

## Top 30 Myths and Misconceptions about Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu

By Roberto Pedreira

March 16, 2016

***"Truth is the quality that moves us forward, expands our horizons, and ultimately sets us free. We should never fear it. Those who do, do so perhaps, because they have something to hide. Perhaps they worry that the relentless light of truth may expose the inadequacies or worse, the deliberate deceptions, in their own words."--Rorion Gracie (Gracies in Action 2, 1992)***

Almost everything everyone believed about Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) up until the recent past derived from three sources, which were Gracies in Action 1 (1988), the 1989 Playboy Rorion Gracie article by Pat Jordan, and Gracies in Action 2 (1992). In all fairness to Rorion, he probably wasn't trying very hard to deceive anyone. He was simply marketing his school while trying to solidify his place in what he knew (if he was successful) would be a stampede of competitors from the ranks of his own family and anyone else who wanted to cash in. He didn't invent the story entirely. His uncle and father were saying most of the same things in Brazil before Rorion went to Hollywood to be a movie star. Rorion's unique contribution was to vastly exaggerate his father's ring record and historical importance, which of course benefited himself and enraged the other factions of the family, who ignored the harsh reality that the demand for Gracie Jiu-Jitsu in America was essentially zero (and near zero in Brazil also, at the time), until Rorion created that demand.

Rorion also conspired with the family and other Brazilians to suppress the seamy facts of the family's history, including fraud, aggravated assault, adultery, bigamy, statutory rape, narcotics trafficking, and various other questionable and criminal activities. Possibly, he didn't think it was relevant. After all, the efficiency of Gracie jiu-jitsu did not depend on the personal qualities of individual members of the Gracie clan. It was a big clan and there was a lot of diversity within it. But after living a decade in Los Angeles, he understood mainstream Americans' propensity for panicking over things as innocuous as comic books, let alone what the Gracie family had on its rap sheet. Rorion wanted to keep the dark side of the family deep in the shadows. Unfortunately, some younger members of the family had self-control issues. It was a problem of continuous damage-control. For a while, Rorion kept the lid on. No one was better qualified to do it. He was the Bill Gates of martial arts.

Jiu-jitsu became a fad. It was an unstoppable martial arts tsunami. Even Rorion was surprised. His little marketing story and Playboy hyperbole grew into an overwhelming mythology not unlike those of scientology and other cults. Black Belt magazine duped itself into designating Helio the Man of the Year in 1997, based purely on Rorion's claims, and even the New York Times declared him to be the creator of BJJ.

Cracks appeared in the facade beginning with GTR's publication of its George Mehdi article in 2000. Mehdi-sensei was too discrete, decent, and moral to expose everything, but it was enough to make thoughtful people begin to wonder if what Rorion had told them was really true. Reila Gracie's 2008 biography of her father provided some unpleasant shocks for Gracie hero worshippers (see [here](#) or read her book). But Reila's book was in Portuguese and difficult to buy outside of Brazil. GTR's Roberto Pedreira offered a synopsis of the first part of Reila's book, which was enough to rock the BJJ world, despite the efforts of certain dark forces to cover up the truth by SEO and wiki-manipulation.

While everyone can appreciate the Gracie family for making an honest living, paying their taxes, and introducing the world to the awesome form of Kodokan judo now known as BJJ, the public has a right to know the truth. That is what motivated Roberto Pedreira to spend 15 years researching and writing Jiu-jitsu in the South Zone, 1997-2008, and the definitive history of jiu-jitsu in Brazil, Choque; The Untold Story of Jiu-Jitsu in Brazil, in three volumes covering the years 1859 to 1999. and subsequently Craze 1-3 ([Craze 1](#) and [Craze 2](#) are out now, Craze 3 will be out in 2020.

For many people the number one "Go To" source for fast information is Wikipedia. If you google "Helio Gracie life" the first source of information you are going to find is Wikipedia. The second is the Gracie Academy in Torrance, California. Both recycle most of the myths and misconceptions. The Academy however has taken a defter approach by gradually writing Helio out of the story, preserving him mostly as a symbolic object of ritual veneration, leaving it to Wikipedia and fan-sites to disseminate the misinformation (possibly so that Academy can't be blamed for it.)

The myths and misconceptions are too numerous to address in a single article.<sup>[1]</sup> The following touches on only a few, and only briefly. For more details, references, and source citations, see Choque 1, Choque 2, and Choque 3 and other sources as indicated.<sup>[4]</sup> Wikipedia editors and Rener, take notes.

#### The 30 Top Myths and Misconceptions

Myth 1. Anyone who doubts GIA is a Gracie-hater.

Fact: An intelligent person can and should reject falsehood, myths, misconceptions, and misinformation. The truth should be respected and revered. This is in no way incompatible with admiring individuals for their achievements. Doubting misconceptions, misinformation, and factual errors does not make one a Gracie-hater. One the contrary, by seeking out and sharing the truth, one is doing a service to jiu-jitsu and humanity in general. Grandmaster Helio would have wanted it that way. He hated the "mystification" that some martial arts teachers resorted to promote their schools. The truth is on the mat and in the ring, he believed (helped along with "marketing.")

Myth 2. Helio invented modern BJJ.

