

Matt Thornton... still flying the

ALIVENESS

Banner!

Matt Thornton is just, like, this normal guy. I mean, don't get me wrong. He's a black belt in Brazilian jiu jitsu and probably the most skilled instructor I've ever encountered. He's been training in martial arts for over 20 years. And he is the genius behind Straight Blast Gym International (SBGi) (www.straightblastgym.com), a highly underrated organization with some of the most sought-after coaches in mixed martial arts.

The training methodology at Straight Blast Gym is top-tier. It is Brazilian jiu jitsu, boxing, wrestling and more, stripped down to its most basic elements and put together in a way that is simple to learn, follow and eventually master. You won't find any fancy new variations of moves that won't work in real time. Everything is tested against live, resisting opponents to see if it really works. There are no rituals and there is no hierarchy.

Having visited and trained at three Straight Blast Gym affiliates, I've been quite impressed with the level of respect and professionalism of SBGi coaches and students. I've quit more than my fair share of MMA gyms due to various forms of weirdness, but I know I can feel comfortable at Straight Blast and that the vibe is generally healthy and fun.

So what is it that makes SBGi so good? Is it the coaches? The training methodology? The instructional methods? The people involved? Some combination of all of these? I thought I'd ask Matt Thornton some questions to get to the root of it... and also to try to figure out who he is and what he's about.

•••ABOUT MATT

Can you tell us a little about your own coaches and how you got started? How and when did you start your gym?

I first started with boxing, and when I left the military I wanted to start boxing on a regular basis. That's when I ran across a guy who had been a JKD (Jeet Kune Do) student, and I was intrigued at the time because they used boxing hands. So I found a JKD Instructor in my area whose name

was Mike Patke. He was my first introduction to JKD. When I moved to Portland, Oregon I wanted to continue JKD training, and I ran into an Inosanto instructor. We became friends and I helped him teach classes for a couple of years. It didn't take long before I found myself questioning the validity of a good deal of what was being taught, how it was being taught, and even the core philosophy behind it all. So much of it was based on fantasy, posturing, and hypocrisy. It was during that time that I met Fabio Santos, and then later Rickson Gracie, and that just validated and confirmed the direction I knew I needed to go in.

So I was taking privates with Fabio, and I had met Rickson, and I realized I just needed to do my own thing. The entire JKD culture was all a bit weird, and certainly backwards at least as it related to functional training. But I didn't want to compete directly with my former partner, even though we were no longer friends. So I opened my first club in a very tiny location about 30 minutes south in a town called Salem, Oregon. I shared the rent with a local Judo instructor.

After I opened my first gym in Salem, we

had Rickson up a couple of times. After that, I traveled to LA for Rickson's tournament where I competed as a blue belt. And while I was there I met Chris Haueter.

Chris and I hit it off really well. Though I trained with many different fighters, wrestlers, coaches, and black belts over the years, Chris was always my main BJJ coach. I received my purple, brown and black belts from him.

What were your biggest challenges at the time?

Those were all primarily financial. I had two small boys and a wife to support. I was working full time, then driving an hour a day, doing all the phone calls, sign-ups, teaching all the classes, etc. This went on for quite some time. And all during this phase, those from the old JKD community I knew were all telling me how sure they were I would not be successful because nobody wanted to train like I was

suggesting. Nobody wanted to spar, or train alive. That was all crazy talk. People wanted to click sticks together, memorize patterns, get certificates they could trace back to former movie stars, and all that stuff.

I am proud I decided to ignore that advice



and follow what my own heart was telling me to do. It's been a fantastic journey due to that.

Who are your favorite fighters outside of your gym?

Outside of those related to SBGi in some way, I have always been a fan of Murillo Bustamante. He always appeared as a class act, and his BJJ, clinch, and stand up was always very skillful... and well ahead of his time in my opinion.

•••ABOUT STRAIGHT BLAST GYM

What would you consider the core values of SBGi?

