

Tactics for Ground Fighting



Use your mind & body to gain control



There's this saying among some police defensive tactics (DT) trainers: "If you're on the ground and not handcuffing, you're losing." Whether you agree or disagree with this theory, being in a ground-fight situation with an offender is never a desirable place to be.

DT trainers have another saying: "There's always a gun present in every confrontation you're in—yours." Put the wisdom of these sayings together and you get the point of this month's Tactics column: Ground-fighting is dangerous.

In addition to keeping your gun secure, if you ever get knocked down or find yourself on the ground fighting with a suspect, your goal is to get back in control. How well you regain control really depends on your training, physical conditioning and the aggressiveness of your opponent.

Most trainers will tell you—and most courts will probably agree—when a suspect makes a grab for your gun during a physical altercation, he's already established his intent. At that point, all bets are off. You don't have to wait until he gets your gun out of your holster to be justified in using overwhelming force on him. This is a fight for your life, and protecting your gun is priority number one.

Maintaining possession of your weapons and gaining control of your

If you find yourself on the ground fighting with a suspect, your goal is to get back in control. Whatever you do standing up you can do from the ground, including defensive kicking tactics (knee strikes, foot strikes, etc.).

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opponent during a ground-fight takes strength, tactical skill and a will to win. I've covered your mental commitment to survive and physical conditioning in past articles, so now let's focus on tactics.

Tactics for Gaining Control

Staying on top of your opponent is your best option. You can do that in any number of ways, but most credible police DT trainers will tell you *getting back* on top can be accomplished by using the following method: First, fight like mad to get onto your upper buttocks. Then swivel around to face your opponent, pull your knees up close to your chest and tuck your chin in. Keep your feet up and get your hands into a blocking position.

Positioning yourself this way accomplishes at least four things: First, it makes you a smaller target. Next, it protects your vital areas and allows you to quickly move around to keep your opponent in front of you. Third, it permits you to use your feet as both defensive and offensive weapons. And fourth, it helps keep your gun away from your opponent. Some trainers suggest crossing your ankles in the event the suspect throws something at you, too.

The primary benefit of this butt-on-the-ground position is that it allows you to shift back and forth from your right hip to your left, thereby giving you access to that tactical tool box on your Sam Browne. If you weren't able to do so before the fight, you can get on the radio and call for backup during a break in the action. If the suspect hasn't made a grab for your gun and the situation hasn't escalated to deadly force yet, you've got access to your OC, your baton and your Taser. This position also facilitates shifting back and forth from right to left in the event you're fighting two or more suspects.

Once you've got the suspect off you and you've achieved some distance, you've won the first part of the battle,

but you're still not really in control. It's now time to get off your butt and get back in control. *Your next objective:* Get the suspect cuffed and stuffed.

Quickly assess the situation and choose the right force option. Ground stabilization is the preferred goal here. A short burst of pepper spray or hit from your Taser should stop his attack, change his channel and get him back on defense. Using verbal commands coupled with the proper level of force, get your opponent face down, his hands behind his back and the cuffs on him.

At the risk of annoying those restraint-system purists out there, this is probably not the time to worry about which way the key holes are facing. You've just been in a ground fight with a definite "No" person. *My advice:* Get him calmed down using proper verbal defusing dialogue for the audience that probably has arrived to watch this free-for-all, and take a second to double-lock the cuffs. Why? You may have to roll him onto his back to get him up onto his feet. Double-locking the cuffs will prevent them from tightening up during this maneuver or when you get him into the squad car.

Here's one last tactical piece of advice before we get into training: Whatever you do standing up you can do from the ground. For years, we've practiced and trained shooting from the prone, kneeling and sitting positions. The same can be said for defensive and offensive tactics, such as knee strikes, foot strikes, baton strikes and OC deployment.

Training Advice

You can't master the techniques described here by reading an article. You must practice them regularly in the gym. Ground-fighting tactics are probably one of the least reinforced physical control skills you'll ever be trained in once you leave the academy.

Most officers, if they're lucky, will get about two weeks of in-service training annually. If you come from a

smaller agency with a limited training budget, you may see 40 or 50 hours of in-service annually. Once you've factored in classes on legal and arrest updates, sexual-harassment, cultural diversity and ethnic sensitivity, crime scene management, defensive driving and, of course, the obligatory firearms training and qualification, that may leave four or maybe eight hours for less-lethal force issues.

The tactics I've discussed are all accomplished with gross motor-skill movements, which brings me to my last point. If you come from one of those 80-plus hour in-service agencies, you probably already have a pretty good DT program that incorporates ground-fighting techniques and weapon-retention skills. But if that's not the case and you have to seek these skills out on your own, be careful.

Do some research. Use your academy as a resource to find credible police DT instructors. If you must let your fingers do the walking, don't just settle for any martial artist even though they may purport to be a police DT expert.

There are a lot of martial arts academy owners out there who let cops work out for free or at a discount and call themselves police DT trainers. I've run into quite a few over the years. In my experience, a lot of these folks are nothing more than cop wannabes. Avoid them like the plague.

Not only do many teach fine motor-skill techniques the average street cop will never be able to master let alone use, a lot of these folks are exposing civilians to our police tactics, which in my opinion is unconscionable.

Also, you may just find yourself rubbing elbows (and other body parts) with some pretty unsavory characters. Seek out reputable trainers.

Until next month, stay safe. **LOM**

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