

**Tang Soo Do Karate Center**  
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**Grappling: Understanding Its Strengths and Weaknesses**



*Every few years, there arises on the martial arts scene the “next big thing” the “Ultimate martial art.” It probably will never stop. It wasn’t until the first UFC that the entire martial arts community recognized the value of grappling skills. Also, since the first UFC, grappling has been promoted by many as the “end all be all” of fighting. I have the greatest respect for the toughness, skills and physical conditioning of these athletes and one can not discount the value of such training. Not only can it provide martial artists with control and submission techniques, but it aids in the development of stamina and body mechanics and at*

*the same time reduces the fear of confronting an aggressor at close range. I am all for this type of training in the proper perspective.*

However, the message I was seeing is “This is the ultimate fighting tool and the answer to violent confrontations in the street.” It is extremely important to recognize some of the dangers associated with grappling in the street. Anyone promoting grappling as the end all to street encounters is failing to recognize many problems associated with the real world of the street. Let’s examine some of the risks created by grappling in the street.

At close range, biting becomes a serious threat. With the increase in blood borne pathogens and other airborne infectious diseases, it takes a foolish soul to want to get all wrapped up with the type of slime you might encounter in the street. HIV / AIDS,

Hepatitis B and C are just a few of the dangers of being bitten. Even discounting these lethal possibilities, the human mouth is germ laden. Almost any bite will result in an infection regardless of how well it is cleaned. The law enforcement community has had some serious encounters with biters. They found that it is not easy to dislodge a secure bite. So in addition to germ transmission, we are often confronted with surgery to reconstruct damage to tissue, bone, tendons and ligaments. Now back to grappling. The response I was given by a grappling advocate to a question about being bitten was twofold. First, anyone who engages in combat knows it can be dangerous. My response, "Do we want to make it more dangerous?" Second, if he bites me, then I will disengage. Isn't it a little late after the damage is done? Besides losing a piece of my body, I run the risk of getting some infectious disease. As mentioned, any human mouth contains a laundry list of bacteria that can easily and seriously infect a wound. Who needs it?

It is also widely known that concealed weapons, particularly bladed ones, are on the rise. There is a well developed knife subculture in this country. With the increased interest in weapon arts i.e. Arnis, Kali, Escrima, Ninjitsu and others etc., we are seeing some of the most creative weapons coming from the strangest places. Spring loaded knives, balisongs, spikes and dirks are only some of the dozens of popular and easily concealed weapons being sold commercially, not to mention many creative homemade applications. Some gang members carry a single edged razor blade in their mouths. The razor blade would be used against anyone they engage at grappling range. Another problem, drug addicts often carry hypodermic needles; getting stabbed with a contaminated needle is possible during an encounter and could result in getting the HIV virus or hepatitis. In addition to some of the problems mentioned, eye gouging, groin grabs, pressure points and head butts are other problems encountered at close quarters.

Another very serious situation I associate with grappling is one involving multiple attackers. Getting all tied up with one subject will make it difficult to see another attacker approach and equally difficult to defend against. Usually when dealing with one offender, tunnelvision, a narrowing of the field of vision, often occurs. This would allow a second offender to approach without notice. Even if the danger was seen, it might be impossible to disengage quickly enough to deal with it.

Additionally, some concern must also be given to the surface upon which you find yourself. A mat or carpet is great for training but seldom found in the street. You are far more likely to be rolling on rocks, glass or garbage and cement is very unforgiving.

Balance in martial arts should be the goal. Being able to fight at different ranges is important. For the street, I see grappling as another tool that would be

helpful provided that a grappling encounter has occurred and no other choice is available at the time. However, I see it as foolhardy for anyone to intentionally enter a grappling situation to subdue or control someone when other means of control are available.