxing). As a result, KM is very top-heavy in punches, kicks, knees, and elbows. A guiding philosophy within Krav Maga is to finish a confrontation as aggressively and violently as possible.[[1]](#footnote-1)

KM was introduced as a more "natural" reaction for officers to respond to weaponless defensive tactics as it was easier to learn and did not require extended hours to learn the discipline.

Through testimony from officers (SMPD and LAPD), officers often find it challenging to find the time and place to practice self-defense discipline. As a result, training is forgotten, and skills diminish. Currently, the Department provides and requires two hours of training per year for every officer in the Department. It was the PSROC's impression that this was woefully too little training.

**BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU-A HISTORY**

 The word "jiu jitsu" derives from the Japanese "Jū," meaning "gentle" and "Jutsu" meaning "art"; essentially, jiu jitsu is the "**gentle art**." Brazilian Jiu Jitsu contains zero strikes. It is a grappling art. Before expounding on the appropriateness of the martial art's name, it may be helpful to know its history.

BJJ is an evolution from Japanese Jiu Jitsu. Mitsuyo Maeda was a Japanese Jiu Jitsu practitioner. In the early 1900s, he traveled the world spreading the art of Japanese jiu jitsu and would find himself in Brazil. In Brazil, he met Gastao Gracie, who hired Maeda to teach his sons, Carlos and Helio Gracie, Japanese Jiu Jitsu. Helio found the art based heavily on athleticism. Helio was smaller and slower than most and found executing learned techniques challenging. Helio modified the techniques to allow a smaller, slower, weaker fighter to prevail over a larger, faster, stronger opponent.

Helio and Carlos Gracie would teach their new martial art to their sons, nephews, cousins, and other family members. Eventually, the craft would make its way to the United States and become famous in the 90's at a Martial Arts competition that pitted competitors of different martial arts against each other. The goal was to determine which, of all the martial arts, was the most effective. Competitors came from around the world with backgrounds in different arts (boxing, wrestling, karate, ninjitsu, kung-fu, muay thai, kickboxing, and Savate). There were no weight classes and very few rules. A man named Royce Gracie, who was much smaller than other competitors and physically unimpressive, effortlessly won the tournament and did so by using an art absent strikes. Royce Gracie is one of the sons of Helio Gracie.

**BRAZLIAN JIU JITSU-THE ART**

As stated above, BJJ is a strikeless art focusing on grappling techniques. It is similar to Western wrestling but is less reliant on strength and more on using an opponent's strength and momentum against them.

 While the goal of Western wrestling is to pin, the purpose of BJJ is to make an opponent "submit" through the use of arm locks, leg locks, shoulder and locks. A BJJ practitioner can execute a technique from being on top of an opponent, under an opponent, or on an opponent's back. BJJ also teaches how to distribute body weight pointedly and neutralize someone struggling above or beneath the practitioner.

Unlike other martial arts focusing on securing a knockout or causing an injury due to impact, BJJ is about control through weight distribution and leverage in a grappling situation. PSROC learned from guests' testimony that almost all use of force instances involve grappling. Our guests informed PSROC that the ideal use of force occurrence involves officers having to throw zero strikes and being able to control a resisting suspect through pressure; BJJ is the evolved art of doing just that.

**HOW IS BJJ BENEFICIAL TO POLICE DEPARTMENTS**

One of the challenges of Krav Maga is the limitations on how it can be trained. Sparring for people who are not professional fighters cannot involve concussions and broken orbital bones. Such restrictions prevent officers from training with full force or near it, as one would experience in a resisting arrest situation on the street. If a technique can't be trained in a realistic setting, the mind and body won't have the memory under pressure to execute it.

BJJ, however, can be trained in a forceful, realistic setting without injury or concussion. Because there are no strikes, blunt force trauma is not experienced. Instead, techniques are practiced in a very controlled environment. If a practitioner is caught in a submission and wishes to stop, this person taps the body of the other practitioner. The sparring session ends, and the people sparring simply start the session over. They train with realistic resistance in a manner that mimics a real struggle. With BJJ training, when officers find themselves in the field embroiled in a battle with a suspect, they can calmly and expertly control the suspect without injury because they have done it endlessly in the gym. BJJ will turn a stressful and dangerous conflict into another day at the gym.