Fact: Every aspect of early modern BJJ was already being trained and taught as early as 1905 in the USA and England. (Obviously, BJJ has evolved independently of judo since the late 1990's. The Gracies and other jiu-jitsu people experimented with different rule sets in the 1950's before eventually deciding, in the 1960's and 1970's, to adopt post-WW 2 judo style rules. Judo rules continued to evolve and note that even today there are more than only one set of rules used in competitions, just as jiu-jitsu rules also evolved and today more than one set of rules are used in competitions.) Until the shift to judo type rules (modified to de-emphasize throwing and pinning), the Gracies used the same competition rules that everyone else did, which were the rules published in Irving Hancock and Katsukuma Higashi (1906). Conde Koma and his troupe also used these rules for their shows in 1909 and 1901 in Mexico and in 1914 in São Paulo and 1915 in Rio de Janeiro. The rules were published in local newspapers multiple times over the years. For mixed styles fights, specific rules were negotiated. There was one exception. Rules 2 and 3 defined how a contest could be won or lost by pinning. The Gracies refused to accept these rules. Rules 8-10 defined fighting from the back. The Gracies did not invent the rules and did not invent any techniques for fighting from the back, with one exception described in Choque 1 and Choque 2 (it was invented by George in 1933.) It is a fact that Helio's opponents between 1932 and 1937 generally did not know how to neutralize his "leg guard."

The Gracies did not use any techniques that were not used by every jiu-jitsu man and some luta livre fighters, until very recently. Incidentally, every professional jiu-jitsu man was also a luta livre fighter. They represented "jiu-jitsu," but they fought "luta livre." What they did do, eventually, was rediscover and preserve many forgotten techniques. And the evidence strongly indicated that they were often led to these rediscoveries by judokas such as Takeo Yano, Haroldo Brito, Oswaldo Alves, and George Mehdi.

Helio Gracie, who might reasonably be considered well informed about the subject, denied that he invented anything. He just added leverage to what Carlos was doing (see [here](#).) He didn't invent jiu-jitsu competition rules either. At first, they were old judo rules, and eventually they were more modern judo rules (with of course, a ground grappling twist). Neither Helio nor Rorion denied that. What Helio did do, Rorion said (GIA 2) was to make judo efficient for street fighting. But it is debatable that he really did that. Gracie street fights were like street fights everywhere. The side with more people (participants/attackers and "supporters"), weapons (sometimes), and element of surprise won. They didn't use Gracie jiu-jitsu in their street fights that we have evidence of. There was one exception. Helio pulled guard in a street fight. He ended up in a hospital (see Choque 3 for details and documentation.) Eventually, Rorion was reduced to the claim that what Helio invented was his teaching method. But George was using the same method, which he learned from Takeo Yano. It was the systematic, detail oriented pedagogical method introduced by Jigoro Kano in his Kodokan school of judo. None of the above should be taken to imply that Gracie Jiu-Jitsu isn't awesome. It is awesome. Roberto Pedreira can personally testify to that. But it's awesome because of what it borrowed from judo (as Rorion admitted, see Choque 3, appendix 5, and notes to appendix 5.) Rorion deserves full credit for re-introducing it, of course (see preface to Jiu-Jitsu in the South Zone, 1997-2008.)

Myth 3. Helio invented leverage.

Fact: Helio didn't say he invented leverage. He said, in 2001 ([here](#)), that he added leverage to the techniques that he assimilated by watching Carlos. That could mean that Carlos taught himself, or that Conde Koma taught him badly, or that Conde Koma didn't teach him, or that Koma's own skills were lacking leverage, or that Carlos didn't learn the techniques correctly, or that he forgot them by the time Helio saw him teaching them (according to Helio).

Myth 4. Gracie Jiu-jitsu was undefeated between 1927 and 1992.

Fact: The first documented Gracie fights were exhibition matches in 1929, 1930, and 1931. Carlos met Geo Omori three times (April 28, 1929, January 5, 1930, and January 19, 1930). All three ended in draws. George confronted defeated amateur boxer Johannes Toon on January 19, 1930 and was scheduled to meet Gabriel on January 5. In 1931 George, Oswaldo, and Benedicto Peres met three supposed capoeira "representatives" under rules that prohibited the capoeiras [capoeiristas] from striking on the ground. The jiu-jitsu men won all three fights. George won because his opponent punched him on the ground. The first professional fight was Carlos Gracies vs. Manoel Rufino dos Santos in 1931. Carlos lost when he left the ring and refused to fight. Between then and 1992, Gracies and jiu-jitsu won fights, lost fights, and drew fights, the same as representatives of other styles. That proved only that the better fighter won, not that one style was better than another in general.

Myth 5. Choque claims that Carlos could not possibly have learned from Conde Koma.

Fact: Choque did not claim that Carlos Gracie learned nothing from Conde Koma. What Choque said was that, given his lifelong pattern of story-telling, lying, and exaggeration, Carlos own words cannot be taken as gospel. Yet, there is no other evidence that he studied with Conde Koma. There is also no compelling evidence that he didn't. He might have. He might have learned from Koma's assistant Jacyntho Ferro, but that too is only a possibility. [Note it is since been established that Carlos learned from Jacyntho Ferro, not directly from Maeda; see [here](#) and [here](#)].

Jose Cairus, Reila Gracie, Stanlei Virgilio, and various others, have written about Carlos' contact with Conde Koma. It should be noted that none of them offer any evidence that Carlos ever met Conde Koma. All of them simply trusted what Carlos himself said as true, more often than not via recycled second-hand accounts. But as Reila documented, Carlos had a "vivid imagination." He made a lot of stuff up (see Choque 3, chapter 3, for one particularly egregious example, which Reila also writes about extensively).

Myth 6. Maeda's jiu-jitsu was not efficient for real combat. Carlos (or Helio, depending on the version) Brazilianized it and made it efficient for real combat.

