



# BLACK BELT®

## World's Leading Magazine of Self-Defense

### Helio Gracie: Your Thoughts on the Brazilian *Jiu-Jitsu* Founder's Life, Art and Legacy

By Raymond Horwitz

We recently asked you, the readers of *Black Belt* magazine and visitors to [blackbeltmag.com](http://blackbeltmag.com), to share your thoughts regarding the recent passing of **Brazilian jiu-jitsu** founder **Helio Gracie**.

The questions included:

What are your thoughts regarding the recent passing of Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* founder Helio Gracie?

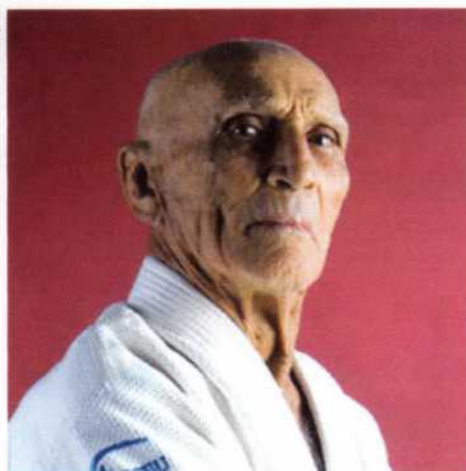
Will Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* change? If yes, then how?

What was Gracie's impact on the martial arts world?

If you are a martial artist, did his philosophies influence your training?

What will his legacy be and how will the Gracie family adapt to the passing of their patriarch?

How does he rank among the major sports figures in history?



Helio Gracie  
(Photo by Rick Husted)

Among the responses were a variety of themes, but one emerged as a constant: Helio Gracie was a force to be reckoned with on a scale larger than the mats upon which students around the world have toiled in pursuit of technical and artistic excellence.

He was an innovator, a teacher, a father and a leader. His legacy, as many of you have said, will thrive in the students and teachers he influenced during his fruitful 95 years of life.

We continue to receive comments from readers across the United States and around the world, and we welcome yours for possible publication in a future issue of *Black Belt*.

In the weeks ahead, [blackbeltmag.com](http://blackbeltmag.com) will be presenting several pieces from the archives of *Black Belt*, and *Karate/Kung Fu Illustrated*, as well as the book ***The Ultimate Guide to Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu***.

In the meantime, we are proud to present a sampling of the responses we've received from you since Gracie's passing on January 29, 2009.

You can read more about **Helio Gracie**, martial artists influenced by his teachings, the Gracie family and the art of Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* by clicking on the links featured at the end of this collection.

—R.H.

### Permanent Presence

No, Gracie *jiu-jitsu* will not change! The sons and grandsons/daughters will keep everything the way that grandmaster Helio Gracie wanted it to be. [Gracie jiu-jitsu] showed that you must have a complete martial art that addresses all aspects of self-defense.

Being a martial artist, [I think that] anyone who can change the way someone looks at martial arts can and will influence all training.

Helio Gracie already has his legacy etched in the martial arts world.

With [his] passing, the Gracie family will be celebrating life, as he wanted it. [He] is still alive because his teachings will always be here.

[Gracie] ranks right up there alongside **Bruce Lee**. These two men have forever changed the way martial artists train and look at pure self-defense. Only once in a lifetime [do men] come along [who] truly understand what martial arts really mean.

Bruce Lee and Helio Gracie are the only two men [with open minds] to break away from traditions and fully grasp what martial arts really [are about]: self-defense, not sport!

Jeff Sterner  
Streator, IL

### The Next Level

Helio Gracie was a person who took a grappling system and brought it to the forefront [of martial arts]. He made martial artists from all types of styles realize how important it is to understand the science behind ground fighting. [In fact, he] was my reason for exploring and incorporating ground fighting into my arsenal, and for taking my kung fu *san soo* training and teaching to another level.

Diego G. Cisneros  
Grand Terrace, CA

### A System for the Street

Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* was changing while Helio Gracie was still alive. He showed the world [the] true reality of street fights. Ninety percent of street fights go to the ground. His philosophies of ground combat influenced me to practice jiu-jitsu and grappling in general.

Helio Gracie's legacy is that he is the founder of one of the most effective martial art in the world. The Gracie family might adapt to his passing by having the oldest Gracie brother become grandmaster, but they [should have] Helio known as *sensei*. He should be ranked [as one of the] top 10 grandmasters.

Luke Austin  
Texas

### Fuel for the Fire

I think that the martial art will be the same, but its practitioners will train with a more fierce fire in them.

