

THE  
**Triangle Hold**  
ENCYCLOPEDIA

Comprehensive Applications for Triangle Submission Techniques



*for all  
grappling  
styles*

**STEVE SCOTT**

# Triangle holds are the most effective submission techniques of any fighting sport

**“No matter your level of experience, white belt to white-haired sensei, you’ll learn something from this book.”**

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World and Pan American Games judo  
champion

**“Quite simply, the man is both a legend and an encyclopedia.”**

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for combat sports

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The legs are powerful tools that a grappler in any combat sport can and should use to their advantage. The triangle hold has proven to be the best use of a grappler’s legs when it comes to restraining an opponent.

*The Triangle Hold Encyclopedia* presents a comprehensive analysis of triangle submission holds and the many applications, variations, set ups, and positions from which they are applied. Included throughout are technical tips and discussions of how to systematically teach and study triangle holds so they become an effective part of your fighting and grappling arsenal.

A central characteristic of this book is that the skills presented can be used in a variety of fighting and grappling sports. Fundamentally sound skills performed by a motivated and well-conditioned athlete, who has molded what he or she knows to work with a high ratio of success, **is hard to beat.**

Contents include:

- Triangle holds starting from the bottom guard position
- Triangle holds starting from in front of an opponent
- Triangle holds starting from a top or back ride position
- Triangle holds starting from a holding or pinning position
- Prevention, defense, and escapes for triangle holds
- Over 1000 instructional photographs

*“As important as the power of the legs may be, knowing how to use that power is even more important—and that’s what this book is about.”*

—Steve Scott



Author photo: Becky Scott  
Cover design: Axie Breen

**Steve Scott** is an expert in grappling martial arts. He has decades of training and experience in sambo, judo, and jujitsu. He holds an eighth dan in judo and a seventh dan in Shingitai jujitsu. He is a member of the US Sambo Hall of Fame. As a coach, he has developed hundreds of national and international medal winners, as well as members of world, Pan American, and Olympic teams. Steve Scott lives in Kansas City, Missouri.



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# **Triangle Hold Encyclopedia**

**Comprehensive Applications for Triangle  
Submission Techniques**

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Steve Scott**

YMAA Publication Center  
Wolfeboro, NH USA

**YMAA Publication Center, Inc.**

PO Box 480  
 Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, 03894  
 United States of America  
 1-800-669-8892 • info@ymaa.com • www.ymaa.com

ISBN: 9781594396496 (print) • ISBN: 9781594396502 (ebook)  
 Copyright © 2014, 2022 by Steve Scott  
 All rights reserved including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.  
 Copy editor: Doran Hunter  
 Cover design: Axie Breen  
 Typesetting by Westchester Publishing Services  
 This book typeset in Adobe Caslon and Franklin Gothic

Illustrations courtesy of the author, unless otherwise noted.

20210501

### Publisher's Cataloging in Publication

Names: Scott, Steve, 1952- author.

Title: The triangle hold encyclopedia : comprehensive applications for triangle submission techniques / by Steve Scott.

Description: Wolfeboro, NH USA : YMAA Publication Center, [2022] | "For all grappling styles"--Cover. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: ISBN: 9781594396496 (print) | 9781594396502 (ebook) | LCCN: 2022931248

Subjects: LCSH: Wrestling holds--Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Wrestling holds--Training. | Wrestling--Training. | Wrestling--Coaching--Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Hand-to-hand fighting, Oriental--Training. | Hand-to-hand fighting--Training. | Judo--Training. | Mixed martial arts--Training. | Martial arts--Holding--Training. | BISAC: SPORTS & RECREATION / Wrestling. | SPORTS & RECREATION / Martial Arts / General. | SPORTS & RECREATION / Health & Safety.

Classification: LCC: GV1196.4.H64 S36 2022 | DDC: 796.812--dc23

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**Editor's Note:** Throughout this book, readers will see mention of US Judo, judo's national governing body. This organization is also known as US Judo, Inc. and USA Judo. For our purposes, the terms are synonymous.

Printed in Canada.

## IN APPRECIATION

A sincere “thank you” goes to a lot of people who helped make this book possible. My publisher David Ripianzi and my editor Doran Hunter and the entire team at YMAA Publications have been supportive, encouraging, and professional in the development, production, and publication of this book as well as with all of my books that YMAA has published. As with all my other books, my wife Becky supplied her love, ideas, critical thought, and support during the process of writing this book and getting it to print. I don’t deserve her, but I’m glad she’s there.

The photography for this book was the result of the hard work and dedication of several professionals who gave selflessly of their time and talent. Mark Lozano, Terry Smemo, Sharon Vandenberg, Jorge Garcia, and Jake Pursley provided the photos used in this book and have my heartfelt thanks.

But this book could not have been produced had it not been for the Welcome Mat and Shingitai athletes and coaches who freely gave their talent and time to this project. They patiently posed for the photos but did more than that; they contributed their enthusiasm, experience, expertise, ideas, criticism, and talent. Derrick Darling, Dr. AnnMaria DeMars, Kelvin Knisely, Sandi Harrelson, Mike Pennington, Jarrod Fobes, Jeff Owens, William Cook, Ben Goehring, Jake Pursley, Eric Millsap, J. T. Thayne, Steve Potter, James Rippee, Ken Jarnigan, Dre Glover, Eric McIntosh, Aric Weaver, T. J. Barnet, Bill West, Anthony Ishmael, J. P. Pocock, Kreig Jarnigan, Wes Wassmer, Justin Metcalf, Brian Hanson, and Josh Wyrick have my sincere thanks for appearing in the photos in this book.



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# INTRODUCTION

The legs are powerful tools that a grappler in any combat sport can, and should, use to his or her advantage. But as important as the power of the legs may be, knowing how to use that power is even more important and that's what this book is about. What has come to be known as the triangle choke has proven to be the best use of a grappler's legs when it comes to strangling an opponent in any kind of fight.

The purpose of this book is to explore what makes a successful triangle choke and many of the applications and variations that make this one of the most effective strangling techniques in any fighting sport. As with any realm of technical study, not every application or variation of the triangle choke can be presented in these pages. However, in this book we will present and examine many of them.

This book will emphasize the triangle chokes and other strangling techniques using the legs. Some grapplers or jujitsu exponents include what is known as an "arm triangle" as another method of triangle chokes. While these techniques are effective, this book will focus on the legs and lower body as the primary tools to perform the

triangle choke. Some exponents use the term arm triangles, while others (this author included) categorize these type of chokes as "shoulder chokes" or *kata jime* (shoulder choke) and in some cases even "shoulder holds" or *kata gatame*. Not including the arm triangles in this book in no way diminishes these techniques or the people who classify them as triangle chokes. It's simply this author's method of coaching and categorizing triangle chokes.