Fact: Detailed and thoroughly document accounts of Maeda's stage shows presented in Choque 1 chapters 5 and 6 and Craze 2 indicate that his jiu-jitsu was the standard theatrical jiu-jitsu of the time, strictly adhering to the Hancock & Higashi rules, in which striking was not permitted and kimonos were required (Choque 1, pp. 66-67). In addition to which his only known martial arts training was Kodokan judo. Whether it was efficient for real combat is an open question. But the Carlos, Helio, George Oswaldo, and Gastão Jr. did little or nothing in the 1930's to modify it in any way. They didn't need to. Their fights were fought according to the same or similar rules.

In addition, they didn't claim to have "perfected", "modified" or "Brazilianized" jiu-jitsu. On the contrary, what they were insisting was that they were trying to preserve jiu-jitsu from being watered down by people who wanted to distort and pervert it into a "sport". Helio hammered the point home by implying that judokas were closet homosexuals, or at least, sissies who liked unnecessary luxuries like air conditioning (see Choque 2 and Choque 3 for many examples). It was only after Rorion made Gracie Jiu-Jitsu a valuable brand that Helio began repeating Rorion's line that Helio "improved" jiu-jitsu by adding leverage and positioning.

Myth 7. The Gracies invented vale tudo and mixed styles fights.

Fact: The Gracies didn't invent either. There had been boxing vs. jiu-jitsu fights as early as 1908, although they were rare. Paschoal Segreto promoted a wide variety of mixed styles fights in São Paulo, Rio, and Niteroi as early as 1909. Sumo (usually called "the Japanese style of wrestling") vs. catch wrestling matches were conducted in North America early as 1884. Mixed fights were common in Brazilian circuses and on theater stages before the Gracies showed up in 1929. Geo Omori fought capoeiras [aka capoeiristas], catch wrestlers, boxers, and anyone else who wanted to give it a go.

Myth 8. The Gracie Academy was established in 1925.

Fact: According to Helio himself (in 1951) neither he nor anyone in his family had ever heard of jiu-jitsu until 1929 or 1930 (he was referring to one of Carlos' exhibitions with Geo Omori, but didn't specify which one). Moreover, he said, no one had any idea that Carlos was a "jiu-jitsu fighter." So much for the theory that Helio had been watching Carlos teach jiu-jitsu lessons in his home in Botafogo.

Myth 9. Helio Gracie was Brazil's first sports hero. Helio Gracie was a living legend in Brazil.

Fact: Brazil has long history of sports, imported to Brazil from Europe in the second half of the 19th century. Brazil had plenty of sports heroes, especially, but not limited to, soccer [futebol] players. Professional fighting wasn't even considered a sport. Since 1955 *Correia da Manhã*, one of Rio's two elite newspapers, published an annual list [quadra de honra] of the best Rio athletes in 22 categories of sports, not including soccer. Ping pong was a sport, among others. Judo was a sport, and George Mehdi was honored several times. Jiu-jitsu was not a sport. Helio never made the list. In 1967 the Museum of Image and Sound, created in 1963 by Guanabara governor Carlos Lacerda, decided to honor the best athletes in Brazilian history. Thirty-four athletes were nominated and 27 received at least one vote. Helio was among the eight who received one vote. A ping pong player received two votes. One of the reasons Helio Gracie was not a sports hero in Brazil was because no one considered jiu-jitsu a sport until Helio was already deep into retirement. To the extent that Helio is honored as a hero today, it is thanks to his role in fathering Rorion and helping him establish his academy in America. Helio is remembered today because Rorion made jiu-jitsu successful in North America.

If there really was a Gracie who was sports hero and living legend in Brazil prior to 1993, it would have been Carlson. But by 1970, Carlson was better known as a soccer referee than as a former fighter. Fame is fleeting.

Myth 10. Kato was the vice-world champion of judo and outweighed Helio by almost 44 pounds. Kimura was the undefeated world jiu-jitsu champion and outweighed Helio by 77-80 pounds (depending on the version of the story).

Fact. No one knows the actual weights. There was no weigh-in. The press, or promoters, estimated the Japanese judoka's weights, or made them up, which the press reported. The best estimates by people in close contact with all of the fighters were that Kimura had 33 pounds (15 kilos) on Helio and that Kato had up to 12 pounds (5 kilos) at most and possibly weighed the same (Kato's usual competition weight was 70 kilos, which is what Helio weighed for the fight, observers estimated). Both Kato and Kimura were Kodokan judoka. There was no such thing in Japan as a jiu-jitsu champion. There was no such thing as a world champion of judo either. Kato was a young inexperienced regional judo competitor with some successes but not the vice-champion of anything. See Choque 2 for details and fully cited sources.

Myth 11. The Gracie Brothers were falsely accused of assaulting a man in 1932.

Fact: They were not falsely accused. They (Carlos, George, and Helio, with Oswaldo serving as the get-away driver) were witnessed stalking and then assaulting Manoel Rufino dos Santos. They were arrested, charged, tried, convicted, and put behind bars. They were pardoned, but no one denied that they had been guilty, just that they shouldn't be punished for it. A few influential friends pulled strings with dictator Getulio Vargas, who pardoned them. The brothers also gang assaulted João Baldi in the same fashion, which they didn't deny. And they tried to do the same to Donato Pires dos Reis (but he escaped unharmed). In the first two assaults, witnesses testified that Helio had used a weapon, a "steel box" of some sort. Helio later said, in 2001, that it was the biggest mistake of his life (see interview [here](#)). The official post-Gracies in Action story is that Helio did it all by himself in retaliation because Rufino Santos insulted the Gracie family (which was untrue, Rufino Santos did not insult the Gracie family, only Carlos, and his insults were factual statements, disguised as questions).

