



Master Toddy's MMA-Tested Muay Thai Techniques: 3 Elbow Attacks That Can Improve Your Fighting Game

Interview by Robert W. Young • Techniques by Joe E. Harvey

For more than 15 years, Master Toddy's gym has been a martial arts institution in Las Vegas. After the Ultimate Fighting Championship became the hottest thing in the sporting world and set up shop in his backyard, it didn't take long for mixed martial artists — many of whom were looking to hone their skills for the octagon — to start showing up at his door, looking for lessons.

"A lot of MMA fighters come to learn because MMA is a new sport that's all about putting things together. It's not thousands of years old, so they're able to pick what they want and then do it in a professional way. They like our gym because we offer professional muay Thai. And they like muay Thai because it already has some grappling — the clinch, which they find very useful. Plus, we attack with the elbows, which are highly developed weapons in Thai boxing."

— Master Toddy

Is there any conflict between the ancient art of muay Thai and the young sport of MMA?

Muay Thai has been around for a long time. We've already figured out how to strike. We can figure out how to make our techniques work in MMA. We can make things easier for MMA fighters.

Is muay Thai punching best for MMA, or is Western boxing better? Are they even different?

Boxing is a little better because muay Thai requires a higher stance. In boxing, you can drop down and turn your body sideways.

Let me rephrase that: Boxing isn't really better; it's better against a grappler. However, muay Thai punching as a whole works because in MMA, you're not limited to just punching. You have other weapons. The difference between boxing and muay Thai is that Thai boxers keep their feet ready to throw kicks and knees. Our posture keeps us ready for combinations. In contrast, boxers hit, then jump in and grab hold of their opponent — that's why the boxing stance was developed. When they're in it, they have only two weapons: their two hands. Muay Thai enables you to use other weapons such as your legs and knees.

What part of punching is most often overlooked by MMA fighters?

You have to make your wrists strong, and you have to hit with the knuckles. Otherwise, your punches won't be effective.

Why do so many MMA fighters chose muay Thai?

Because they need a knockout weapon. A guy might hit his opponent 20 times and nothing happens. That's when he knows he has to change things — for example, that he has to change the way he punches because he's now wearing MMA gloves and needs to connect with his knuckles.

It's the same with elbows — you can see a fighter's head get knocked back with elbow strikes and nothing happens. It's not effective unless you do it with the right part of the elbow and with the right technique. That's why Tito Ortiz came to me to learn how to do the elbow strike. Afterward, he used it to cut everybody.

For a tool to be good, it has to be sharp. Then it's easy to use it and win. If your weapon isn't sharp and you hit with it, you won't be effective. My job is to make tools sharp.

Everyone knows that muay Thai is No. 1 for elbow strikes. When you teach them for MMA, is it primarily standing elbows or elbows on the ground?

We teach mostly stand-up elbows.

What's the secret to executing the most popular elbow strike, the one that follows a downward diagonal path to the opponent's face?

We turn so we can slam the sharp part of our elbow into our opponent's face or eyes. Our way involves exe-

cuting the strike so the bent wrist is in the pocket, or the center of the chest, when we make contact. At the same time, we exhale.

Is there any way to tell if your opponent is good at throwing elbows — short of letting him hit you with one, of course?

Sometimes a fighter will keep his hands high because he wants you to come in and hit his body — which is when he'll hit you with an elbow or a knee.

Single Elbow Thrust

Purpose: To create space between you and your opponent in the clinch, thus permitting you to strike while maintaining a point of contact for control.

Setup/Stepping: From the tie-up position, use the left-leg-tie outside technique as a setup and distraction. Immediately take a full step forward with your left leg, moving it directly past your opponent's centerline. Push forward with your right leg to increase your momentum. Transfer 80 percent of your weight to your left leg during the step.

Elbow Thrust: While stepping forward, perform a right elbow thrust. Directly from the tie-up position, thrust your right shoulder and the point of your right elbow forward while releasing your right hand from the tie-up. Maintain the left hand position of the tie-up throughout the technique. Cradle your opponent's head with your left palm and, using his momentum, allow your left arm to straighten out to increase the distance between you and him. The stepping and elbow thrust should be done in unison with a burst of sudden force.

Follow-Up: Transfer 80 percent of your weight back to your right leg while opening up your right shoulder and chambering for a right horizontal elbow strike. Perform the elbow strike to your opponent's head, using proper technique and transferring your weight during the strike. Use your left arm to pull him into the blow, thus increasing the impact. Afterward, immediately pummel in with your right hand and retie into the clinch.

