

USA 2009: A Collection of Thoughts on Spartanburg



~ Joanna Yu, 1st kyu, Canada~

I'm over the top happy that I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the Jitsu International Course this summer. I loved every single second of it and would like to share a few of the many many many highlights that I experienced over the four days.



Training with kids for the first time was inspiring. Their enthusiasm, skill, full commitment to techniques, and attitude amazed me. Some were only 7 years old, but they were fierce. There is something to be said about literally making full use of the small cozy seminar rooms. What I mean by this, is using the walls as an additional weakening technique once you have control of your attacker and their weapon. More specifically, grab your attacker by the mastoids to get them on their tip toes so you can then force them to have a 'run/slam-in' with the wall. Of course put an end to the attack by disarming the weapon.

The amount of 'new' material I learned in just 4 days. So many 'new' things to think about and play with in the years to come. Just hope I can remember it all. While keeping a Jiu Jitsu diary is a great idea, sometimes it is hard to write it all down.

Overall I would describe the whole experience as the best summer camp ever! And as such I would like to extend a big thank you to all those who helped organize the event. I am already looking forward to the next International event 3 years from now.



~ Kia Dunn, 1st kyu, Canada ~

Looking back at the international course, I am sure that I speak for everyone when I say that we participated in something great; not just because of the coming together of several continents of Jiu Jitsu, or the diversity of the instructors and what they imparted or even the revelry, the singing, or the small conversations to be had late at night, but rather because of the great diversity of individual experiences. Yes the event as a whole had many great moments, but perhaps even more meaningfully, each individual had their own very unique experience and from those I've spoken with after the fact, the time spent has had a subtle though profound impact on them and how they feel about and see their lives and the world.

There was a moment on the third day where as I looked around the room at everyone training I saw not just a room full of Jiu-jitsuka but a room full of very different people, present and tied together at that moment, but coming from so many different backgrounds and lives that it became hard to imagine us all finding our way to this one place and time. Therein, I feel, lies the importance of the event; that each of us brought something to the event, shared it, and at the end we all left with a little of everyone else and we couldn't help but see ourselves a little differently. And to see this diversity, and to trace it all back to a small club in Keighley, West Yorkshire, England, it becomes difficult, though inspiring, to imagine it coming full circle to the international reunion. It served as a reminder for me that such small unassuming beginnings can grow to become something no one present at the time of its inception would have likely imagined or intended.



Having realized this however it occurred to me that for all the experiences we were taking part in, it would be too easy to miss another element of internationals that, in my view, has even more profound implications. There was a whole other context taking place between all of the Juniors present. Imagining myself as a child I could only picture myself being awed, intimidated and perhaps even alienated by the prospect of taking part in such an event, but the more I looked the more I realized they were none of these things; they were comfortable, this was normal for them, it was part of their lives. And it was at that moment that I realized the immense contribution that Jiu Jitsu can make and the potential that it has.



Having seen the level of discipline, dedication and spirit as well as comradery and respectfulness displayed by the Junior element at internationals, I can only think of how much better the world would be with more people like them in it. Frankly, I've never met more pleasant people. I saw father and son, brother and sister training together, generations bridged on the mats. It had been my impression that it was almost prohibitively difficult to both have a family and remain dedicated to Jiu Jitsu. People get married, have children and grow out of Jiu Jitsu, and while I don't claim to completely understand the phenomenon, I can't help but

feel that people see Jiu Jitsu as something specifically related to their young adult years and as such it's only for young adults, and perhaps those select older few who are either too stubborn or crazy to stop. But the internationals showed me that family and Jiu Jitsu are not at opposed, quite the contrary.

Just as there is life after Shodan and a whole other set of challenges and opportunities for growth, there is likewise a role and place for Jiu Jitsu prior to our adult years. Each of the three phases play very different roles in people's lives, but each is nonetheless important in their own way. They showed me that Jiu Jitsu isn't just a bunch of university kids beating each other up while they get their degree and maybe getting a black belt, it can also be about family and it can become a part of your entire life. This whole experience has also given me a great many hopes for juniors program we have now, and being able to spend time with some of the juniors and speak with people who had been running juniors clubs for many years has allowed me to see a larger picture for the program.

Now, while that might be a topic for another letter, I will finish by saying this: I have just finished teaching the first Junior session of the new school year and, for the first time, I thought to myself, "this isn't just a junior class, this is Youth Jitsu Canada," and personally I can't wait to see what that phrase comes to represent.



~ Katie Lin, 6th kyu, Canada ~

One of the most empowering and beautiful aspects of Jiu Jitsu is the fact that it is not bound by the physical limitations of strength or stature. This is evidenced by the impressive displays of grace and technique from some of the smallest of Jiu-jitsuka at this year's Jitsu Internationals: the Junior participants.

In addition to the various adult contingents in attendance at this year's Jitsu Internationals, the conference also saw the participation of Junior Jiu-jitsuka from both the United Kingdom as well as the host city of Spartanburg. Junior representatives not only had the opportunity to train in all of the seminars and group sessions offered by various sensei from around the world, but they also had the chance to challenge themselves in a demonstrative competition towards the end of the conference. For many Canadian Jiu-jitsuka, it was a novel experience to train with and meet Junior Jiu-jitsuka for the first time. Despite their small sizes, the Juniors quickly proved themselves to be some of the fiercest and most adept participants on the mats, taking on larger opponents and tackling complex techniques with unflinching enthusiasm. Not only was it inspiring to see so many dedicated, determined, and disciplined youth training side by side with their adult counterparts on the mats, but it was also incredibly humbling.

Humbling because the Juniors threw themselves wholeheartedly into their training. Humbling because of the sheer amount of energy that they brought to the conference. But most of all, humbling because it was clear to see that they had already mastered a concept that, for some of us, takes years and years of training to understand: that you are only limited by your size if you allow yourself to be. And these Juniors certainly allowed no such thing.