Helio Gracie's impact on the martial arts world [was] great. He ranks with the [likes] of Bruce Lee. He was the only 10th-degree [black belt], and he will be missed.

His legacy will live on in his students and martial artists everywhere.

Cam  
via the Internet

### An Art for the Everyman

Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* will change and evolve just as every other martial art has. Adaptability is important to any art's development and growth. However, the core and principles of Gracie jiu-jitsu will remain as [they are].

The core of the art stresses leverage and strategy over brute strength. Gracie jiu-jitsu is a martial art that allows a smaller individual to defeat a larger individual. It was developed for the average person to use effectively when needed.

**HELIO GRACIE**  
**(1913 - 2009)**

Born October 1, 1913, Helio Gracie was the patriarch of the Gracie clan and was responsible

Helio Gracie's impact on the martial arts world cannot be overstated. He made all of us evaluate our own styles and showed the effectiveness and importance of ground fighting and scientific principles. In addition, Helio Gracie stressed a holistic lifestyle that included good nutrition through the Gracie diet. The results [were] evident by his good health and longevity.

Gracie's legacy will be enhancing jiu-jitsu to the level where virtually anyone, when taught correctly, can use it in a time of need. He will also be remembered as someone who stressed a healthy lifestyle and promoted good nutrition through the Gracie diet. [He] was a true master in the martial arts who will be missed.

It will be an interesting time for the Gracie family. Each brother is a true master in jiu-jitsu, and each can teach the art effectively. **Rorion Gracie**, the oldest son, will be the head of the clan, but his brothers will continue having a big impact on the art. In addition, I believe that each will teach and spread the art in the manner that Helio would have wished.

Helio Gracie ranks among the top sports figures in history. His development of the art, his legendary matches, his [promotion of] good nutrition, and his philosophy [regarding] his art and life rank him among the true legends.

Peter Pappas  
via the internet

### The Tradition Will Endure

No, [Brazilian *jiu-jitsu*] will not change. It has been [a] transition since the Gracies first made their mark.

The Gracie family made us see the importance of ground fighting and grappling, which had lost popularity for some time.

Helio had no influence on my personal training as a martial artist. I was a **judo** player for many years before BJJ came to America. BJJ is just a version of *newaza*-style judo.

Helio was a skillful martial artist, but his athleticism was never so great that he should be considered a major sports figure.

Name withheld

### Devotion, Discipline and Dedication

Yeah, absolutely [Brazilian *jiu-jitsu*] will change. It will be (and I mean as a "style" and not as a "one all dominant art") refocused as an art where the "average little man" will have a chance to prevail—much like Helio Gracie envisioned.

It's [for his] devotion, discipline and dedication that Gracie will always be remembered and revered. He proved that you don't have to be the strongest or fastest, or even the youngest, to be passionate—not just about the martial arts but [about] life, as well.

His philosophies on leveraging, patience and "using the opponent's mistakes," as well as the Gracie diet, have greatly affected every facet of fighting and training for martial artists.

He will no doubt be ranked among the legends and pioneers of the martial arts world—and soon enough, the whole sports community will discover his contributions to the world.

Onward to all genuine and sincere martial artists!

Jecho Asprec

### The Final Word ...

I feel very sorry for the whole family. I recently lost my father, so I know how they must be feeling.

Brazilian jiu-itsu will not change [because] Helio's seeds have already been sown and his legacy will carry on.

The whole martial arts scene owes a debt of gratitude to the Gracie family [because] they have [rejuvenated] every art. Nothing is taken for granted anymore.

for transforming the Japanese **jujutsu** taught by Esai Maeda into the Brazilian *jiu-jitsu* taught today by Gracie family members.

He based all the techniques on leverage instead of power because he was a relatively small man. He was also noted for winning countless challenge matches, one of which went on nonstop for nearly four hours.

Gracie, who continued teaching jiu-jitsu seminars and giving demonstrations in his hometown of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, right on into his latest years, fathered nine children.

In 1997, he was inducted into the *Black Belt Hall of Fame* as Man of the Year.

He passed away on January 29, 2009, in Rio de Janeiro.

(Excerpted in part from an in-depth *Hall of Fame* profile by Steve Neklia that was originally published in the 1997 *Black Belt Yearbook*.)

—R.H.

Helio Gracie is a legend. Enough said.

Steve Kelly  
United Kingdom

**Return to** <http://www.blackbeltmag.com/archives/745>.