

Gracie Invitational - Full Report and photos

Contributed by J Sho
Monday, 21 May 2007

Luciano Cristovam armbars Remco van Baardewijk on his way to double gold

Without doubt, the highlight of the BJJ Calendar in the UK is the annual Gracie Invitational tournament organised by the European Fight Network and hosted at the SENI martial arts exposition. This competition has grown from modest beginnings to a 2 day tournament which saw around 500 competitors this year, a scale that is only rivalled in Europe by the CBJJ European Championships. There were strong showings from 302 team, Pedro Bessa team, Brasa, BTT, Roger Gracie Academy, Gracie Barra Birmingham and the other academies from around the country, with over 200 white belts and more than 150 blue belts vying for the titles on offer. The competition was not limited to these shores and a number of fighters came from as far away as Hungary, Greece, Poland, Italy, Sparta and even one competitor from Australia. The competition also saw a large turnout of UK resident black belts coming to support, coach, referee and fight. The four homegrown British BJJ black belts were there, Jude Samuels (as organiser), Marc Walder, Rick Young and Ben Poppleton as well as Pedro Bessa, 'Ze' Marcello, Vitor Estima and of course Roger Gracie and Braulio Estima, both these reigning CBJJ World Champions having recently excelled at the ADCC World Championships.

From the experts to the beginners and the White belt absolute had more than a hundred people registered, but the competition would potentially still be going now. 32 athletes were chosen and it was Wolfslair member Krystian Mlynarski who beat RGA member William Koplitz to take Gold. Goran Reljic doubled up in the Blue belt division, the tough Croatian taking gold in both the super heavy and absolute divisions. The fantastic turnout at these belt levels and the high level of skill on display bodes very well for the future of BJJ in the UK. Although the number of female senior grades in the UK is very limited, with only a handful of purple belts and a sole brown belt, a Purple belt superfight between Carmen Jahnke and Jennifer Webb gripped spectators. Despite coming close, Jahnke was unable to complete any positions and ended up losing by sweep to the BTT athlete Webb.

The highlight of Saturday was four Black Belt superfights, three of which ended in submission. Lucio 'Lagarto' getting revenge for his loss in the EFN 10K Challenge to Thiago 'Monstro', submitting the Brasa athlete with a triangle. Cagewarriors champion and Ze Marcello black belt 'Xandinho' Isidro submitted the Gordo student Marcio Gomes in quick fashion with a choke, Gomes seemingly underestimating the explosive game Isidro employed. The popular Bristol based instructor Pedro Bessa took a break from refereeing to show his other talent on the mat. Having beaten former world champion 'Ze' Marcello at the 10K challenge in March, he took on another BTT instructor from Belgium, Jean Pierre Grizzo and won by choke in a commanding performance. In the final fight, Ranieri Paiva from Wolfslair beat Brasa fighter Clarks Andrade on Points.