A central characteristic of this book is that the skills presented on these pages can be used in a variety of fighting and grappling sports. It is the author's firm belief that a good choke is a good choke no matter who does it, in what context or sport it is used, or who invented it. Some chokes presented in this book may not be suitable for certain grappling sports, but every attempt has been made to present the skills in this book so that as many people as possible can make use of as many chokes as possible in as many situations as possible.

As a coach and author, I hope that the concepts and skills presented here will impel you, the reader, to develop your abilities to the best possible level. If you are successful, then I am successful.

Steve Scott



“If you don’t know how you got somewhere, you don’t know where you are.”  
James Burke



## Part 1: The Triangle Choke

How It Got To Be What It Is Today

James Burke's adaptation of an old mariner's saying certainly applies to the subject of this chapter (as well as to the entire book). Another way of saying it for our purposes might be that if we don't have some factual idea of how the triangle choke developed and evolved over the years, we won't appreciate its capacity as a functional weapon or its versatility as a tool that can be used in any fighting sport.

## A HISTORY OF THE TRIANGLE CHOKE

When Prof. Jigoro Kano developed Kodokan judo in 1882, he set the stage for the growth, evolution, and expansion not only of his brilliant invention, Kodokan judo, but for what has come to be known as martial arts in general. It was the exponents of Prof. Kano's judo (as well as Prof. Kano himself) who developed the concepts of combat sports that would expand to a variety of offshoots throughout the world.

It was because of this technical experimentation, innovation, development, and growth that the concept of controlling an opponent with the legs, and then using the legs as a weapon to strangle an opponent, came into being.

In the years before Prof. Kano founded his judo, what we now know as triangle chokes were not used to any degree at all. The feudal jujutsu of Japan was designed for fighting and usually fighting an armed opponent on a battlefield. There is little, if any, historical mention of strangling an opponent with the legs in any of the ancient or feudal documents chronicling the various jujutsu ryu (schools). Grappling with an enemy combatant and exposing the legs or lower extremities to a knife or sword wasn't a wise thing to do for the *bujin* (warriors) of that time.

So, it wasn't until the "sporting" concept of grappling was introduced to the Japanese culture through judo that such techniques as *sankaku* (or *sangaku*) *jime* (triangle strangles) were developed and used. The Kosen judo exponents of the early 1900s who specialized in the groundfighting aspect of judo contributed a great deal to the early development of triangle and leg chokes. This led to a greater appreciation of triangle chokes among the top Kodokan judo fighters who spread the word outside of Japan to an international audience.

Historically, the roots of what came to be known as *katame waza* (holding or grappling techniques) or *newaza*

(groundfighting techniques starting from a supine position—what is now commonly called the guard) originate from a school that was a rival to Kodokan in its early years around the turn of the twentieth century. The exponents of *Fusen-ryu* jujutsu proved superior to the Kodokan fighters in an early dual tournament (in 1900) and it didn't take long for Jigoro Kano to bring in Mataemon Tanabe, the headmaster of the Fusen school, to teach his students at the Kodokan Judo Institute. Additionally, Prof. Kano recruited exponents of another school of jujutsu that placed emphasis on groundfighting, the *Jikishin-ryu*, around the same time to instruct his Kodokan pupils. This period, from 1900 to 1906, saw a marked improvement in the quality of groundfighting among the Kodokan judo exponents. Notably, in 1906, Prof. Kano finalized his work on *katame no kata* (form of grappling) to complement the already-existing *nage no kata* (form of throwing). These two structured forms of learning technical skills formed the basis of the early teaching of judo at the Kodokan. Several of the Kodokan's top instructors, notably Hajime Isogai, Tsunetane Oda, and Yaichibei Kanemitsu (among others) formed what was known as Kansai judo, a group of Kodokan instructors who developed the groundfighting of judo to a higher level in an attempt to be on par with the highly refined throwing techniques of Kodokan judo.

This group, as well as others, developed the Kosen judo movement that placed emphasis on *newaza* and was popular among preparatory and high school students as well as university students from 1914 to 1943.

It was in the early days of Kosen judo that *sangaku* (or *sankaku*) *jime* (the triangle strangle or choke) was initially developed. Historians differ somewhat as to who exactly was the originator of *sankaku jime*, but it was the work of Oda, Isogai, and Kanemitsu that laid the technical foundation that saw the development of the triangle choke.

When Mitsuo Maeda introduced Kodokan judo to Brazil (and in particular to the Gracie family) in the 1920s, he set in motion the eventual development and evolution of Brazilian jiu-jitsu and their approach to grappling. The Brazilian exponents took a particular liking to the triangle choke and (independently of the Kodokan and Kosen judo movements) developed their own approach to the study and teaching of the triangle choke as a distinct and functional tool in grappling and fighting, especially when applied from the bottom *newaza* (guard) grappling position.

As mentioned before, the concept of "newaza" was (and continues to be) a major aspect of not only Kosen judo but also the general approach to grappling on the



mat or ground used in Kodokan judo and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. And this approach to fighting off of the buttocks or back led to the early development of *sankaku jime* (as well as a variety of other skills) in a highly complex and functionally effective way. As previously mentioned, the early (and current) proponents of Brazilian jiu-jitsu focused on this grappling position and have done much for the further technical development of the triangle choke as an effective weapon.

## STRANGLING IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER

Strangles and chokes are the “great equalizer” in any form of fighting, whether in a self-defense situation, law enforcement or military applications, or in any of the fighting sports. Smaller or physically weaker fighters can (and do) defeat larger, stronger opponents with chokes and strangles. Depriving an opponent or assailant of the ability to breathe will make even the strongest men surrender (or pass out). If someone has forced his opponent to submit or surrender from a strangle, the fight is over and everyone knows who the winner is, since forcing an opponent to choke, sputter, gag, or go unconscious leaves no doubt who won the fight. It’s rarely a fluke when one fighter forces his opponent to give up from a choke. Maybe someone can score a “lucky punch” or a “fluke throw,” but it’s very rare to score a lucky or fluke choke on an opponent. Often, a strangling technique is the result of one grappler or fighter controlling the position of his opponent and methodically working to make the strangle effective. In many cases, a physically smaller or weaker fighter may be able to choke his larger and stronger opponent, forcing the larger fighter to submit or go unconscious.

Chokes and strangles are probably the subtlest of all fighting or grappling skills. It’s okay to be sneaky when doing chokes or strangles. In fact, it’s an asset. A good strangler knows how to use his hands, arms, feet, legs, or any part of his body to manipulate and control an opponent. A good strangler seems almost relaxed or “loose” but is always gripping, grabbing, holding, or controlling some part of his opponent’s body so that he can ultimately strangle him into submission. A good strangler has a “feel” as to how to use his hands, arms, feet, legs, and other body parts independently of each other, but working together to get the job done.

