

5 training tips for combat sports

Like the fitness industry, there are a lot of myths going around in combat sports. Like gaining mass will make you less flexible, or being strong will slow down your game. Like any myth or principle, they are transported through time by those scared of the extra work or effort, those looking for excuses, or just plain wrong science. Remember, any advice worth its gold is only as good as where you find it and how the science was conducted.

It's not because the pros endorse it that you have to. The law of individuality rules them all, no one is the same. It's not because a given diet worked on your friends that it would do the same wonders for you. It's not because Galvao can smash pass or that Garcia excels in the butterfly guard that fits your style and game.

So many details can influence many aspects of our plan that trying to point out what really worked is somewhat impossible for most of us. Trying to mimic what the icons and full time pros is often not our reality.

So for those looking for the extra edge, willing to sacrifice a bit of their time and old habits, here are a few tips to help you live a long and prosper modern day warrior life.

Warm up efficiently

Range of motion and dynamic moves are part of the game. You can't expect to get out of an arm bar without your joints paying for it. A couple of full range push ups, knee bends, low back stretching and ankle hopping and stretching can be the difference between a tap and a snap.

When you warm up, look at it as if you need to put the joint into a full range of movement, increasing the stretch gradually. For those lucky enough to roll in a place where there are a few pieces of gym equipment, use it! Increasing the load slowly for a few reps only.

It is possible to "over warmup". The goal is to wake up the nervous system, not fatigue it. If you need to warmup for more than 30 minutes, you might have to look into your dietary habits or your training regimen.

Which leads me to my next point.

Eat enough

The most common mistake I see is the lack of proper nutrition. Most will have a hard time trying to take in enough calories in a day to manage the high demands of multiple trainings in a day. Some might get away with eating empty calories, junk food and be able to perform. However, this may take a toll on the digestive system and the joints after a while and can have dire consequences in the long run.

I always aim to have more nutrient dense (meats, veggies, healthy fats) food be a major part of your plan at the expense of calorie dense foods (junk and processed). With that in mind, eating clean and clocking in 2500 calories a day is always a challenge. Increase fat intake, get your daily minimum of required protein, and carbs are your friend.

Cutting down carbs (high glycemic carbs) can be a problem, especially when the workload is immense. If the goal is to cut weight, low glycemic carbs in the morning while eating higher glycemic carbs at night when you are more insulin sensitive and when most people roll will keep you on the fat loss track. It will help you have constant energy throughout your trainings. The 80/20 rule could be easily applied here.

Add strength training

No, being strong is not a flaw. In fact, being strong should be seen as a sign of health. Being strong means strong and healthy joints. Yes, using strength over technique is never a good idea, I agree. But being man handled by a higher belt, strength is the only thing you have to survive. Strength training should be seen as a way to prevent injuries and longevity. Grip strength is one if not the most important aspect of bjj and grappling sports. It is also correlated with longevity.

It can be highly predictive of functional limitations and years of disability. "Physicians or other health care professionals can measure grip strength to identify patients with serious conditions such as heart failure or other heart conditions who have a particularly high risk of dying from their disease," says Dr. Dr. Darryl Leong, Researcher and Assistant Professor of Medicine at McMaster University Michael G. of Medicine and Cardiology.

Based on their study of 140,000 adults aged between 35-70 years and followed over a 4-year period in 17 countries, the results revealed that for every 5 kilograms (11 pounds) drop in grip strength, one in six had an increased risk of death from any cause[i].

You can use different implements for pullups such as this one. The globe from Rogue fitness. Extremely hard way to increase your pullup strength, but pays big in competition.

Include some rest days.

“When you rest, your opponent is getting stronger” or “I’ll rest when I am dead” type of sayings is not to be taken lightly. If can’t calm the body down, your nervous system will break down. Not today, or next month, but it will eventually. This is called accumulation. If you don’t let the body rest and regenerate, how can you expect improvements?

This is where a well thought out plan comes in handy. Alternating phases of accumulation, intensification and tapering to maximize all these hours spent in the gym and on the mats.

The taper phase is used to reduce the negative physiological and psychological impact accumulated from the daily beatings and trainings. If done properly, it will eliminate residual fatigue and the outcome is an improvement in performance.

Gain muscle mass

Yes, this goes contrary to popular belief.

Which one of these is true?

- a. Gaining mass will make you slower.
- b. You’ll be less flexible.
- c. You will gas out faster.

If you guessed A or/and B, your wrong. While A is a myth, most people think that they can gain an incredible amount of lean muscle mass in a matter of weeks, it just doesn’t work that way. If you chose C, you are on the right track. You need to get used to these new gains. Since it is a metabolically active tissue, it increases the demand on the metabolism. It needs a little getting used to, but it is well worth the effort. I often see guys going up a weight class but most think it’s a free pass to eat more junk. Gaining muscle is a tougher challenge, I agree. But gaining fat, as easy (and fun) as it can be, is a big mistake. Gaining fat promotes inflammatory processes in the body and can have a negative impact on hormones, especially testosterone. If you are looking to go up a weight class, gain muscles, not fat. Assess body composition to avoid this mistake.

With the amount of energy expenditure involved in BJJ, it’s good if you can gain a solid pound of muscle a month, yes, A MONTH! Keeping it is even a bigger challenge. You have to eat a ton of food, especially protein to gain a fair amount of muscle, every day, without fail. You also have to maximize recuperation, which means sleeping a good 8 hours a night, uninterrupted, have little to no stress in daily life, and have no digestive issues whatsoever. You’ll also have to strength train a good 3-4 days a week.

Sounds easy right?

So then, having a plan seems like the best idea right? Although maintaining all these great habits seem impossible or a dream for most of us, you can still fit in decent amounts of workouts into your busy weeks.

I'm a big believer in trying to find how little you can do to get the maximum results. Most people kill themselves every workout only to stop after a few months because they have no more energy and a boat load of injuries. Slow and steady for the best sustainable gains, I'm all in. In order to do so, use tools that give you the most bang for your bucks, as in compound lifts. Here is a 2 days sample program anybody can use with minimal equipment.

In strength and conditioning, there are many types of strength and hypertrophy. For the purpose of the sport, I use functional hypertrophy. It is the perfect mixture of strength training, which can also dig into hypertrophy. In this case, the goal is to make the muscle grow in a way that will enhance performance. You want to gain lean muscles primarily for injury prevention, but also gain strength to pull, push and be able to be explosive when you need it the most.

Day 1

Seq	exercise	Sets	Reps	Tempo	Rest (sec)
A1	Pullups neutral grip	5	5	40x0	60
A2	BB back squats	5	5	4010	120
B1	Seated row to neck with rope	4	8	4010	30
B2	Swiss ball neck bridges	4	5	1410 (iso bridge)	90

Day 2

Seq	ex	Sets	Reps	Tempo	Rest (sec)
A1	Flat close grip tricep press	5	5	4010	60
A2	Barbell deadlifts pronated grip	5	5	4010	120
B1	Standing barbell front press	4	8	4010	30

One common question that I often get is; how can you make sure you are using the right weight. If the goal is to do 5 reps, obviously, the weight should be heavy enough that you can't do more than 5 reps.

However, remember that you have 5 sets to do. Wise is the one who leaves a few reps in the tank, but trying to reach the 5 rep max on the last set. The first 3 sets should gradually warm you up for the last two hard sets. The goal is to break the score on fifth set. Do this every week and you'll get constant progression.

Enjoy the workout!

Coach Eric