Myth 12. Brazilian jiu-jitsu is not Kodokan judo.

Fact: We don't know who they learned from but whoever it was either a Kodokan judoka or learned from one, i.e., Jacyntho Ferro, Donato Pires dos Reis, Geo Omori, Takeo Yano, Sumiyuki Kotani, Chugo Sato, or someone else. It is a fact that they read Irving Hancock's book, and other books all of which were available in Brazil. Everything that Carlos, George, Oswaldo, Gastão Jr., and Helio knew, used, and taught, could be found amply illustrated in the 1905 and 1906 books of Sadakazu "Raku" Uyenishi, Tani & Miyake, and Hancock & Higashi, among many others, one of which was written by (or rather credited to) Conde Koma himself, published in 1913 (see Craze 2 chapter 9).

Whoever the Brazilians learned from and however they learned, it was Kodokan judo (and wrestling, which was also mixed in with Kodokan judo). For anyone with doubts, look at the techniques. If there were any old jiu-jitsu techniques that still existed that were not incorporated into judo, it didn't matter, because they Gracies didn't know them. What they knew was judo, or to be precise, the judo of that epoch.

There has been an internet theory going around since Choque 1 (1st edition) was published in 2014 that someone in Osaka invented or perfected a style of ground-fighting and that this is what the Gracies learned.<sup>[2]</sup> This theory seems based on pure speculation and perhaps the possibility that Sadakazu "Raku" Uyenishi, Taro Miyake, and Yukio Tani came from Osaka (so their ghost-writers said).<sup>[3]</sup>

Note: for details and documented facts about the "Osaka" connection, see [Craze 1](#) chapter 5 and appendixes).

Since Carlos's only fight was his 1931 loss to Rufino Santos, we need to look at George and Helio. Their jiu-jitsu was basic pre-WW 2 judo. They could have just as easily learned from reading Raku or Tani & Miyake's books as taking lessons from anyone. It was all in the books. Certainly, they could have put their own spin on the basics. Every judoka is expected to do that. They also could have made specific tactical choices in their matches. And they did. Helio made one set of choices, based on his reluctance to take chances, preferring to "draw" rather than to risk losing. George made another, based on his willingness to take chances, in order to win at risk of losing. They both often ended up on the bottom because they were either lighter than their opponents, or were inferior in stand-up skills. But as pointed out previously, they did not choose to be on the bottom. They played from top when they could get top position.

They also could have learned advanced leg and guard techniques from Geo Omori, who we know did them, because there are photographs of him doing them. If the Gracie brothers didn't learn from Omori personally, they could have learned from watching his fights and seeing the same pictures that we can see today (some are included in Choque; for others, visit the archives). Yes, it's all speculation. That's the point.

Perhaps this is why in December 2013 Rener Gracie explained that "the Gracie family was introduced to jiu-jitsu by a Japanese man back in the early 1900's." That leaves the door open for almost unlimited speculation. Which member of the family? Which Japanese man? When? The Academy seems to want to back down from the claim that Carlos mastered the secrets of jiu-jitsu under the loving personal guidance of Conde Koma. Rorion probably wishes he never mentioned "Esei Maeda." (which is an incorrect pronunciation of Maeda's name Hideyo, 栄世, before his changed it to Mitsuyo, 光世.)

Myth 13. Carlos Gracie and Helio Gracie were the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu champions.

Fact: Carlos never competed in a jiu-jitsu competition and never won a fight. Carlos also claimed to be a boxing champion and to be in personal communication with Peruvian magician who transmitted messages from a higher spiritual entity requesting that Carlos's best friend Oscar Santa Maria give him money for 30 years and to let him impregnate his fiancée, Lair de Aguiar Silva (who ended up being Reila Gracie's mother).

Helio proclaimed himself the Brazilian champion after staging a match with a nobody named Landolfo Caribé, who had no record up to then (despite claiming otherwise). Even Carlos and Helio said that Caribé was not qualified to fight for the so-called title that they invented out of thin air. Most of the press and the sports authorities either ignored Helio or refused to accept his claim, labeling the fight a fraud.

Helio said he didn't care what authorities said. He was the "people's champion." This was how Helio Gracie became the Brazilian jiu-jitsu champion in 1950, a title he refused to relinquish even after being demolished by Kimura and Waldemar Santana. He finally passed it on to Carlson, and after Carlson beat Waldemar in a jiu-jitsu match (the only jiu-jitsu match of his professional career), the "public" accepted Carlson as champion. But by that time the public had lost what little interest they had in jiu-jitsu as a spectator sport. Judo and luta livre had more to offer. That's why all of Carlson's other fights were luta livre.

Myth 14. Helio Gracie did not "really lose to Kimura because Kimura told newspapers that if Helio lasted 3 minutes he should be considered the winner" (according to Gracies in Action 1).

Fact: Why would Kimura throw Helio around for the first 10-minute round if he wanted to win within 3 minutes? He knew Helio wouldn't be KOed by a throw. Kimura explained why after the fight: He wanted to give the fans a show before submitting Helio.

Myth 15. Helio "came to the conclusion" that he could have defeated Kimura if they were the same weight.