The “*shime waza*” (strangling techniques), initially conceived and developed in Japanese fighting arts such as jujutsu and Kodokan judo, gave sport grappling a whole new dimension. In Japanese fighting and grappling in the early twentieth century, the theory of *shime waza* was an integral concept in fighting or grappling on the ground. What may have been considered “dirty wrestling” in Western forms of grappling or wrestling in the late 1800s and into the early 1900s was considered just another way of gaining an advantage over an opponent to the Japanese.

## TRIANGLE CHOKES: AN EXPLANATION OF SANKAKU JIME

The method we recognize as *sankaku jime* or the triangle choke was (as mentioned previously) initially conceived and developed by the Japanese. To begin to understand this form of strangling an opponent, let’s look at the translation from the original Japanese. The word “san” means “three.” The word “kaku” means “corner” or “angle.” Thus, “san-kaku” is translated to “three cornered” or “triangle.” The word “jime” is an adaptation of the word “shime.” The “sh” is hardened to “j” when used as a suffix in the Japanese language. The word “shime” means “to tighten,” “to squeeze,” “to constrict,” or “to shut or close.” In common usage, “shime” translates to “strangle by squeezing or tightening.” We could call this choke the “three-cornered squeeze” but that is too cumbersome and doesn’t do this great weapon justice. Simply calling it the triangle choke seems to make the most sense.

A triangle choke takes place anytime the legs of the attacker are wrapped around his opponent at the neck area in a triangle or figure four (that has been formed by the attacker’s legs and feet) and the attacker applies pressure to the neck, strangling his opponent. What is often called a triangle choke is a leg choke with the attacker forming a triangle with his legs and using the power of his legs to strangle or choke his opponent. Strangling an opponent with the strength of the legs produces some of the most powerful submission techniques ever invented or used in sport combat.

This entire book is devoted to the basic concept of a fighter or grappler wrapping his legs and feet tightly around his opponent’s neck, head, and arm and strangling him with the strength of the attacker’s legs.

# TRIANGLE HOLD ENCYCLOPEDIA



## TRIANGLE CHOKES: A VARIETY OF APPLICATIONS

This book presents a comprehensive analysis of triangle chokes and the many applications, variations, set ups, and positions from which they are applied. Additionally, defenses and escapes are examined, and there will be discussion of how to systematically teach and study triangle chokes so they become an effective part of every fighter or grappler's arsenal.

### TRAPPING THE OPPONENT'S HEAD/NECK, SHOULDER, AND ARM IN THE TRIANGLE

Presented here are some examples of how the attacker uses the triangle he has formed with his feet and legs to either trap the opponent's head/neck, shoulder, and arm to create the strangling action or to trap only the opponent's head to create the strangling action. Both are valid triangle chokes, but the "head only" triangle choke is not allowed in some forms of sport combat, so make sure of the rules before you use it.

### Trapping Opponent's Head/Neck, Shoulder, and Arm



#### EXAMPLE #1

This photo shows an example of a basic triangle choke from the bottom guard position. Look at how the bottom grappler has formed a triangle with his feet and legs so that he is trapping his opponent's head (and neck), shoulder, and arm.

### Trapping Opponent's Head



#### EXAMPLE #1

This photo shows an example of a basic triangle choke from the bottom guard position, but in this situation, the bottom grappler traps only his opponent's head in his triangle. Depending on the rules of the combat sport, this application may not be allowed, but it's still a strong choke and has the added benefit of being a nasty headlock as well.

## Trapping Opponent's Head/Neck, Shoulder, and Arm



### EXAMPLE #2

This photo shows a triangle choke from a top controlling position where the attacker traps his opponent's head (and neck) along with his shoulder and arm to create a strong choke.

## Trapping Opponent's Head



### EXAMPLE #2

This photo shows a position that is almost exactly the same as the previous photo, but the attacker does not trap his opponent's arm or shoulder and traps his head only. This is a strong choke as well as an effective neck lock.

## THE LEG SCISSORS AND ITS DESCENDENT: THE TRIANGLE

While this book focuses on triangles, a few words on the scissors hold are included here to provide some insight from both a technical point of view and an historical point of view.

Any fan of professional wrestling will recognize a scissors hold. This is probably the oldest form of applying pressure to an opponent's head, neck, or body used in any style of grappling or wrestling. Some people (this author included) believe that the triangle hold with the legs is an offshoot of the original scissors hold with the legs and is the historical forerunner of the triangle hold or choke. It's also interesting to note that in just about any style of wrestling from any culture around the world, the scissors hold has been used for centuries.

Technically, when a grappler or wrestler wraps his legs around any part of his opponent's body or head, hooks his ankles or lower legs together, and then applies pressure by squeezing or constricting (or even simply holding the opponent without applying pressure), that is a "scissors." An adaptation of the scissors hold is the subject of this book, the triangle. When the attacker uses his feet and legs to form a triangle or "figure four" around any part of his opponent's body or head and then control or apply pressure (or simply to hold the opponent), that is a "triangle." Generally, a triangle hold is more effective in both applying pressure and controlling an opponent, but a scissors hold can be effective as well, depending on the circumstances and rules of the match or fight.

As with the triangle, a scissors can be used to apply pressure to an opponent's head or neck as well as his body so that he submits from the pressure. A scissors hold can also be used to control an opponent so that the attacker can apply some other type of submission or finishing hold or technique.

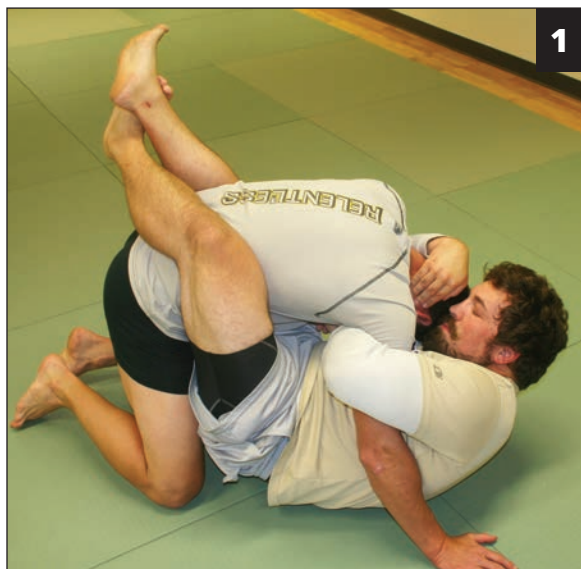
This brings up the subject of the concept of "shime waza" (constricting or squeezing techniques) as developed by the early exponents of Kodokan judo. The idea behind shime waza was for the attacker to use any part of his body or appendages (as well as any part of his clothing such as a judogi) to apply so much pressure to an opponent that the opponent would either submit or go unconscious. Any part of the opponent's body was fair game, but eventually the rules of the sport of judo limited these attacks to the neck and throat of the opponent. Such moves as "*dojime*" (literally meaning, "body squeezing") were eventually prohibited and, through the years, the

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concept of shime waza was interpreted to mean “strangling techniques” or any attack directed at an opponent’s throat.