Day 2 Nick Gregoriades stretches out Max Carvalho

On the Sunday, the Brown Belts fought in two divisions, Lightweight (under 70kg) and Heavyweight (over 70kg) and both saw some very seasoned fighters in action. The lightweights featured 4 Gracie Barra grapplers (Luiz Tosta, Kevin Chan, Paul Bridges and Dave Elliott) and one lone BTT representative, James Duncalf. Tosta was clear favourite, having taken silver and gold in the Pan American championships in the past 2 years, but he was pushed to the limit by first Bridges, who showed impressive poise and takedown skill and then Elliott, absent from competition for some time, but seemingly well practised at leg-locks. Elliott submitted Kevin Chan with a knee bar in his first match and almost caught the Mario Reis student here with a toehold in the final. Tosta's experience (and his seemingly rubber ankles and knees) proved telling and he had another medal to add to his collection. Silver medallist at the recent Thermopylae Cup, losing in the final to a much larger opponent, Nick Gregoriades a brown belt under Roger Gracie put on the joint performance of the weekend, totally dominating his opponents on his way to the gold. His final against Gracie Barra Hungary instructor Max Carvalho took many people by surprise, given Carvalho's equally impressive showing in his opening matches. Nick controlled the pace of the match and racked up a comfortable number of points before showing just how tight and controlled his game is, tying up both his opponents arms and moving inexorably to an armbar. Perhaps someone had told him Max was from Gracie Barra Persia? On any other day, Nick would have been the outstanding competitor of the weekend, but on this occasion he has to share that title with his team mate Luciano Cristovam. Luciano is arguably the best purple belt resident in the UK at the moment, having taken bronze in the Blue Belt category at the Mundials last year and made strong showings in recent tournaments, taking 2 silvers at the Amsterdam Open and double gold at the Bristol Open; Swiss Cup and the Combat Academy Open. Cristovam, cousin to his instructor Roger Gracie, emulated his relative by positionally controlling and then submitting almost everyone he faced. Fighting above his usual weight, he picked up the middle-heavyweight gold along with the open weight division title, facing the same athlete, Kevin Webb from Gracie Barra Birmingham in both finals. Webb is a clear contender for best British Purple belt, but he did not have an answer for the relentless attacking game of the Brazilian, losing by points in their weight category and by choke in the open weight final.

A planned superfight between ADCC World Championship competitors Rachel Wheatley and ADCC Germany Winner Carmen Jahnke became a round robin to include Italian grappler Paola Grisolia. Grisolia was probably not expecting such high level competition and the world class competitors she faced both submitted her quickly by choke. Wheatley, who was exceptionally close to beating Megumi Fuji at the ADCC Championships drew Jahnke into her game and submitted her by triangle in an enthralling match up. Both she and Caoimhe McGill would no doubt relish some more

competition from the other top level female grapplers out there.

Awards Ceremony

The final act of the day other than the medal ceremony, was the presentation of awards for coaches and competitors of the year. The Coaches of 2006/2007 were Braulio Estima and Pedro Bessa, who have both done an excellent job in promoting BJJ in Birmingham and Bristol respectively whilst remaining top competitors themselves (and in Braulio's case, reigning Middle-heavyweight world champion).

Competitor of the year was Marc Walder's star purple belt Michael Russell, who has won every BJJ competition he has fought on the EFN calendar and added gold in his category here to the Silver medal he won at the CBJJ European Championships in January. In the final with his rival for the crown of best lightweight purple belt, Andy Roberts, both well versed in throwing guard, he bucked expectations and went for the takedown, throwing Roberts off guard. This unexpected gameplan paid off and he beat Andy on points after a thrilling match.

Most Improved competitor for 2006/2007 was the AFS grappler Jamil Sorouji, who had torn through the white belt ranks last year and is now making a similar impression as a blue belt. Ironically his closest rival for the title, Ryan Soosanazad from GB Mario Reis, was due to meet him in the final but had to pull out due to a shoulder injury picked up in his semi-final. Both of these guys will be entertaining us for some time to come and will have made the purple belts sit up and take note.

Team of year was Roger Gracie Academy, awarded for consistency in competition - their team members having competed and medalled in more pan European tournaments than any other UK team this past year. Their stand out members include Nick and Luciano, mentioned above; blue belts Oliver Geddes and Conor Culleton; Helio Perreira, who took brown belt bronze medal at the recent Pan American Games and of course, Roger himself, who recently added the ADCC Superfight title to his already vast array of titles.

Another smoothly organised production from Jude Samuel, Jon Shotter and Andy Roberts.

Photo Gallery

Some photos from the Black Belt superfights and purple and brown belt divisions (click on the photos below to access the galleries)

[Purple Belt divisions](#)

[Brown Belt divisions](#)

[Black Belt Superfights](#)

Future Events

With an ADCC National Championships in London this July and a host of other EFN events planned, check here for more information: [EFN Events calendar](#).