That is hard to say because SBGi is really an organization of unique individuals. But if I had to say what we shared in common, the desire to train alive would top the list. I don't think any of the SBGi coaches would teach a dead pattern in their gym, even if they knew they could make money from it. And secondly, I would say authenticity. We have a group of people who are very open and honest about who they are. There is not a lot of pretense, and schemers really aren't rewarded here. People who like to use strategy or manipulation as a means of "networking" or other such phony things don't really stay part of the group. They just don't fit in.

For the readers who are unfamiliar with SBGi methodology, can you explain the difference between "aliveness" and a "dead pattern?"

Aliveness is something that incorporates timing, energy, and motion. A dead pattern is a choreographed routine. It may look cool, but it has no relationship to anything that will translate to a resisting opponent. Most martial arts are taught through dead patterns. Most sports train alive. The nature of sports demands a certain level of reality that weeds out most of the fantasy based traditional martial arts.

Can you name some pro fighters that came out of SBGi? For example, I heard Forrest Griffin started at what used to be an SBGi affiliate. Are there any others?

Yes, Forrest was a longtime student of Adam Singer. I gave Forrest a purple belt probably six or seven years ago. There have been a ton of fighters come through our door, and a lot of people who got their start with SBG. I don't want to start naming a list, but those who have been around the scene since the start, or who are

familiar with us up here in Oregon know how long we have been out there with the sport, and where people come from.

How has SBGi evolved over the years?

I think the organization has matured as its coaches have matured. I started SBGi in my 20s. Now I have two teenage sons, a large gym, and a lot of friends I care deeply about. And so my priorities, what I tend to value, have changed a bit over the years. I think that is the case with all the SBGi coaches. As we mature, those around us tend to mature as well. Or they move on, and others who we have more in common with now come into the picture. I think it's been a healthy journey with SBGi. And now we are in a good position to let the younger generation take over, and we can guide them along the way as needed.

SBGi has produced and worked with some world class MMA fighters over the years. Is there anyone coming up who we may want to look for in the future?

Oh yes, there is a whole flock of them. I don't want to start naming too many names because I know I will miss a lot of athletes. But keep an eye on Aisling Daly <http://www.fightergirls.com/news.asp?ID=187> from John Kavanagh's gym <http://www.sbgireland.com>. She is one of the top female MMA prospects right now. Rosi Sexton <http://rosisexton.wordpress.com/> is of course still going strong, and just signed a very big contract. And from Iceland I think everyone should look out for Gunnar Nelson. He is a prodigy for sure.

At my own gym, keep an eye out for Rick Davison who will be going pro soon. We also have a newcomer who has less than a year of training so far, but who will most likely be taking the steps into the pro ranks shortly, and that is Hamilton Ash. He is another prodigy that seems pretty unstoppable right now. In fact, our whole Portland team looks strong right now.

This next generation is so far ahead of the last one, and light years ahead of where I was when we started this whole thing a decade or so ago. There really isn't even a comparison to be made. It's pretty incredible to me.

Where do you see SBGi headed in the future?

Well, we will continue to grow at a slow

and organic rate. This organization is about quality, not quantity. I am not in a rush to add locations, or coaches. Instead I am focusing on the coaches we already have, and on producing the best athletes we can. Along the way, the organization will continue to evolve and mature. And as long as I am part of it, that is a process that will occur in a healthy and natural way, in a manner that exceeds my own limited ability to plan, or anyone else's attempts to scheme, or goal set. So in that sense, I will be just as interested to see where it takes us as everyone else will be.

•••RUMOR CONTROL

Have you ever had to ask anyone to leave your gym?

That has only happened a few times. In my own gym, I can only remember having to do that twice. Once, maybe twelve years ago, we had a student that was rolling with a coach and he bit him. He was asked to leave. And on another occasion several years ago we had an older male student who made an inappropriate sexual comment to a female student. And I asked him to leave immediately as well. That is the kind of thing I have zero patience for. There may have been other instances, but those are the only two occasions I can remember at my own gym right now.

It has been my experience that I don't usually need to police my gym this way, or even the other gyms within SBGi, because people we wouldn't want around tend to weed themselves out very quickly. I can think of maybe one other instance where I wish I had asked a coach to leave SBGi, because he was a bit of a bully. But even in this case the guy wound up leaving to do his own thing anyway.