In the photos that follow, some examples of the leg scissors are presented.

## Using a Scissors Against an Opponent’s Body



In what has come to be called the “closed guard,” the bottom grappler squeezes his legs together, constricting the top grappler’s torso. This is another example of what the Japanese call “dojime” or body constriction.



Another example of using the legs to scissor the opponent’s torso with the intent of constricting him so hard that the opponent submits from the pain. These are just some of the many variations of using the legs to scissor an opponent.

## Using the Scissors Against an Opponent’s Head or Neck



This photo shows a basic application of the leg scissors applied on an opponent’s head. The attacker squeezes his legs together; to quote John Saylor: “Squeeze his head so hard, it pops like a zit.”

While the Japanese have been credited with the early development of the triangle hold or choke, the triangle also has historical roots in the Western style catch-as-catch-can wrestling that developed in Europe and the United States. When professional wrestling was a legitimate sport, using the legs to squeeze an opponent into submission was a popular way to end a match. The figure-four hold was a well-developed wrestling move that was used to control and apply pressure to the head, neck, body, arms, legs, and any body part that could be manipulated by an attacker’s legs. Just as the Japanese developed the “triangle,” the exponents of Western catch wrestling (and later amateur and freestyle wrestling) developed the figure-four hold within the confines of the rules of the wrestling where it was used. While the Japanese included choking techniques, the catch wrestlers of Europe and the United States used this move more as a headlock or neck pressure technique since “strangling” an opponent was against the rules in catch wrestling (although “sleeper holds” and other strangles were used extensively as well). Ed “Strangler” Lewis (among other prominent professional wrestlers) used the sleeper hold and figure-four headlock with great success in the early 1900s.

While we owe a debt of gratitude to the early catch wrestlers for their development of the figure four as a headlock, it was the Japanese Kodokan and Kosen judo exponents and later, the Brazilian jiu-jitsu exponents, who developed and refined the strangling technique that we now recognize as the triangle choke.

As Kodokan judo spread throughout the world during the course of the twentieth century and as Brazilian jiu-jitsu developed as an offshoot of Kodokan judo and would

“Wrap him up like he’s a birthday present.”  
**Rene Pommerelle**



## Part 2: Triangle Chokes

From the Bottom Guard Position

## TRIANGLES FROM THE BOTTOM GUARD POSITION

The oldest and most basic way of performing a triangle choke is when the attacker is on the bottom fighting from his buttocks, back, or backside. As a result, this position produces a large number of opportunities (and as a result a large number of applications) for a triangle choke.

Historically, and as mentioned earlier, fighting from the bottom in what is now commonly called the guard position has been known in Japanese judo (both Kodokan judo and its offshoot Kosen judo) as *newaza* (grappling techniques from a supine or reclining position). Japanese judo athletes, especially those who followed the Kosen form of judo where the emphasis was (and continues to be) on groundfighting, favored strangling techniques, and triangle chokes from the bottom were developed to a high standard. Likewise, Brazilian jiu-jitsu exponents have traditionally favored fighting from the *newaza* or guard position and have developed highly refined triangle chokes from this position. The triangle chokes applied from the bottom guard position have proved to be a mainstay in many modern forms of sport combat including MMA (mixed martial arts).

From a coaching perspective, initially presenting the fundamental skills of the triangle choke from the bottom guard position seems to be the most effective way to develop the technical skills necessary for effective triangle chokes from any starting position. This is what I do as a coach, and it has been my experience that athletes who initially learn triangle chokes from the bottom guard position gain a better fundamental understanding of what the triangle choke is about and ultimately progress in skill acquisition more quickly and develop a more disciplined approach to applying triangles from any position. Literally, the best way to learn triangle chokes is from the ground up.

The next few pages of this section analyze what makes the triangle choke from the bottom guard position work. After this, a variety of functional applications and variations are presented using triangles to control, trap, and choke an opponent. Not every variation of the triangle choke from the bottom guard position may be presented, but a good number are. Don't be afraid to take what you see on these pages and experiment, innovate, and create new applications and variations of the triangle choke.

## TWO BASIC BOTTOM DIRECTIONAL POSITIONS OR ANGLES OF ATTACK

There are basically two directional applications for triangle chokes from the bottom guard. While there are any number of variations, the two most common come from when the attacker (the bottom grappler) is lying in a straight line directly under his opponent or when the attacker on bottom is lying sideways at an angle under his opponent. Both directional applications are effective, and it's pretty much a matter of preference and opportunity that dictate which is used. However, athletes who have long legs as well as exceptional flexibility tend to favor the straight-on direction when applying a triangle choke, but this isn't a hard-and-fast rule. The photos that follow show these two basic directions.

### Basic Straight-On Position from Bottom Guard



The attacker on bottom lies directly in front of his opponent as shown in this photo. This is often considered the standard application of the triangle choke from the bottom guard. A good advantage of this straight-on position is that it allows the attacker on bottom to control his opponent very well with his legs as shown in this photo. The bottom grappler also has the option of spinning and turning to a side angle under his opponent if this initial application doesn't work.

## Basic Side Angle Position from Bottom Guard



The attacker on bottom lies at an angle and sideways to his opponent (the two bodies forming somewhat of an “L” shape) as shown in this photo. The advantage of this side angle position is that it allows the bottom grappler to “have longer legs.” In other words, the side angle of the bottom grappler’s body in relation to the top grappler’s position closes the distance between the two grapplers and allows the bottom man to extend his legs further, trapping and forming a triangle easier. This side angle also allows the bottom grappler a good opportunity to roll his opponent over onto his side to complete the strangle or apply an armlock.

## THE PRIMARY PARTS OF THE TRIANGLE: ANCHOR LEG AND TIE-UP LEG

Each leg has a specific function when forming a triangle. Fundamentally, the triangle with the legs is formed with

(1) an “anchor” leg and (2) a “tie up” leg. The anchor leg is the leg that the attacker slides over his opponent’s shoulder and initially uses to trap the defender’s head. The tie-up leg is used to form the triangle by hooking onto the anchor leg.