Fact: That's what Gracies in Action 1 said that Helio said. Helio didn't say that at the time of the fight. Why would he? He fought other judokas who were less skilled than Kimura (Namiki, Yano, Ono), but the same size as Helio, or smaller, and he couldn't beat them, with two exceptions (He choked out Naoiti Ono in a "test of sufficiency". Naoiti Ono weighed 55 kilos. At that time Helio weighed in the area of 66 kilos, give or take a couple. He also choked out Kato in their second fight, after drawing in the first.) In the Kimura fight, Helio was never on the attack at any time. It is difficult to imagine how he could have converted his ultimately unsuccessful defense into a victory, at any weight. Unlike Kato, Kimura was not just a stand-up judoka. He was a master of ground fighting as well.

Myth 16. Kimura was so impressed with Helio's jiu-jitsu that he invited him to teach at the Imperial Academy in Tokyo.

Fact. Kimura didn't speak Portuguese. Helio didn't speak Japanese. Yassuiti Ono and Takeo Yano usually served as Kimura's translators. Perhaps there was a translation error? It is a fact however that Kimura (and his colleague Yamaguchi) invited or challenged Helio and his colleagues to go to Japan to fight them. Helio never accepted the invitation. In addition, there was no such thing as an Imperial Academy in 1951, and Kimura had no authority to invite anyone to do anything in Japan and he didn't think what Helio was doing was jiu-jitsu (Kimura had studied ju-jutsu and knew the difference between ju-jutsu and judo). He thought Helio was playing an older style of judo (which he approved of). Also, for the record, he said that Helio had a good defense but lacked stand-up skills. Overall, he was not impressed with Helio's skills, but Helio did



surprise him by how slippery he was. Years later Kimura said he "felt like he lost," which was half Japanese modesty but possibly also suggested that Helio's defense on the ground did surprise him. Credit where it's due. Helio had a good defense. It took Kimura almost 3 minutes to submit him (more accurately, for Carlos to submit on Helio's behalf).

Myth 17. Helio Gracie defeated a Brazilian boxing champion.

Fact. Helio Gracie fought Antonio Portugal in the prelim to the Geo Omori vs. Tavares Crespo fight on January 16, 1932. Antonio Portugal was never a Brazilian boxing champion. He was a small, washed up, exceptionally poor boxer with a weak punch and who had rarely won a boxing match.

Myth 18. The Gracies were ground fighting specialists.

Fact. All grapplers fought on the ground. All jiu-jitsu fighters, judokas, and luta livre fighters fought on the ground. Even the pro "catch" wrestlers. There was nothing unusual about the Gracie's philosophy, strategy, or methodology. However, it is true that some of their opponents sometimes preferred to fight standing up, which they could choose to do, being superior in that aspect of the fight, and in some (but not all) cases, bigger. The idea of neutralizing a striker by tackling him to the ground was not new and didn't always work. Jiu-jitsu fighters did get KOed and on occasion killed by boxers. Moreover, the Gracies did not specialize in fighting off their backs. They used bottom "legs around" position for defense, exactly as rule # 9 in Hancock and Higashi advised (as Rickson said much later, the guard should be used for defense. He got it.) George and Helio always fought from top whenever they were able to do so. (According to descriptions, Carlos was usually on his feet or on top in the Rufino Santos fight; Oswaldo preferred top position when he could get it, and Gastão Jr. never fought).

Myth 19. Carlos Gracie was a great fighter.

Fact. Carlos had one professional fight, a grappling match with middle-aged wrestling teacher. Carlos lost when he walked away and refused to fight. He had three exhibition jiu-jitsu matches with Geo Omori. All ended in draws. He had one other grappling match with an unnamed, unskilled opponent at the ACM in Rio. It ended in a draw (according to George Gracie. )

Myth 20. Helio Gracie defeated the famous jiu-jitsu fighter/pro wrestler Taro Miyake.

Fact: Helio never fought Taro Miyake. Helio's opponent (June 23, 1934) was a Japanese named Miyaki. (Taro Miyake's name was also sometimes spelled "Miyaki" in North America). Miyaki appeared out of the blue in April 1934, matched against pro-wrestler Roberto Ruhmann in a no-gi jiu-jitsu contest. Miyaki supposedly had a Kodokan black belt. Ruhmann choked him with his famous "headlock."

A GTR reader suggests where this myth may have originated. He writes: "This one is important. Wrestling historian Mark Hewitt claims that the Miyake defeated by Helio was Taro Miyake in his book Catch Wrestling. I think Hewitt is just assuming this without any proof or real evidence, and unfortunately, I might be the source of this, unwittingly. In 2001 or so I gave Hewitt information about Helio's record on a message board, using only the name "Miyake" for this opponent of Helio's as it was all that I had. Hewitt then made the leap to this Miyake being Taro Miyake and now it has been written into much of pop BJJ history."



Recent (as of May 2016) Wikipedia revisions and assorted blog posts referencing Wikipedia are now claiming that Miyaki was part of Yassuiti Ono's troupe, perhaps implying that although Helio Gracie failed in his two attempts to defeat Ono himself, at least he beat a member of Ono's alleged troupe. This is incorrect. Yassuiti Ono and his younger brother Naoiti and eight other Japanese immigrants first appeared in the São Paulo press in October of 1934. The group was described as a "troupe of 10 jiu-jitsu fighters" (see Choque 1, 295-296) and included someone named Miyaki among them. But this must have been a different Miyaki, because Helio Gracie had already fought the Miyaki that we know about on June 23 of that year. Moreover, Miyaki already had several professional "fights" under his belt. In any case, it was not Taro Miyake, who would have been about 54 years old and weighed 90 kg. at the time (Miyaki was about 20 and weighed 64.2 kg., one kg. less than Helio Gracie). Photographs of Miyaki and Taro Miyake taken at about the same time leave no doubt that they were not the same person.