I know you travel a lot. How often are you at your own gym?

Well, I think a lot of competitors like to spread the myth that I am not in my own gym much. But the truth is I teach every week. I teach beginner classes that anyone can come to, and I roll as much as I can. So anyone training in Portland will get to work with me all the time. I try and organize my travel in such a way as to not conflict much with my class time. And I also spend a lot of time working with the other coaches who teach in Portland.

We also have some other great black and brown belts at the Portland gym. Eric Hemphill is a full time coach with us, and

perhaps the best black belt to ever come out of Oregon (in my opinion). And of course athletes like Rick Davison and others, who are monsters on that mat, are at the gym all the time.

Do you spar with your own students?

Sure, I spar with my students. Primarily I roll nowadays. I love BJJ, and I love rolling. So I try and roll in class as much as I can, so long as it is not taking away from the coaching time the students need. I don't often do MMA with my athletes much anymore. This is because we have a pretty serious pro/am team right now, and I serve the team better coaching the team practice than I do as a body.

In the last few years my priorities have really changed towards being a coach. I want to be there for my athletes and students as much as I can. That means cornering all the fighters, even the first time amateurs. It means my attention during group class is on the students, not on my own game. It means I see myself as a coach and teacher now, and that is where my responsibility is. I still roll, and I still enjoy working on my own game, but my athletes come first.

So, do you really date your students?

No, first of all I am very happily engaged to a very bright and beautiful woman. We are getting married in November. And my family, her and my children are really where I spend all most all of my free time. Secondly, I have always discouraged instructors (or myself) from dating students at our own gym. Of course it has happened on occasion. Some of the former coaches at the gym have met their wives training in Portland. But the main thing is we want to have a facility where everyone feels comfortable. And I never want an attractive woman to feel like she won't be able to train for fear of being hit on constantly. So we are very careful about that. I think we have a really good vibe at the Portland gym, where everyone is comfortable. I have had women visit from other gyms, and they always comment that training in Portland was a positive experience for them, one where they felt welcome. And I am proud of that.

•••TOP SECRET TRAINING SECRETS

Your students seem to go beyond just memorizing positioning and submissions but actually understand how things work

and therefore can solve problems on the mat. How do you teach something like that?

Through alive training. Everything I teach in any class is put into an alive drilling format on the first lesson, so students learn quickly what the reality of actual resisting opponents means. And within that structure I also encourage a lot of critical thinking, analysis and creativity. I believe critical thinking is probably the most neglected thing in society as a whole right now. Functional martial arts provides a great vehicle for people to work through their own thought process.

How do you create the type of atmosphere where students adapt movement patterns to fit their own body types and ultimately develop their own styles?

That is actually quite easy. You just focus on the fundamentals. I teach only the core fundamental movements of BJJ. That doesn't mean there is not a lot of creativity, submissions and all that stuff at my gym. It's going on everywhere. But it does mean that during the group classes I stick with just the roots of the delivery system; things everyone who does BJJ will need to know, things everyone who does BJJ will do in more or less the same mechanical way and things everyone who does BJJ will want to be able to do as a reaction, without conscious thought.

Once the students have that material, they drill it alive, and then with BJJ they start to roll (all on the first day). And through live rolling, over a period of about a decade (give or take a year for most students) they develop their own unique "style." This is the same with boxing, wrestling; any non-fantasy-based martial art. You don't even begin the process of developing your own style until you begin sparring.

It's not the buffet line JKDC method of picking and choosing from various "systems." That is a terrible approach. Rather, it's about getting the core skills from the delivery systems of stand up, clinch, and ground, and then putting in years of alive training and sparring. And only through that process does an individual begin to express their own "style."

You mentioned your focus on fundamentals, something that Straight Blast Gym is known for. What IS a fundamental?