Think of it this way: both legs trap an opponent’s head, shoulder, and arm, and the leg that the attacker initially slides over his opponent’s shoulder to wrap around his neck is the anchor keeping the opponent’s head in place. The other leg is the leg that is used to tie up, secure, and form the triangle, trapping the opponent’s head, shoulder, and arm to create the strangling action.

## The Anchor Leg



The bottom grappler uses his right leg to slide over his opponent’s left shoulder and place it on the left side of his neck. This “anchor” is important, as it is the leg that creates the initial trap that controls the top grappler’s head, keeping it in place so that the other leg can be used to form and secure the triangle.

## The Tie-Up Leg



The bottom grappler's left leg is the tie-up leg and is placed over his right (anchor) leg and ankle to form the triangle and secure it so it is tight and effective. This action ties the two legs together to more firmly secure the triangle. (More on how to form the triangle a bit later.)

## CLEARING THE SHOULDER: SLIDING THE ANCHOR LEG OVER OPPONENT'S SHOULDER TO FORM THE TRIANGLE

It's essential for the bottom grappler to quickly slide his anchor leg over his opponent's shoulder to control the top grappler's head and start to form the triangle with the legs. Sometimes, doing this is a problem, but it's a problem that can be solved with some practice on the mat.

Presented here are some primary methods that the bottom grappler can use to slide his leg over his opponent's shoulder (what I call "clearing the shoulder") and start to form the triangle. Certainly not all the methods of sliding the anchor leg over an opponent's shoulder are presented, but the methods shown all have a good ratio of success. The best thing to do is to experiment during practice to develop a variety of methods to slide the anchor leg over an opponent's shoulder and find the ways that work best for you.

## Clear Shoulder: Hand or Lower-Arm Push



Probably the most fundamental and commonly used way to clear an opponent's shoulder is for the bottom grappler to (as in this photo) use his right hand to grab the top grappler's left hand or forearm.



The bottom grappler uses his right hand and arm to shove the top grappler's left hand and arm in and close to the defender's body as shown in this photo. As he



“Everybody’s got a neck!”  
Dewey Mitchell



## Part 3: Triangle Chokes

When in Front of an Opponent

## TRIANGLE CHOKES WHEN THE ATTACKER IS IN FRONT OF AN OPPONENT

Two common methods of applying triangle chokes that have evolved over the years are used when the defender is either kneeling or prone on the mat or when both fighters are facing each other in a neutral position (either on the knees or standing). In any event, the attacker is positioned so that he is in front of his opponent.

In some situations, the defender may be positioned so that he is lying on his front, kneeling on hands and knees, or balled up as tightly as he can; in all of these cases, his goal is to somehow (usually mistakenly) survive the onslaught of the attacker (often in the hope of having the referee call a halt to the action). In some cases, this defensive position may work, but in a lot of instances, it's simply a chance for a skilled grappler to secure a triangle choke and get the tap out. This approach was initially used in Kosen judo in the early part of the twentieth century and has developed over the years in all levels of modern judo, submission grappling, and BJJ competition.

In other instances, both grapplers are facing each other in a neutral position, either on the knees or standing. In this situation, the attacker should have a definite plan as to how he will set his opponent up or place him in a vulnerable position from this neutral situation. This form of a front-starting position presents more challenges to the attacker as his opponent often has as much freedom of movement or mobility initially as the attacker does. In these situations, the attacker needs to have an effective and well-rehearsed method of setting his opponent up or breaking his opponent down so that the attacker can secure the triangle choke.

So then, this chapter will examine the triangle chokes that can be used in either of these situations. A wide variety of triangle choke applications coming from these front-starting positions will be presented, but obviously not every move ever invented can be included. So use your imagination to expand on what is shown on the following pages.

## THE TWO BASIC APPROACHES TO ATTACKING AN OPPONENT FROM THE FRONT

There are two basic approaches when attacking an opponent from the front. They are:

1. The “front ride” start where the attacker is standing or kneeling at the head of his opponent who is already on the mat and either positioned on all fours or lying on his front.
2. The “neutral” start where the attacker is either standing or kneeling facing his opponent who is either standing or kneeling as well.

## ATTACKING AN OPPONENT FROM THE FRONT RIDE STARTING POSITION

In this first approach for a front attack, the attacker is standing or kneeling at the head of his opponent who is positioned on hands and knees, balled up tightly, or lying flat on his front.

## THE DEFENDER IS ON ALL FOURS (IN A GI SITUATION)



The attacker stands and the defender is positioned on all fours on hands (or elbows) and knees as shown. This is a fairly common position in just about all of the fighting sports. This photo shows the defender on his elbows and knees.

## THE DEFENDER IS ON ALL FOURS (IN A NO-GI SITUATION)



This photo shows the defender on his hands and knees in a “parterre” position from wrestling.

## THE DEFENDER IS BALLED UP TIGHT



The defender is on all fours, balled up tightly with his hands, arms, feet, and legs in as close to his body as possible. The defender is in an extremely defensive position with the goal being to survive the top fighter’s attack and hope for the referee to call a halt to the action, giving him a reprieve.

## THE DEFENDER IS LYING FLAT ON HIS FRONT



Another extreme defensive position is when the defender lies flat on his front and tries to get as flat as possible on the mat in the hope that the attacker will not be able to secure a submission technique or turn the defender over onto his back. Usually what takes place is that the attacker pretty much has his way with the defender and gets a tap out.

## ATTACKING AN OPPONENT WHEN IN THE NEUTRAL FRONT STARTING POSITION

In this second approach to front triangle attacks, the attacker and defender are facing each other in either a kneeling or a standing start position.

## BOTH GRAPPLERS ARE IN A NEUTRAL KNEELING POSITION



This photo shows a common situation where both grapplers are kneeling (on both knees or on one knee) and tied up in a grip of some type. Both grapplers are in a neutral position in relation to each other at this point of the match.

# TRIANGLE HOLD ENCYCLOPEDIA

## THE ATTACKER IS STANDING AND THE DEFENDER IS KNEELING



The attacker is standing and his opponent is kneeling on both knees or on one knee. The attacker often has the advantage in this situation as he has more freedom of movement.

## BOTH THE ATTACKER AND DEFENDER ARE FACING EACH OTHER BUT HAVE NOT MADE CONTACT



This is a neutral position with both fighters squared off, standing and facing each other. They have not made contact with each other at this point.

## BOTH THE ATTACKER AND DEFENDER ARE STANDING AND HAVE MADE CONTACT (EITHER A GRIP, TIE-UP, OR CLINCH)



The grapplers are standing and have gripped each other or secured a tie-up but are in a neutral position at this point.