Myth 21. Helio was small, sickly, and weak.

Fact. We don't know. That's what Helio and Rorion say. Lots of children are small and weak, and "sickly" is a vague word. Helio didn't like going to school. Maybe he pretended to be sick to avoid going? If so, it worked, according to Reila Gracie and Helio's lawyer. But by 1930, before he began learning jiu-jitsu (according to Carlos), he was a champion swimmer.

Myth 22. Helio Gracie was a great fighter.

Fact: Helio Gracie had 10 public professional fights between 1932 and 1936. Eight of the 10 were grappling-only matches. His opponents were (in order) Antonio Portugal, Takashi Namiki, Fred Ebert, Miyaki, Wladek Zbyszko, Dudú, Yassuiti Ono (1st fight), Takeo Yano, Massagoichi, Yassuiti Ono (2nd fight), and, assuming it happened, Erwin Klausner. (Note: Helio didn't consider Antonio Portugal a "professional" fight because the money was donated to the Brazilian Olympic team). His record for these 10 fights was 4 wins, no losses, 6 draws. He then stopped fighting until 1950.

Two Rio newspapers reported that Helio Gracie defeated boxer Erwin Klausner in a jiu-jitsu match in Belo Horizonte on September 26, 1937. There was no pre-fight build-up or post-fight analysis and boasting, features of all of Helio Gracie's other fights. There is reason to suspect erroneous reporting. Reports from outside Rio did sometimes confuse one Gracie brother with another, and misspelling of names in general was not unusual (the concept being that as long as you know who was being mentioned, it didn't matter how their name was spelled). George lived in Belo Horizonte. Helio only fought outside of Rio once. The reportage was skimpy, with no photos. If Helio had really defeated a legitimate heavyweight boxer, one with luta livre experience, such as Erwin Klausner (even in a jiu-jitsu match), it is difficult to believe that Carlos Gracie wouldn't have tried to capitalize on it. It is a genuine possibility that Helio Gracie's victory over Erwin Klausner is another myth. Choque 1 (1st and 2nd eds. corrected in 3rd ed.) said that the fight was reported, not that it actually happened. This distinction is apt to be overlooked in the blogosphere).

Helio Gracie had five professional fights between 1950 and 1955. His opponents were Landolfo Caribé, Yukio Kato (twice), Masahiko Kimura, and Waldemar Santana. His record for these five fights was 2 wins, 2 losses, and 1 draw.

His career ring record was therefore 6 wins, 2 losses, and 7 draws. He also had at least two documented non-official sparring matches (Azevedo Maia and Arturo Emidio, who soon after lost to Robson Gracie), and one "test of sufficiency" with Naoiti Ono. Helio submitted those three opponents. He never fought Geo

Omorí, contrary to some sources, although on at least one occasion, he said he wanted to. Choque 1 reported, based on a single news article, that Helio lost an amateur luta livre match against Dudú in 1937. Because it was only one article, and the press did sometimes err, we cannot be sure that Dudú's opponent wasn't really George Gracie, rather than Helio Gracie (such mix-ups did sometimes happen, but generally there were multiple articles to eliminate the confusion. Not in this case however.) In any event, it was an amateur match. Perhaps Helio's greatness as fighter was based on something other than his ring record. As Jack Dempsey said, greatness is bestowed by the press. As Mike Tyson said, greatness is bestowed by the people. The reader will have to decide about Helio Gracie.

Myth 23. Helio challenged world heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis (who was unquestionably the greatest heavyweight boxing champion, see proof [here](#)). Joe Louis refused.

Fact: It's true. Helio Gracie did "challenge" Joe Louis. Joe Louis, or his rather, Joe's manager, did refuse. In return, Joe Louis (his manager rather) challenged Helio. Helio refused. George Gracie also challenged boxers. Boxers challenged George and other jiu-jitsu men. Everyone challenged everyone else. It was a way to publicize themselves by giving newspaper writers something to write about.

Then there's Muhammad Ali--the heavyweight champion, not the founder of Islam (neither of them were born with the name Muhammad Ali, by the way).

One of Carlson's opponents, a pro-wrestler named Martin Karadagian, challenged Muhammad Ali (or Cassius Clay, as he was usually called in Brazil) too.

Was Ali afraid of Karadagian's pro-wrestling skills? According to Rorion-logic, he must have been. There could be no other imaginable reason he would decline to accept a challenge from a publicity-seeking pro-wrestler.

But Ali fought pro-wrestler Antonio Inoki. The difference was that Inoki's challenge was backed up with a lot of money.

Myth 24. Helio Gracie had many vale tudo (NHB) fights.

Fact: Helio Gracie had two vale tudo fights (Dudú and Santana). He won the first, lost the second. He also had one mixed styles fight (Antonio Portugal). He won.

Myth 25. Helio jumped into a turbulent shark infested sea to rescue a drowning man. Helio was awarded a medal of honor.

Fact: There was newspaper report to that effect in 1946, although it didn't say anything about turbulence or sharks. Helio was a good swimmer, so it is possible. It also could have been one of Carlos' Gracie's publicity stunts. Carlos admired Jack Dempsey's promoter, Tex Rickard, and imitated his tactics, which included fabricating stories (as did all promoters and managers). According to Reila, Carlos was also on the boat and encouraged Helio to jump in the water. Being seasick, Carlos couldn't do it himself. Helio was given a medal of honor in 1952 by the Standard Oil Company. It has never been explained why the Standard Oil Company awarded the medal and why it waited until 1952.

