

Roberto Leitao's Ten Principals of Grappling

(by Ed Beneville)

INTRODUCTION

The principals of grappling which follow are from Luta Livre expert Roberto Leitao. Roberto Leitao is arguably the Helio Gracie of Luta Livre. [But if you disagree, I am not interested in arguing about it, I understand that some will maintain that Helio deserves credit for Luta Livre also. I have insufficient knowledge to say either way.]

Roberto Leitao is in his mid 60's and has a lifetime of experience with no-gi grappling. The principals are the result of more than 30 years of searching, analyzing and experimenting with grappling by Leitao.

Some of these principals may seem obvious and familiar. Nevertheless, seeing them in print may make you more aware of them which in turn will make you better able to utilize them. The numbered statements are meant by Leitao to be concise mnemonic devices. With these principals we can answer almost all questions says Leitao. We can know why, when and how. We can have a better understanding of how we should develop our strategy in grappling.

This information is based upon a lecture I attended by Roberto Leitao and a handout he distributed at it. My comments appear in blue. The rest is based on the handout. I rewrote parts of it to make up for what I perceived to be rough spots in translation.

THE PRINCIPALS

1. If I don't know, I will not allow.

If you do not know what it is that your opponent is attempting to do, do not let him do it. A strong opponent with little knowledge in grappling who obeys this principal will be tuff to defeat. Grappling is a continuous process. You have to block your opponent's steps. This is the most important principal.

Unexpected attacks are dangerous ones.

Executing a technique always requires a variety of elements to come together. Generally speaking these elements include things such as leverage, base, positioning, timing, momentum, and control points or grips. If you can deny your opponent crucial elements for his technique, you can stop the technique.

Even if you do not know what your opponent is trying to do, you can discern the steps he is taking to make it happen and thwart those steps.

2. A systematic repetition is always dangerous.

If you continue to show your opponent the same move you will give him the opportunity to anticipate it and counter it.

Keep the element of surprise on your side.

3. Every part of our body must work.

It is natural that you concentrate your attention to the parts of your body that are involved

in one situation while forgetting others that could give you a big help. Put them to work!

It is easy to concentrate on one element of a technique at the expense of others. For instance in executing an arm bar you might become so focused on having the proper grips with your own arms that you forget about putting your hips at a correct angle and how you should be employing your legs. Use everything. I find this to be particularly important in passing the guard and for escapes. Use your torso and all of your limbs including your head in executing movements. This correlates with the principal of maximum efficiency espoused by Judo.

Keep in mind that your torso and upper legs are the strongest parts of your body. Beginners tend to concentrate too much on what they are doing with their upper body at the expense of their core strength.

4. We must keep our forces at the same level of our opponent's.

If you are with one arm going against two arms of your opponent, something is wrong. If you are matching the strength of your arm against your opponent's leg, something is wrong.

This is not about meeting force with force. It is about avoiding situations where you may be overwhelmed by force.

5. An intelligent movement is a continuous movement.

Keep moving. Use your opponent's momentum and movement to your own advantage.

6. If you control the space you control your opponent's actions.

Two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Use your body to block your opponent's movements.

Blocking your opponent from moving by putting yourself in the space where he wants or needs to go is easier than trying to control him moving him outright.

7. If you support properly, you support strongly.

Use the mat and your opponent's body for support, not your own strength.

8. If you did not conquer the position, be suspicious of it.

"If there is a beautiful fruit on the side walk, it belongs to somebody or it's spoiled inside."

I am unfamiliar with the saying, but the meaning is clear enough. Be wary of what appears to be free. In the context of grappling positions you may be headed into a trap. Players will appear to give something only so they can take something better.

9. Don't show what you are feeling, only what is convenient for you.

If your opponent doesn't know how you are feeling about a position, he will not know what he should do.

Don't telegraph your intentions. In grappling that usually happens when you start making pressure the way you want to go before the moment arrives. It also can happen because you tense up the muscles you are going to use, or because you change your breathing. On the other hand you can fake your opponent into believing he knows what you are going to do by any of those means and thereby coax him into reacting in a way that suits you.

10. You must always do something.

If you don't do anything your opponent will be more efficient in his attacks but he does not need to worry about yours.

Don't allow your opponent to dictate the fight and don't be passive.