## THE COMMON FINISH POSITIONS FOR A FRONT ATTACK

This was discussed in the first chapter of this book, but it's not a bad idea to review it again in this chapter, so it's at this point that a little historical perspective is in order to better explain the most common finish positions for the triangle choke, especially as it is applied from a front ride or front neutral starting position. As explained in the introduction to this book, the historical or "traditional" method of classifying triangle chokes has been in the context or perspective of how the choke is finished. This has offered a good explanation of the conclusion, but didn't satisfactorily explain how the grapplers or fighters ended up where they were and how the choke was started or applied.

The front starting position (whether it's from the front ride position or from the front neutral position) provides a variety of finishing positions with the four most common being:

“I sit on a man’s back choking him and making him carry me; and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and to ease his lot by all possible means except by getting off his back.”

**Leo Tolstoy**



## Part 4: Triangles

From the Back Ride Position

## “GET HIS BACK”

These three words say a lot to those of us in the world of fighting sports. Getting behind an opponent and taking his back is a fundamental skill that sets up a variety of submission techniques and finishing moves.

“Getting his back” is what takes place when a grappler is able to control the position so that he is behind his opponent. From there, the attacker works to control his opponent from this rear position so he can control his opponent’s movement in order to work into a choke, armlock, leglock, pin, or other finishing technique. In MMA or in a self-defense situation, strikes and other methods of finishing the fight can also be employed.

How the attacker controls his opponent from the back depends on what the attacker ultimately wants to do. For instance, in amateur folkstyle wrestling, getting behind an opponent and riding him can earn points for the wrestler who controls the ride. In submission grappling, catch wrestling, MMA, sambo, BJJ, or judo, points aren’t scored for riding an opponent for time from behind. The primary goal when riding an opponent is to secure a submission technique. So, tactically, getting behind an opponent and controlling the position with a ride has the ultimate goal of making the opponent tap out or submit. Further, how the attacker controls his opponent with a ride from the back often depends on what submission technique he wants to attack with.

This chapter presents some triangle chokes that can be applied when the attacker is behind his opponent and has his back. Tactically, the attacker who controls his opponent from the back wants to control the movement of his opponent with a ride but must make sure to be mobile enough in his ride so his feet and legs can be used as weapons and form a triangle in order to further control his opponent and secure the triangle choke to get a tap out. In other words, if the goal for the attacker is to get a triangle choke, he should make sure to have his feet and legs free enough so he has the freedom of movement and mobility to work in and form a triangle with his feet and legs.

## RIDE TO CONTROL AN OPPONENT

A “ride” is a term used in a variety of combat sports to denote control. A ride is a temporary position that the attacker uses to maintain control of his opponent for as long as necessary to secure a finishing hold or submission

technique or to go on to another position of control. The ability to control an opponent with a ride is a skill that every grappler or fighter should spend a considerable amount of time working on. Any grappler or fighter who wants to finish the match or fight and get a submission (for the purposes of our discussion, a triangle choke) must control the position first. As I’ve written in a number of my books, “Control the position and get the submission.” For a comprehensive examination of rides that are useful in jujitsu, submission grappling, MMA, and catch wrestling, I recommend the book I coauthored with John Saylor, *Vital Jujitsu* (to get a copy, you can email me at [stevescottjudo@yahoo.com](mailto:stevescottjudo@yahoo.com)).

While there are quite a few riding and controlling positions from the back, for the purposes of securing a triangle choke when behind an opponent, this chapter will focus on three primary rides. They are:



(1) The Rodeo Ride. This is also called the “rear mount,” “back ride,” or “getting the hooks in.” I first heard the term “rodeo ride” used by John Saylor at the U.S. Olympic Training Center about 1984. It explains this controlling position quite well. John coined this name because, as he put it, “It looks like the top fighter is riding a bull in the rodeo.” The ideal situation is for the top grappler to control his opponent by “getting the opponent’s back” and “getting his hooks in” and controlling the bottom grappler with both leg control and hand/arm control. The major distinguishing feature of any rodeo ride is that the top grappler’s hips and midline of his body have contact with his opponent’s hips and midline of the defender’s body. Another distinguishing feature of this ride is that the top grappler often has one or both legs hooked into the hip or hips (or leg or legs) of the bottom grappler. Because of this, the attacker must ensure that he can get one or both of his legs free in order to use them to secure a triangle

position. This is a consideration when a grappler controls his opponent with a rodeo ride. If he wants to work in a triangle, the controlling grappler must be able to have the freedom of movement with his feet and legs so that he can use them to triangle his opponent.



(2) The Seated Rodeo Ride. In this ride, the attacker is seated on his buttocks behind the defender. This is a variation of the rodeo ride and is used often in just about every fighting sport. As in the basic approach to the rodeo ride, the ideal position for the attacker is to maintain control of his opponent from behind using both his legs and his hands and arms. As with the rodeo ride, the attacker must make sure to use the seated rodeo ride so he has enough freedom of movement with his feet and legs to secure a triangle choke.



(3) The Standing or Squatting Ride. In this ride, the top grappler is either standing or squatting behind his opponent (who may be on all fours or lying flat on his front). This may look like a rodeo ride without the top grappler using his foot or leg to control the bottom grappler's lower body. To the untrained eye, this ride may not appear to afford the top (attacking) grappler enough

control over his opponent. However, this is a strong controlling ride and allows the attacker the full use of his lower extremities by not having one (or both) legs hooked into the defender's hips. This mobility of the feet and legs is often ideal for setting up the defender for a triangle choke. Often, this ride is the ride that a triangle choke specialist will focus on to control his opponent from a back ride position.

## FUNCTIONAL APPLICATIONS USING THE THREE PRIMARY RIDES

### RODEO RIDE

The top grappler is positioned on his opponent's back, with the attacker often using his feet and legs to control his opponent's lower body and hips and using his hands and arms to control his opponent's upper body. This sequence of photos presents a frequently used triangle choke when the attacker "has his opponent's back" and "has his hooks in."



The top grappler controls his opponent using his feet and legs to control the bottom grappler's hips and lower body. The top grappler uses his hands and arms to control the bottom man's upper body.



The top grappler moves his right foot and leg over his opponent's right shoulder as the top grappler rolls to his right. As he does this, the top grappler uses his left hand to grab his right ankle to start to form the triangle with his legs.



