

13. A Note on Rank, Promotions, and Competitions *by Master Rickson Gracie*

At the original Gracie Academy, run by my father and my Uncle Carlos in Rio de Janeiro, there were only three belt ranks: students wore the white belt, instructors wore a dark blue belt, and those training to become instructors wore a light blue belt.

When my father and other masters of the time formed the Jiu-Jitsu Federation of Guanabara in 1967, it was with the intention to make Jiu-Jitsu a recognized sport, with formalized rules for competition. As part of this effort, this panel of masters created the belt system with which modern practitioners are familiar. This belt system was created to ensure that practitioners were competing against opponents of a comparable skill and training experience. In other words, these belts were created expressly for the purpose of organizing competitions of "Jiu-Jitsu vs. Jiu-Jitsu," and had nothing to do with the study or practice of the core art of self defense against an untrained aggressor.

Nowadays, most if not all Jiu-Jitsu schools use this belt system, and likewise organize most if not all of their classes and training around the study and practice of what works in a "Jiu-Jitsu vs. Jiu-Jitsu" contest. This is a great practice, and one to which I have dedicated a lot of my life. Moreover, I fully expect that RGU Affiliates will continue this type of practice and training, and continue to offer it to students who love it—and to students who, having completed the course of study outlined in the Level I Instructor Certification, discover that they want more from their Jiu-Jitsu practice. However, as I have said, the mission of Rickson Gracie United is to preserve and spread the core art of Invisible Jiu-Jitsu to students of every level—especially those not being served by the current model. The course material and curriculum outlined in the Level I Instructor Certification are designed with this objective—and only this objective—in mind. Accordingly, the question of rank and ranking standards—which pertain only to this more advanced practice of Jiu-Jitsu vs. Jiu-Jitsu—falls outside the scope of my current focus and concern. Affiliate student promotions must therefore be left to the discretion of individual affiliate instructors.

Likewise, for this reason, it is inappropriate for any student's rank to be considered a "Rickson Gracie United" rank, or representative of "Rickson Gracie United's" standards, or my personal standards. All rank given must therefore also be considered to be under the auspices of the awarding Instructor and his or her club, school, or academy, and not "Rickson Gracie United." Any certificate awarded or other documentation created or presented along with the belt promotion itself should reflect this, naming only the club, school, or academy and the awarding instructor(s), and not "Rickson Gracie United."

Similarly, while I fully support any affiliate or sub-affiliate instructor(s) and/or affiliate or sub-affiliate students who want to engage in competitions, it must be understood that Rickson Gracie United is not a competition team. While I believe with all my heart that the principles we will explore, develop, and share in this endeavor—strategy, base, weight distribution, connection, leverage, timing, and distance—form the basis of effectiveness in any situation, whether that be a street fight or a Jiu-Jitsu competition match, our focus will not be on the modern competition game, and the specific moves, countermoves, strategies, and counter-strategies required to give the best chance of success. This development must necessarily occur within the further "Jiu-Jitsu vs. Jiu-Jitsu" training that each club, school, or academy conducts with students who enjoy that part of the practice. Accordingly, it is my feeling that any club, school, or academy representatives wishing to enter a competition should do so under that club, school, or academy's name only, without the "Rickson Gracie United" descriptor.

Notwithstanding the above, I recommend that all Rickson Gracie United Affiliates follow the general ranking guidelines I previously outlined in the JJGF articles when awarding rank to their students. These include the following:

- *A student must be at least 16 years of age to receive the rank of blue belt.*
- *A student must be at least 17.5 years of age to receive the rank of*

brown belt.

- *A student must be at least 18 years of age to receive the rank of black belt.*
- *Black belts who compete but do not teach wear a black belt with a white bar.*
- *Black belts who teach, and who are in the process of becoming full instructors, wear a black belt with a red bar.*
- *Black belts who have completed their instructor apprenticeship wear a red bar with a white border at each end (Professor rank).*
- *Only black belts who 1) have achieved the rank of Professor and 2) are actively involved in teaching and/or service to the art earn degrees. Degrees occur on the following timeline:*
 - *1st degree - 3 years as a Professor*
 - *2nd degree - 6 years as a Professor (3 years between degrees)*
 - *3rd degree - 9 years as a Professor (3 years between degrees)*
 - *4th degree - 14 years as a Professor (5 years between degrees)*
 - *5th degree - 19 years as a Professor (5 years between degrees)*
 - *6th degree - 24 years as a Professor (5 years between degrees)*
 - *7th degree (coral belt) - 31 years as a Professor (7 years between degrees)*
 - *8th degree (coral belt) - 38 years as a professor (7 years between degrees)*
 - *9th degree (red belt) - 48 years as a professor (10 years between degrees)*
- *A Professor must have 2 degrees to award a black belt.*
- *A Professor can promote up to 1 degree below their current rank.*

Additionally, it is envisioned that senior members of Rickson Gracie United (members of the Board of Advisors, Proctors, and Certified Instructors) will take responsibility for the promotion of junior affiliate heads as needed. This includes both junior black belt, as well as colored belt, Certified Instructors and affiliate heads.