I use a pretty simple three step criteria for a fundamental. First, it's something I think everyone who does the art must know. For example, with BJJ I can't imagine anyone not needing to know an elbow escape. Secondly, it's something most all of us with do almost the same way. In the case of an elbow escape, there are some tricks that may help smaller people, but by and large a 250 lb. man and a 130 lb. woman are still going to execute the movement with more or less the same mechanical structure. And three, it's something that in order to play the game well, you need to do viscerally. It needs to be a reaction, a habit. So you shouldn't have to think "wow, I should be elbow escaping here", you should just find your body does it when it needs to.

And on another occasion several years ago we had an older male student who made an inappropriate sexual comment to a female student. And I asked him to leave immediately as well. That is the kind of thing I have zero patience for.

If something doesn't meet those three criteria, then it's most likely a style specific movement, like rubber guard, a pivot sweep, or a DLR (De La Riva) guard. It may or may not become an essential to a particular athlete's game, but it's not something everyone who does BJJ needs to do really well in order to be good at BJJ.

You have a real gift for breaking down BJJ into specific concepts and organizing them into a structure that others can really learn from. Is this something you've always been able to do or something you've learned from teaching?

Well thank you, I appreciate that. I am not sure where it comes from, but I think the biggest factor is probably just teaching experience. I have been teaching week in week out on a full time basis now for over twelve years. I have taught literally thousands of people. And on top of that, it (coaching/teaching) is a subject that I have a sincere interest in. So throughout the years I think I have modified, added, discarded, and accumulated a lot of ideas and things that have helped me present the material in ways that help others. It's been a process of learning by experience, like everything else.

SBGi borrows from all of the combat arts including boxing, wrestling, BJJ, Greco,

etc. How do you assure that students apply all the aspects that work in their own game while preserving the integrity of each individual style?

What aspect of fighting a student wants to focus on is strictly up to them. Not everyone wants to do MMA. Some people love doing just BJJ. Some people love the clinch, they love Greco, and wrestling, and the Thai clinch. Some people love stand up. Of course they will understand when they come from a gym like mine, that in order to fight in MMA, you need all three ranges (stand up, clinch, and ground). But as I stated, not everyone wants to fight. Some people just want to roll. And that is not just okay, that is in my opinion as it should be.

It is never my job to push people into doing anything. A proper coach is not a salesman. I am here to facilitate whatever direction the student feels compelled to travel. That stated, if they are learning BJJ from me, they will get the entire core art. I don't give out belts easily, and all my brown and black belts know the art of BJJ inside and out. They can train others in gi,

no-gi, self defense or the MMA applications of the delivery system. I ensure that before they ever get to brown. But if they want to coach MMA fighters, then they all understand that they need more. And funny enough, most all of them are really good at those aspects as well. Someone like Karl Tanswell <http://www.karltanswell.co.uk/> for example, he is a solid black belt no doubt. But he also has a great understanding of boxing, clinch, and most of all how it all fits together as one unique delivery system for the sport, which is part of the reason he is one of the world's top MMA coaches right now.

With so many people teaching so many different things, and basically a lack of skepticism that exists in the MMA world (especially when it comes to people being loyal to their coaches), what is a healthy way students could judge the value of ideas or material presented to them?

Well, the martial arts con is like all cons. It requires your willing participation. If you want to believe that there is a silver bullet out there that will allow you to take on two football players, if you want to believe

that a famous 80+ year old kali grandmaster actually picked up a bus using a secret prayer on his body, if you want to believe that the one touch KO, or no touch knock down works, or that something silly like silat, or wing chun, or any of the fantasy-based systems will give you that extra edge, then you have already bitten the bait. And for those people, there really isn't much you can do so long as they willfully choose to keep the scales on their eyes.

But for those looking for the truth, then it's pretty easy to see what's real and what's not. Just test it in an alive environment. And when the teacher, guru, sifu does his cool looking demo, watch the feeder not the demonstrator. If the feeder throws his punch or kick, and just locks it out standing there for the showman to do his 5 strike one and two step routine, then you know it's just a choreographed play.

The beauty of something like BJJ, wrestling, or boxing, is that in the long run being good at them is a lot like being good at Spanish, or playing the guitar. It can't be faked.