Coincidentally, Sadakazu "Raku" Uyenishi, who was also a good swimmer, dived into the Lagan River in Belfast to save a drowning man (according to Chp. 6 of Uyenishi's Textbook of Jiu-Jitsu in 1905).

Myth 26. Rolls Gracie introduced the triangulo [triangle choke, sankakujime, 三角締め] to jiu-jitsu after seeing it in an old judo book.

Fact: Jiu-Jitsu in the South Zone, 1997-2008 (JJSZ) quoted Romero Jacare Cavalcanti, one Rolls' black belt students, as saying this. Cavalcanti also said it in a magazine interview in 1998. JJSZ didn't say it was true, only that Romero Cavalcanti said it was true.

Choque 1 and Choque 2 revealed that, while Rolls might have learned the triangle from an old judo book, judokas and some jiu-jitsu people in São Paulo knew the triangle very well. The triangle originated and was perfected in Japan by 1922. Yassuiti Ono, before he immigrated to Brazil, had been a student of the man who perfected and introduced it. Another Kodokan judoka named Ryuzo Ogawa immigrated to São Paulo at just about the same time, 1934. Oswaldo Alves learned judo from Hikaru Kurachi, who was Ogawa's student. Alves later became an instructor at Haroldo Brito's academy in Rio, where Waldemar Santana had been a student and Carlson Gracie had trained judo (briefly). In 1955, it was reported in the local press that Haroldo Brito's favorite technique was the "triangulo." Later, Alves taught Rolls Gracie judo and jiu-jitsu (see Oswaldo Alves interview [here](#).) Perhaps Alves neglected to teach Rolls the triangle. Maybe Alves never learned. Both possibilities are hard to believe, but they are possible. What is 100% certain is that Haroldo Brito and probably most judoka in São Paulo and Rio knew the triangle by not later than 1955.

Myth 27. The Gracies renamed the judo technique udegarami [腕がらみ] Kimura, in honor of Kimura.

Fact: Rio sports writers began referring to Kimura's signature move as "Kimuriana" during his second tour of Brazil in 1959.

Myth 28. Rolls learned the "bent armlock" from an American wrestler named Bob Anderson and named it Americana in his honor.

Fact: Why didn't he name it "Bob" or "Anderson"? The Americana was called "bent arm break" or something similarly descriptive in most early jiu-jitsu and judo books. Eventually becoming known as one of various forms of udegarami [腕絡み; the same name as for the Kimura version: it literally means "arm-twist" or something similar, such as arm twine, arm caught in a tangle, entangled arm, arm entanglement]. According to contemporary writers, catch wrestlers adopted it from the early jiu-jitsu books, renamed it and claimed it is their own. When the Zbyszko Troupe of catch wrestlers came to Rio in 1934 sport writers began calling it Americana, probably because the troupe was established in America and catch wrestling was believed to be a North American sport.

Myth 29. The Gracies didn't know, teach, or use footlocks.

Fact. Most early jiu-jitsu instructional books depicted footlocks. The first, Sadakazu Uyenish's book (1905) and Tani & Miyake's book (1906) included examples of footlocks and how to apply them, with multiple clear illustrations. The Gracies, along with everyone else, knew and taught them. In 1955 George Gracie, while discussing favorite techniques, said his was the choke, but Helio's favorite technique was the footlock. Helio might have learned it from Geo Omori, because Omori used a footlock to defeat the boxer Tavares Crespo with a footlock in 1932, the same event where Helio fought Antonio Portugal. If Helio did not learn it from Omori, there were plenty of other places where he could have learned.

This myth seems to have arisen when an inattentive reader falsely accused JJSZ of saying that the Gracies didn't know or teach foot locks. On the contrary, the author of JJSZ knew that the Gracies taught foot locks

because he learned foot locks from Rickson. What JJSZ actually said was that in 1997 footlocks were considered in Rio to be "cheap" ways to win matches. And also that beginners were not encouraged to use leg locks in sparring due to the risk of knee injuries and they discourage the formation of good grappling habits. Obviously, people used footlocks in competition when they were allowed to use them and needed to use them. One of the subjects of one of JJSZ's chapters used a footlock to win the 1999 Mundial black belt absoluto gold medal.

Myth 30. Rorion Gracie introduced Brazilian jiu-jitsu to America.

Fact: Reylson was first, followed by Carley. Rorion was already living in Los Angeles trying to break into show business. Reylson opened an academy in Florida, which flopped. Carley had no success until the UFC made his name well-known (it is debatable that he had success even after that, but he had a real job and didn't need jiu-jitsu.) Reylson and Carley tried to teach jiu-jitsu the way George, Oswaldo, and Helio had taught it, as a series of short lessons based on traditional Japanese stand-up self-defense. (Reylson already had successful academies in Rio, where he taught this traditional curriculum.) Rorion, with Art Davie, repackaged jiu-jitsu for Americans and was successful, as we know. (It might be more accurate to say Art Davie, with the cooperation of Rorion, did it. Be that as it may, it couldn't have happened without Rorion.)

Bottom Line

Gracies in Action 1 and 2 were designed to stimulate interest in the Gracie's style of judo, which they called jiu-jitsu, and, reasonably enough, to make sure Rorion benefited from his efforts. It's not surprising that he tweaked history and exaggerated his father's accomplishments, or, given what Rorion surely knew about his uncle Carlos, and what the world now also knows, that he left Carlos out of the story once the prologue was finished and the obligatory link to an Asian master was established.