If the elbow thrust doesn't break his tie-up, continue to strike and take advantage of the created space by adjusting your angle of attack.



SINGLE ELBOW THRUST: Joe E. Harvey (left) clinches with his opponent (1) and takes control of the man's balance (2). He executes an elbow thrust (3) to create distance (4). Next, Harvey pulls him in as he delivers his follow-up strike: an elbow to the face (5). The muay Thai stylist then pummels in (6) and ties up with his opponent again (7).

Is the elbow primarily used to cut an adversary or knock him out?

There are two ways to use the technique. To cut, you drag your elbow across your opponent's face. It's best to aim for his cheekbone, nose or eyebrow. To knock him out, you go straight in with power, aiming for the jaw.

What about the back elbow and spinning elbow? Are they used in MMA?

A lot of people use the back elbow, but the spinning elbow is risky because you must turn your back to your opponent.

How are things different on the ground?

The elbow strike changes because the angle of the force changes. You sit on top of your opponent and hit down. What most people do wrong is bend down and then hit the target. Instead, you should move your elbow first and then drop your body. That uses the energy of your whole body.

What's something that few fighters know about the elbow strike?

To be most effective, the skin on your elbow has to be rough, like the worst sandpaper in the world. That way, it cuts.

Double Elbow Thrust

Purpose: To create space between you and your opponent for striking in the clinch while maintaining contact for maximum control.

Setup/Stepping: From the tie-up position, use the right-leg-tie inside technique as a setup and distraction. Immediately take a full step forward with your right leg, moving it directly past your opponent's centerline. Push forward with your left leg to increase your momentum. Transfer 80 percent of your weight to your right leg during the step.

Elbow Thrust: From the tie-up position, thrust both elbows forward, leading with the points of the joints. Maintain your original tie-up hand positions throughout the technique. Using your opponent's momentum, allow your arms to straighten out to increase the distance between you and him. The stepping and double elbow thrust should be done simultaneously and explosively.

Follow-Up: Bend both knees slightly and perform a head butt to the chin. Angle your head at 45 degrees while thrusting up and forward with your legs. Use your arms to pull him into the strike, thus increasing the impact. Immediately close the distance and return to a tie-up position.



DOUBLE ELBOW THRUST: Muay Thai stylist Joe E. Harvey (left) holds his opponent in the clinch (1). He uses his upper body and right leg to compromise the man's balance and distract him (2), then quickly transitions to a double elbow thrust (3). Extending his arms, Harvey uses the opponent's momentum to create space (4). He immediately yanks him back in as he effects a head butt (5). He finishes by tying up to re-establish the clinch (6).

Double Elbow-Thrust Release

Purpose: To break the tie-up while staying in a position that permits rapid follow-up strikes.

Setup/Stepping: From the tie-up position, use the left-pull off-balance technique to set up your move and distract your opponent. Immediately step forward, moving your left leg past his centerline. Push forward with your right leg to increase your momentum. Transfer 90 percent of your weight to your left leg.

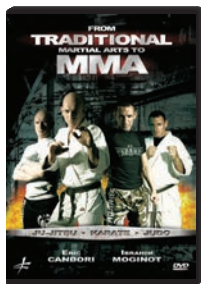
Elbow Thrust: From the tie-up position, thrust both elbows forward, leading with the tips. Hold his head close to you for a moment, then release your hands to springboard him backward. The stepping and release should be simultaneous and explosive.

Follow-Up: After the release, assume a muay Thai stance and smother your opponent by stalking to maintain striking distance. You can follow up with a cross and left hook if you properly protect yourself with three points of coverage. After the left hook, pummel in with your right hand and return to a tie-up position. If the elbow thrust doesn't break the tie-up, continue to strike and take advantage of the created space by adjusting your angle of attack.



DOUBLE ELBOW-THRUST RELEASE: The martial artist (left) creates the clinch (1). He angles the opponent to his left to disrupt his balance (2), then unleashes a double elbow thrust (3) to springboard the man backward (4). The martial artist smothers the man with strikes (5-6) before pummeling in (7) and clinching (8).

BOOKS AND DVDS FROM BLACK BELT



FROM TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS TO MMA: Ju-Jitsu · Karate · Judo

by Eric Candori and Ibrahim Moginot

The authors contend that the practice of martial arts should not revolve around a community rivalry between one or another martial art but rather in bridging the stylistic gaps by addressing the commonalities of timing, rhythm, opportunities, anticipation, fitness and biomechanical body laws. (Approx. 75 min.)