Aside from the application of techniques in the field, BJJ can have personal benefits for each officer. Regular exercise suits any person and maintains a healthy lifestyle, reducing injuries. More so, it offers benefits to mental health. Those that practice martial arts are less likely to be panicked and lash out, resulting in injuries.

**TEST CASES: OTHER CITIES HAVE IMPLEMENTED BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU TRAINING**

The following Los Angeles area police agencies have moved to the Jui-Jitsu style of defensive/arrest and control tactics for officers.

Santa Ana PD

Manhattan PD

El Segundo PD

Hermosa Beach PD

Beverly Hills PD

Pasadena PD

El Segundo implemented a program similar to what PSROC is recommending. Chief Bermudez has approved a six-month pilot program where the Department will pay for individual memberships at Gracie University-a Jiu Jitsu gym.

The best test subject for a BJJ program's success is Marietta Police Department in Georgia. In July 202, Marietta PD funded BJJ training for all officers who wish to partake. 95 of the 145 sworn officers within the Department took up BJJ training. After 18 months, the following data was compiled:

48% reduction in officer injures

1) 100% of the injuries were to officers who weren't training BJJ

2) 23% reduction in Taser deployments

3) 53% reduction in suspect injuries

4) 0 excessive force allegations since the inception of the program.

5) A reduction in workman's comp claims resulting in an estimated savings of $66,752.00

**PROPOSAL**

Once the Department approves a BJJ gym, officers will be approved to sign up for classes. If approved, the training would allow officers volunteering to practice the discipline of BJJ training during off-time at authorized training centers selected by the Department. Officers will begin with basic BJJ concepts/tactics and progress to more refined "active" exercises and hold.

Several departments currently have an Officer Incentive program for officers interested in taking Jui-Jitsu (GST) during off time but paid for from the City's education Incentive reimbursement program. Most of the officers within SMPD have concluded post-high school training, so the education reimbursement fund sits untouched mainly. Martial arts are education, and PSROC recommends that officers be reimbursed for BJJ from Santa Monica's education incentive reimbursement program. While this may need some addendums to current agreements with the Santa Monica Police Officer's Association (POA), communication between commission officers and POA officers leaves PSROC with the impression that this would be a manageable hurdle to overcome.

Another concept currently practiced by the Orange County Sheriff's Department is that the Department send a group of instructors to complete the Gracie Survival Tactics (GST) certification course they provide. Once trainers from the Department are trained, they provide training to department personnel. The training can be done on-duty time. The challenge with this model is that it requires the Department to provide staffing and training time, and training location for the Department. The hourly rate of a police officer or Sgt at overtime is approximately 3x the cost of paying an outside certified instructor at an outdoor facility.

Currently, the Santa Monica Police Department is on a 3/12 deployment format. This format requires that every officer use one 10-hour day/month to make up for the extra pay provided. Other Departments are using this extra day to provide needed training to police officers to maintain POST certification (AOT).

The Santa Monica Police Department needs to deploy officers in the field due to the many vacancies of sworn officers. Once the Department reaches its complement of officers, it is recommended that they too can use the extra day for training purposes, including but limited to GST.

**COST**

In our discussion with representatives of police defensive tactics instructors of the various departments, there is some reluctance by some of the older officers to convert to the grappling Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu training. Pasadena PD currently provides funding for off-duty studio-based Jiu-Jitsu training. Approximately 10% of the total complement of officers currently take advantage of the education incentive training. Pasadena employs 241 officers, so about 24 officers are enrolled in the training program. This training is currently being funded through the regular department training budget.

SMPD officers live in varying communities across southern California. PSROC believes there should be a vetted and authorized gym in each community. SMPD could approve gyms in conjunction with PSROC.

On average, BJJ gyms charge **$160 per month**. For the benefits, this is a nominal fee.

**CONCLUSION**

PSROC recommends that Santa Monica immediately start funding BJJ training for willing officers.

1. Krav maga training: preparing for street reality". Krav Maga Guild. Retrieved May 25, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)