My review of Matt's Reno seminar:

Straight Blast Gym continues to exceed my expectations in every aspect. First of all, the instruction is always really top-notch. The focus is on fundamentals, so I always walk away with a lot of techniques I can use right away. This time we worked mostly on guard techniques and some from cross-sides, plus some fun BJJ chokes and some takedowns. But any fundamental at SBGi always is run through the same way. It begins with introduction of a technique, a demonstration and then some practice with no resistance drilling back and forth with a partner. This is followed by isolation drills, one person at a time (for an adequate amount of time) drilling against progressive resistance. This makes it far easier to integrate techniques into my game right away. Most gyms I have been to teach a lot of set-ups which I can never get to work, or they will teach so many techniques all at once that I feel like I really never get any of them, or they will teach a technique for a range we're not even training that way. Not so with Straight Blast.

Another thing that is really cool is that they do not teach techniques and defenses for those techniques at the same time. This means you have time to get the techniques to work on the mat and they will only teach the defense when it comes up as a problem, if that makes sense. Matt wrote about this on his latest blog in far more detail.

There were about 22 participants at first but not everyone signed up for all three days due to work and other obligations. There were a lot of police officers there, which is always nice. But one thing that was particularly cool was that there were a lot of women. I think there were six women total including myself. One of the girls I spent a lot of time working with was a really amazing wrestler. It was a great match-up for me because she had some skill so it was pretty challenging, but didn't have much BJJ so it wasn't impossible, and she was smaller than me which made up for the skill difference. Plus she was feisty and energetic.

I was also super excited to meet Lily Pagle from Modern Combatives in Berkeley. I'd never met a female brown belt before and she was a million times more amazing than I'd imagined. Lily also sells beautiful and comfortable gear -- style with substance (sistas, check out Catfight Gear www.catfightgear.com for t-shirts and custom made gis). The gym was a swirl of colors and patches. There were some other women from the Berkeley affiliate as well, and I got to go to visit afterwards. Watching the coaches there work with kids (they have several kids classes modeled on SBGi VP (and 2003 North American Grappling Association Instructor of the Year) Luis Gutierrez <http://www.onedragon.com/> was just about the most adorable thing I've ever seen.

And you're right, Matt really does have a gift for communication...both in breaking down concepts so they are easily understandable and systematic and also in coaching in a way that is incredibly understandable and also really quick. I'm not sure if it's a natural talent of his or a lot of experience or both, but when he'd correct something with me I was able to pick up on what he was saying within 30 seconds or less. I am a kinesthetic learner and not very visual so I struggle with MMA at times but this was a whole different ball game.

Another thing I love about SBGi is the really smooth vibe. In most gyms I usually have to find the smallest, nicest looking guy in the room and stand next to him so I can immediately ask him to partner with me when it comes time to roll. But at SBGi gyms (I've been to three now) it doesn't matter who you partner with because everyone there is cool. I've never had anybody at SBGi refuse to roll with me except for one guy who was warming up. At other gyms this is a constant problem. I think it's something the coach really needs to address with individuals, but it's not the fight I want to fight so if it happens at a gym and is not addressed I always find somewhere else to go instead. I trained at a gym where I got sat out over and over again for close to a year and it really stinks.

I've also found that SBGi coaches are far more receptive to answering questions--they do not get defensive or rail on you for asking questions. In addition the level of professionalism is the best I've seen in the martial arts world so far. Matt told me he actually kicked someone out of a gym for making an inappropriate comment towards one of the girls that was training there, which I was really impressed by... I don't think most people realize just how prevalent that is and how distracting, inappropriate and creepy it can be. SBGi is definitely the first gym I've felt truly comfortable at, and I think it's really the coaches that set and maintain the tone, and the students that follow suit.

With fantasy based arts you can maintain the illusion of deadly skill forever, provided you never take the step down the path of aliveness.

Why are people so obsessed with belts? Also, do you think the giving of belts has been watered down over the years?