Code 90117 — Retail \$29.95*



MARCELO GARCIA: Winning Techniques of Submission Grappling

Marcelo Garcia returns to show all the techniques and strategies he uses to dominate his opponents. This six-DVD set covers more advanced techniques like the X-guard, arm drags, taking the back and more. The set includes 2005 Abu Dhabi Combat Club footage of Garcia in action.

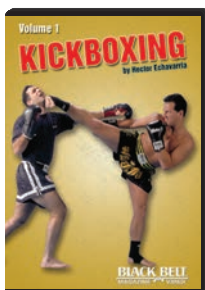
6-DVD Set — Code 5024 — Retail \$150*



CHUCK LIDDELL: Mixed Martial Arts

In this six-DVD set, Chuck Liddell takes you through the most demanding workout you will ever have; shows you how to perform various strikes, blocks, defenses and focus-mitt drills from *vale tudo*; demonstrates the sprawls and takedowns that made him a champion; and gets down on the mat to show you how to perform and counter submissions. (Each DVD is approximately 42 minutes.)

6-DVD Set — Code 70011 — Retail \$54.95*



KICKBOXING

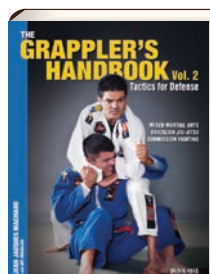
by Hector Echavarria

Hector Echavarria is a national and international kickboxing champion who has successfully defended his Vale Tudo Kickboxing Championship title 12 times. This three-volume video series is your chance to learn powerful kickboxing techniques from a true champion.

Volume 1 (Approx. 59 min.) **DVD Code 8249 — Retail \$19.95**

Volume 2 (Approx. 59 min.) **DVD Code 8259 — Retail \$19.95**

Volume 3 (Approx. 58 min.) **DVD Code 8269 — Retail \$19.95**



THE GRAPPLER'S HANDBOOK VOL. 2: Tactics for Defense

by Jean Jacques Machado and Jay Zeballos

Learn the best submission escapes from the world's greatest grappling instructor. Discover how to escape from virtually any position or submission with Jean Jacques Machado.

128 pgs. (ISBN: 978-0-89750-201-6)

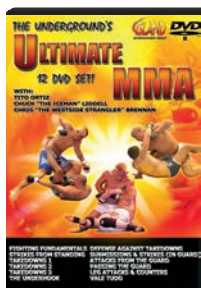
Book Code 523 — Retail \$26.95



TITO ORTIZ: Mixed Martial Arts

Tito Ortiz shows you how to develop the stamina and endurance to survive any fight, teaches you the basics of no-holds-barred freestyle fighting, reveals the techniques he's used to bring down some of the biggest and meanest, breaks down takedown defense into its critical points, shows you how to attack from the guard and more. (Each DVD is approximately 47 minutes.)

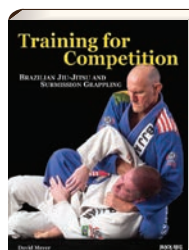
7-DVD Set — Code 70016 — Retail \$109.95*



ULTIMATE MMA

Some of the biggest names in mixed martial arts cover everything you need to know about cage fighting in this 12-DVD set. (Each DVD is approximately 43 minutes.)

12-DVD Set — Code 70012 — Retail \$99.95*



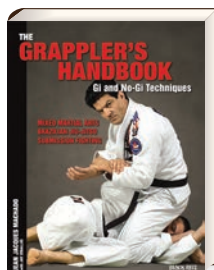
TRAINING FOR COMPETITION: Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and Submission Grappling

by David Meyer

Champion and coach David Meyer shares his knowledge of competition-winning strategies with added insights from grappling authorities like Bas Rutten, Cesar Gracie, Gene LeBell and Wally Jay.

191 pgs. (ISBN: 978-0-89750-167-5)

Book Code 495 — Retail \$24.95



THE GRAPPLER'S HANDBOOK: Gi and No-Gi Techniques

by Jean Jacques Machado with Jay Zeballos

World-renowned teacher Jean Jacques Machado highlights the secrets behind *gi* and *no-gi* techniques for martial artists of all levels to successfully transition between styles.

184 pgs. (ISBN: 978-0-89750-183-5)

Book Code 509 — Retail \$26.95

* For retail sale only. No wholesale prices.