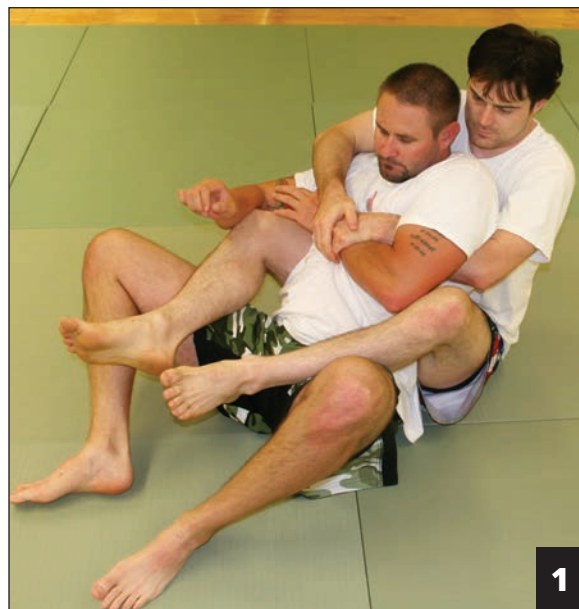
The top grappler rolls to his right and forces the bottom grappler to roll as well. Look at how the top grappler uses his left hand to pull his right lower leg (his anchor leg) in and under his left knee.



The top grappler forms the triangle with his feet and legs to finish the sequence.

## SEATED RODEO RIDE

The key feature of the seated rodeo ride is that both the attacker and defender are seated on their buttocks on the mat as shown in this sequence of photos with the attacker usually using his feet and legs to control his opponent's lower body. The attacker also often uses his hands and arms to control his opponent's upper body. This ride provides a strong and stable base to initiate a triangle choke.



The attacker is seated on his buttocks behind the defender. The defender uses his feet and legs to control his opponent's hips and lower body and uses his hands and arms to control the defender's upper body.



The attacker shifts his grip with his hand and arms and prepares to change his position to start his triangle choke.



“Park him there until he quits.”  
**Shawn Watson**



## Part 5: Triangle Chokes

When Controlling or Pinning an Opponent

## APPLYING A TRIANGLE CHOKE AFTER CONTROLLING AN OPPONENT WITH A HOLD OR PIN

Shawn Watson's advice to "park him there until he quits" is based on the dual concept of (1) controlling an opponent with a pin or time hold, making it so miserable and painful and applying so much pressure from the hold that he taps out or (2) controlling an opponent with a pin or time hold to control an opponent long enough to allow ample time to secure a submission technique or finishing hold. In most forms of submission grappling and fighting (including sambo, freestyle judo, BJJ, and MMA), a fighter or grappler can't win by a pin or hold-down. He or she must use the pin or hold-down as a method to secure and control an opponent in order to either apply so much pressure with the hold-down that the opponent submits or, more often, use the hold-down or pin to control the opponent long enough to work in a submission technique.

This chapter of the book focuses on using a hold-down or pin as a controlling position in order to finish off an opponent with a triangle choke. The advice that I come back to time and again in this book is certainly true here as well: control the position and get the submission.

### THE CONCEPT OF A "TIME HOLD"

In 1966, I read a book that changed my outlook on grappling. The book was *The Handbook of Judo* by Gene LeBell and Laurie Coughran. While there was a lot of great information in this book, one of the things that influenced me the most was the concept of a "time hold": not only making the hold or pin so miserable and painful that the guy on bottom wants to give up, but also the idea of controlling an opponent with a pin or a hold-down in order to effectively secure and apply a finishing hold such as a submission technique. A good hold-down or pin will sap the strength and take the fight out of the guy on bottom, giving the grappler in control a better chance (for the purposes of the subject of this book) of applying a triangle choke.

Holding or pinning an opponent on the ground with the intention of making him surrender is the embodiment of groundfighting or ground grappling. So let's follow Shawn Watson's advice and park him there until he quits

and examine some of the primary holds or pins used to secure a triangle choke.

## THE PRIMARY HOLD-DOWNS OR PINS USED TO SECURE TRIANGLE CHOKES

While anything is possible, there are primarily five holding positions that are most often used to control an opponent long enough to secure and apply some type of triangle choke. They are: (1) leg press, (2) mount, (3) side control, (4) scarf hold, and (5) north-south control.

### LEG PRESS POSITION



This is one of the strongest grappling positions used in any fighting sport and gives the top fighter or grappler a great amount of control over his opponent. From the leg press, the grappler on top can apply an armlock (often *juji gatame*—the cross-body armlock), triangle choke, or leglock. Or he may even switch to another controlling pin.

## MOUNT OR SCHOOLYARD SIT



The pinning variation of this is called *tate shiho gatame* (vertical four-corner hold) in judo and Japanese jujitsu. The more aggressive fighting version of this controlling position has come to be known as the “mount.” It’s also been called the “schoolboy sit” or “schoolyard sit” because this position has often been used in schoolyard fights to dominate an opponent. It’s also an effective base from which to apply a triangle choke. Every ground-and-pound MMA fighter knows this position quite well.

## SIDE CONTROL



What many call side control is also known as *mune gatame* (chest hold) or *yoko shiho gatame* (side four-corner hold)

in judo and is one of the strongest controlling positions in any form of grappling or fighting. But don’t simply think of controlling an opponent from the side as only a pinning situation as used in judo or wrestling. Side control is an ideal holding position to set up an opponent for a variety of submission techniques, including triangle chokes.

## SCARF HOLD (HEAD AND ARM PIN)



This is *kesa gatame* (scarf hold) in judo and variations of it are used in a variety of grappling, fighting, and wrestling sports. Exponents of this pin know very well how to make life miserable for the guy on the bottom, but this is also a good time hold to use to set an opponent up for a triangle choke. In a general sense, the scarf hold or head and arm pin is a variation of side control, as the grappler doing the hold is actually lying at the side of the bottom grappler. However, because of the unique control of the bottom grappler’s head, this hold will be considered as a separate pinning or holding position in which to initiate a triangle choke.

## NORTH-SOUTH CONTROL



Called kami shiho gatame (upper four-corner hold) in judo and Japanese jujitsu, this controlling hold is ideal to work a triangle choke on an opponent.

**TECHNICAL TIP:** A hold or pin gives the attacker (1) time and (2) opportunity. Time creates the opportunity. In other words, the control that a hold or pin provides the attacker is the element that gives him more opportunities to secure a triangle choke or other finishing technique. Think of a hold or pin in the same way you do a ride. It is a controlling position. If the attacker controls the position, he or she has a far greater chance of getting the submission.

## #1 Roll Back Triangle from Leg Press



The top grappler controls his opponent with a leg press as shown.



The top grappler moves his left foot and may use it to push the bottom grappler's right arm so that more room is created between the bottom grappler's arms and chest. In any case, the top grappler will start to slide and wedge his left foot inside the bottom grappler's right arm.