Well, people are interested in the BJJ belts because they actually mean something. A BJJ belt should reference some skill. I actually wrote a long piece about this in the Aliveness BLOG:

<http://aliveness101.blogspot.com/2006/03/about-belts.html>

Also, as a society we are conditioned to receive validation from outside sources. Our whole school system is based on that. So I think the best approach with the BJJ belts is to address it head on, as I did in that article.

As far as standards, honestly I don't really concern myself with anyone else's standard. My only concern is the SBGi standard. And everyone knows that our standards for belts in BJJ are very high. That's self evident from our athletes. Anyone can walk in my gym and roll with our purples and our browns, or with the belts in the UK, Ireland, East Coast, wherever. I am proud of the standard we have kept throughout all the SBGs. And I maintain that by keeping very high standards for my students, which I then encourage them to follow as they grow into giving out their own BJJ belts. And I try and start mentoring my brown belts on the hows and whys of different belts, in order to prepare them for being black belts themselves. So far it's worked well.

•••SBGi'S VIBE IS, LIKE, TOTALLY GROOVY

One thing I noticed when I spent a week visiting the Portland gym (and other SBGi affiliates) was the distinct lack of machismo and made-up street fight stories... I also noticed that people asked a lot of questions and were actively participating. What do you do to create the type of atmosphere where this takes place?

I think that's just a gym culture thing. I think that the people who have been with me for more than 8 years or so at my own

gym all have certain traits in common. None of them are the type of people who are going to sit around and talk about street fights, or act like fools with their hats on crooked or anything like that. And since these people are also the best fighters and coaches in my gym, they tend to be the natural role models for the younger students. So the goofy kind of immature MMA stereotype just doesn't survive in my gym. Nobody would respect it.

How do you create a positive atmosphere in a gym in which people work well together when so many people attracted to MMA are jerks?

Well I think it just goes back to the overall gym culture I mentioned earlier. I have not had that experience because I actually like every single person in my gym. Now granted, we don't sign up 40 people a day who just want the image that is being pimped to them as "cool." To a degree I see that you do have a very silly adolescent image of what masculinity is about being sold to kids today within the MMA world. It makes money by pushing fear. But as I stated, if your top athletes don't conform to that childlike posture, then the younger realize it's actually not considered "cool" within our culture. And those that are stuck to it drop off and sign up at the gyms where that kind of thing is exploited.

The image of being someone who trains and actually being someone who trains are two very different things. There are people

stereotype which is based on a fairly simplistic jock image and one which is designed to appeal to adolescent males. In other words, it's about looking tough, or appearing scary, which on another level simply shows itself to be "scared" rather than actually training hard and just being a nice human. The 60 dollar t-shirts covered with skulls and all that sort of nonsense... it's all pretty obvious.

As one of our best local fighters, Lyle Steffens, pointed out in his blog (link to <http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=260086222&blogID=406202838>), MMA seems to have more of a level of respect, with athletes displaying professionalism or at least toning down unprofessional acts in public. In recent years, fighters have been flipping each other off in public, fighting at press conferences, cursing each other out and throwing gang signs. Do you think it's true that the "young male demographic MMA is marketed to would rather watch drunk, angry, uncontrolled morons causing trouble instead of hardworking, honest fighters?"

I honestly don't know? That is something the people who study marketing are figuring out I am sure. If they decide that the behavior you mentioned builds more hype, and a larger audience then I think you will continue to see more of it. In which case, fighters will be presented with another set of unique challenges. They will have to decide if they are going to allow promoters and marketing people to denigrate them or if they are going to maintain their dignity instead, perhaps at the cost of a larger paycheck. It's an interesting journey for sure.

In your blog you suggest that coaches let students follow their own bliss... Can you say more on that?

Sure. Follow your bliss was the advice the late Joseph Campbell always gave to his graduate students. And it's a call towards authenticity. Of course those unfamiliar with the depth of

that statement will often have a knee jerk response that the saying itself is referring to something selfish -- leaving your family, or your responsibilities. But that is actually backwards. Following your bliss never means anything truly selfish. In real-



of all walks of life that enjoy BJJ, as an example. They may be doctors, or bakers, or artists, but they all enjoy the art/sport.