If we subtract the historical part of GIA what remains is: (1) some fights go to the ground and (2) if they do, Gracie Jiu-Jitsu is a good ground system to know. It's hard to argue with that now but at the time there were lots of people who naively believed that they had the skills to avoid ever "going to the ground". Rorion needed dramatic visuals to punch his message across. To alleviate the potential boredom of a series of amateur videos showing what probably did not look like what Americans thought fighting should look like, he added voice-over explaining what was happening during which he interpolated his version of jiu-jitsu history. The theory that the Japanese always tried to hide real jiu-jitsu from foreigners was not invented by Rorion. The early pioneers of jiu-jitsu in North America said the same things in order to make jiu-jitsu seem more exotic and precious. When judo became a threat to the Gracies in Brazil they added and emphasized the part about judo being fake and incomplete jiu-jitsu. Previously, in North America, England, even Brazil, martial arts entrepreneurs like Hancock & Higashi described non-Kodokan jiu-jitsu (judo was still often referred to as jiu-jitsu at the time) as "older and inferior" and less effective. Geo Omori (or his manager) wrote a series of articles stressing the same theme in Brazil in 1932, as did others from time to time. The Gracies merely reversed the comparison.

Masterpiece of marketing though it was, GIA had flaws. The first is that he completely ignored the single most important Gracie in the story of jiu-jitsu in Brazil. That was Carlson, who is not mentioned by name even once on either GIA 1 or GIA 2.

Actually, that isn't surprising. How could Rorion monopolize his family's jiu-jitsu if Carlson loomed large? How could Rorion possibly hope to match achievements and jiu-jitsu knowledge with Carlson? Moreover,

Carlson would rock the boat in addition to teaching jiu-jitsu his own, non-"pure water," way. Rorion did not believe that Carlson's personalized "pro re nata" [as needed] methodology (which originally was also Rickson's way) would work with Rorion's target clientele or that it would fit his assembly-line model of instruction. On top of that, Carlson couldn't speak English, had no head for business, and would have let all of his friends, and he had many, share the wealth, establishing affiliates without paying exorbitant fees, and might even have let students train for free, as he did in Brazil.

The most important Gracie in the triumph of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu was of course Rorion himself. But (obviously) that wasn't true in 1988 or 1992. Even so, he did include himself, modestly and to good effect, showing that even a skinny would-be movie star/businessman can kick ass if armed with a knowledge of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. But where was Carlson?

Neither Rorion nor Art Davie in 1988, smart as they were, could have anticipated the internet, Google, Wikipedia, and the digitization of archives in many national libraries, including Brazil's. Little did they know that what Rorion included in GIA as filler material would end up being believed by everyone across the globe as historical truth.

On second thought, it isn't surprising at all. It's just the same as it ever was in the world of "martial arts."

For full details and documentation, see Choque 1, Choque 2, Choque 3, Craze 1, Craze 2, and Craze 3 (forthcomng 2020), and other sources as indicated.

For more information:

[Top 18 Myths and Misconceptions about Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in Gracies in Action 1](#)

[Top 24 Myths and Misconceptions about Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in Pat Jordan's 1989 Playboy Article](#)

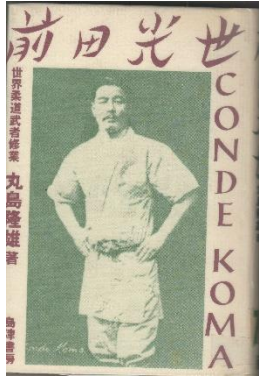
Notes

1. See [here](#) for some background on this article. Don't be misled by misguided, mendacious trolls into believing that Roberto or Choque are anti-Gracie. Roberto and Choque are not anti-Gracie.

2. The Osaka theory seems to have originated as early as 2007 (maybe even earlier). There are number of evidential gaps in the theory, but the primary weakness is that the Gracies didn't have a unique system of fighting. They simply used judo ground techniques when they were on the ground and fought from the bottom when they were on the bottom. Theorists are confusing what the Gracie Brothers did during the 1930's with what their offspring did during the 1990's and after. The false assumption is that Royce's early UFC game was personally created by Helio Gracie in the 1930's. This is precisely what Renner, Ryron, and more recently Kron, are claiming.

3. The idea that Yukio Tani was a ground specialist who learned in Osaka seems to originate in an off-handed comment in Graham Noble's otherwise excellent 2000 article "The Odyssey of Yukio Tani". Graham Noble conceded that "We know little about Tani's early training" and quotes an acquaintance to the effect that "Tani trained with Fusen-ryu groundwork specialists Torajiro Tanabe and/or Matauemon Tanabe". The acquaintance did not provide any evidence as to how he knew that. Graham Noble then says that a 1997 Japanese book indicates that Tani's father was a friend of Matauemon Tanabe. Graham Noble and other writers who cite this book, such as Svinth & Green, and Renzo Gracie & John Danaher, misidentify it as Maeda Itsuyo: Conde Koma (or Maeda Mitsuyo: Conde Koma).

The correct title of the book is 前田光世—世界柔道武者修行—by 丸島隆雄 [Marushima Takao] (島津書房、1997年). "Conde Koma" is merely printed on the dust jacket (below), and isn't part of the title itself.



Unless Graham Noble, Svinth & Green, and Renzo & John Danaher can read Japanese with a high degree of fluency, which does not appear to be the case, it is safe to say that they do not really know what the book says. In any case, this is slim evidence at best.

4. For information about the Choque series, see [here](#). Note that references to Choque 1 are specifically to the third edition unless indicated otherwise.

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Updated May 29, 2016.

Updated December 22, 1917.

Updated October 11, 2019.