“A good defense keeps you in the fight.”  
John Saylor



## Part 6: Prevention, Defenses, and Escapes

## TRIANGLE CHOKE PREVENTION, DEFENSES, AND ESCAPES

The first few pages of this chapter will examine some basic concepts of preventing, defending, and escaping from triangle chokes. After that, more specific methods of prevention, defense, and escaping will be presented.

There are some common factors used when preventing, evading, defending, escaping, or countering a triangle choke attack. Fundamentally, the first phase is to prevent an attack from happening or negate the attack when initially recognized or before the attack takes place. The second phase is actively defending against an opponent who is attempting to apply a triangle choke. For whatever reason, the defender has been unable to prevent the attack or possibly didn't realize the attack was taking place. In this case, a solid defense is necessary to stay in the fight. The third phase takes place if the defender has been caught in the triangle and must escape from it. Needless to say, this is a tough situation, but keeping cool and knowing what to do may be the tools necessary to escape from a bad situation.

### PREVENTION

The best way to get out of a triangle is not to get into one and to stop it before it starts, but that is sometimes easier said than done. As presented in the earlier chapters of this book, a fighter or grappler who is skilled at triangle chokes will control the position in order to set up the application of the choke. Recognizing that an opponent is starting to develop a triangle and knowing what to look for are skills only developed through constant and structured training and through a lot of experience actually grappling or fighting on the mat. Knowing how to negate or prevent an opponent from establishing a controlling position is a skill that every grappler should have, and this takes constant, regular, and structured training. Being able to realize that a bad situation is developing is an important asset that every fighter or grappler must possess. A good way to prevent an opponent from attacking with a triangle choke is to constantly put him on the defensive. A good offense is indeed the best defense, but when fighting a fit, motivated, and skilled opponent, the ability to see when he is attempting to mount his offense is a skill that comes from hard, smart training and experience.

There are several specific preventive measures a defender must take to ensure that he isn't caught in a triangle choke. They are: (1) The defender recognizes that

the attacker is setting him up, and he or she takes evasive action to control the position to prevent the situation from worsening. (2) The defender must prevent his opponent from forming a triangle, or if the opponent has already started to form the triangle with his legs, the defender must halt its progress and keep the opponent from hooking his leg over the defender's head. Posture up, keep the shoulders in tightly and compactly, and do not let the opponent get his foot or leg over your upper arm or shoulder. Above all, control your head and don't let your opponent hook his leg over your head. (3) Pre-emptive attack: the defender immediately attacks as his opponent attempts to apply the triangle, beating him to the punch (maybe not the punch, but certainly beating him to the choke).

### DEFENSE

If an opponent is able to start his triangle attack, it is vital to act quickly and put up a good defense. It's a simple fact that it takes two to tango and the ability to defend oneself is a necessary skill.

The position (and who controls it) is a fundamental aspect of grappling and fighting. If the attacker controls the position, the defender should do everything possible to get involved in a scramble. A scramble is a grappling situation where neither athlete has an advantage. So, if you are unable to control the position then at least get into a scramble situation so the opponent has less control and does not control the position.

The defender should immediately get his arms inside the attacker's legs so the attacker can't form a triangle with his feet and legs. This is a proactive defense as it affords fewer gaps and holes for the attacker to wedge his foot or leg in to start the triangle. It's proactive in the sense that the defender can quickly take aggressive action from this position to counter the opponent.

A major rule is that at no time should a grappler or fighter lie flat on his front. Some people think lying flat on the front in this way is "safe." But in this position the defender has no real chance of doing anything other than hoping that the referee will call a halt to the action.

### ESCAPES

If a grappler or fighter gets caught in a triangle, he must immediately realize his predicament, keep calm, and do everything allowed within the rules of the sport to escape. Regular and structured drill training on both defense and escape methods are necessary for every grappler or fighter,

and working on defenses for the triangle choke should be drilled on enough that a grappler can instinctively react effectively when caught in a compromising situation.

Also, realize that an escape doesn't always lead to a situation where a counter-attack can be made. Sometimes, just getting out of trouble and surviving the immediate threat is enough to keep a grappler in the match or fight.

**TECHNICAL TIP:** When defending or escaping from a triangle choke, think logically and keep your cool. Keep things simple and get out of trouble. Often your defensive move will put you in position to better make your escape. Don't try some flashy or complicated technique simply because some famous fighter has done it. It's your neck on the line right now, not his.

## PREVENT THE TRIANGLE: KEY POINTS

### THE DEFENDER MUST CONTROL HIS OPPONENT'S HIPS

The legs are connected to the hips, so it makes sense for the defender to control his opponent's hips to prevent the attacker from forming a triangle with his legs.

## HANDS ON HIPS



The top grappler uses both hands to press down firmly on the bottom grappler's hips, pinning them to the mat. Doing this controls the mobility of the bottom grappler's hips and legs and prevents the triangle from starting in most cases.

## POSTURE UP



The bottom grappler (the attacker in this photo) wants to use one of his legs to hook over the top grappler's shoulder and head in order to pull him down low and start to form the triangle. This initial hooking leg is the anchor leg in the formation of the triangle, and the top grappler makes sure to "posture up" to prevent the bottom grappler from hooking with either leg to start his triangle.

## ATTACKER WANTS TO CONTROL OPPONENT'S HEAD



This photo shows how the attacker (on bottom) has used his right leg to hook and control his opponent's head to start his triangle choke. The bottom grappler wants to use his right leg to hook and pull the top grappler's head down low enough so that the bottom grappler can start to form the triangle with his feet and legs. It is essential for the top grappler (the defender in this photo) to prevent his opponent from pulling his head down and breaking his posture forward. This is why it is important to "posture up" and maintain a strong upright posture when in the top guard position.

## DEFENDER PREVENTS OPPONENT FROM CONTROLLING HIS ARM, SHOULDER, OR HEAD



In keeping with the two previous photos, the defender must not allow the attacker to control his head. As previously mentioned, the attacker wants to hook and control the defender's upper arm, shoulder, or head so that he can go on to form the triangle. By posturing up and keeping the attacker from hooking his leg over the upper arm, shoulder, or head, the defender (top grappler in this photo) can better prevent the triangle from being formed. Sometimes, the simplest thing to do can be the best. This photo shows the top grappler using his hands and arms to block the bottom grappler's leg from hooking the top grappler's arm, shoulder, or head.

**TECHNICAL TIP: Simple things done right are called "fundamentals," and fundamentals done right win fights.**

Some specific ways of doing this are presented in the following photos.

## ARMS INSIDE AND BELOW OPPONENT'S LEGS



To form a triangle choke, the bottom grappler's goal is to get one leg over the top grappler's arm, shoulder, and neck. To prevent this, the top grappler must make sure to keep his opponent's legs outside and below his arms.