The image being marketed by the MMA media about who trains, or what they are supposed to look like is an unrelated

ity, not following the calling of your own heart is how people get hurt. And it is the most irresponsible thing you can ever do.

I encourage all my students to follow their own heart. I am a martial arts coach; I am not a life coach, or guru or any of that nonsense. I am here to teach the functional martial arts in a healthy way. SBGi is for everyone who wants to do martial arts. It's for every-body; young, old, male, female, everybody. Everybody can train alive.

Now BJJ, or any particular martial art or combat sport is not for everyone. In fact, some people may not like that activity at all. They may prefer something else completely, like baseball, or hunting chupacabras. In that case, SBGi is probably not their best vehicle, as what we teach is functional martial arts. And not everyone wants to do martial arts. Some people need to write, or feel compelled to do some form of art, or some other career. Whatever it is, I say find it. This is not something that should ever be done through the force of will. I think one of the most backward things teachers tell their students often revolve around the fallacy of the force of will. It may work in the very short term. But in the long run it just leads to repression and unhappiness. So instead of telling a student they should be more consistent, or work harder, I tell them look if you don't like coming to class every week, find what you do like to do. Go on a search and find it! Once you do, you will be happier, those around you will be happier, and if you ever want to come back we will still be here. I strongly believe we all have something we can do that we will love, and that when we find that we serve not just our own selves better, but also our families and communities as a whole.

••BUT PORTLAND IS SO FAR AWAY!

There are a lot of places that are nowhere near a SBGi affiliate. What suggestions do you have for people who may not be getting techniques down or drilling enough or progressing at the level they want but have limited options as far as gyms go?

Well I would try and find a place that offered quality training first. Most urban locations in the USA at least have some form of boxing or wrestling, and they would be my top choices. I would check for these types of gyms, assuming no decent MMA or BJJ school was around that

you were comfortable with, long before I looked under 'martial arts,' or 'JKD.'

Barring that, get a group of friends together and train. Anybody can start a training group. That is how SBGi started. There just wasn't another place for us to go at the time. Once you understand how to train alive, the possibilities for growth are not limited by geography. In fact, I have found that some of the best athletes I have worked with have come from distant locations that had no black belts, or MMA coaches yet they will still reach a solid purple within a few years (by understanding how to drill, being smart and rolling consistently), whereas I have been to places in LA and seen many students who have been training around dozens of great black belts for many years, and they are still poor blue belts at best. More often than not it's about the quality of alive training, and the heart of the student, not the pedigree of the coach.

How would you get to purple belt level without a coach?

By understanding how to drill, being smart, and rolling consistently.

You have large SBGi camps several times a year. Could you tell us about those? Can anyone attend?

Sure, we have a spring camp and a fall camp, usually in March and October. They are held at different locations around the USA. There is also now a Euro camp run by Karl and John Kavanagh once a year in various locations around Europe. It's basically a gathering of all the different SBGi coaches. It's a great chance to socialize, exchange training and coaching notes with each other, and see what each of us have been working on. It is also a great chance for SBG purple belts to roll with other SBG purples from different parts of the country, and the world. This allows us to maintain a kind of worldwide consistency to our belt standards.

Everyone is welcome. Even brand new people tend to get a lot of value out of these events. I can't imagine a better way to become exposed to the big picture of what our curriculum is all about, all with the course of one weekend. It's pretty fun.

Thank you very much for the interview.

No problem.

••HOT LINKS!••

Straight Blast Gym's website:

<http://www.straightblastgym.com/>

Matt's blog:

<http://aliveness101.blogspot.com/>

SBGi membership offers a lot of perks and access to a really fascinating online forum:

<http://www.straightblastgym.com/membership.htm>

SBGi sells some really great videos. I can personally vouch for the quality of Functional JKD 2:

<http://straightblastgym.com/store.htm>

Finally, if you are in Tucson and are interested in watching videos and drilling/training the SBGi way please e-mail me at yael.grauer@gmail.com... especially if you have a garage gym that is loaded with mats and equipment. J