

You Bet Your Life

by: Jeff Wynn

When I was a kid (this will definitely date me) there was a TV show that my parents never missed. It was run by Groucho Marx and was titled “You Bet Your Life”. I do not remember it really well — contestants had to bet on something, for sure — but the name stuck with me. After many years of on-again, off-again martial arts, including colored belts in three of them, my oldest son came home one day full of fire and said “Dad, I’ve finally found it! I’ve found a real martial art, not a martial business, and Dad — it’s pragmatic, and it works!”

Of course it was not long before I was drawn into Bruce Jones’ tiny school in northern Virginia. At that time there were only about 15 students (today on a given Saturday it is typically 60 or 70). I noticed after awhile that Bruce and Judy Jones did not accept just any student — they were not interested in macho-types, and they certainly were not interested in teaching bullies. Bruce was also very insistent that any student of his must be interested in becoming a teacher. If you were not interested in serving your community in some way, you were really miscast there.

One of the earliest lessons I remember was being asked “Would bet your life on that?” Wow. That brought me up short. Another comment I recall hearing every so often was “that’s a low-percentage move,” or “that’s a high-percentage move.” On any given day, we would work hard on just two or three different techniques, including variations. We practiced and practiced — long beyond what a beginner would think was really necessary. We were reminded, however, that understanding a technique was next to worthless unless you

built it in — you will never fight effectively from your cerebral cortex, but only from muscle-memory. If you do not have the move down from using it literally hundreds of times, it probably would not be very useful to you.

All of us, in our life experience, can probably remember at least one street-fighter who was pretty good at fighting, but had no formal martial training _ he had just learned a lot from the School of Hard Knocks. Typically this kind of fighter has learned two or three things that work really well for him ... and he uses them very effectively, even steering a fight to where he can use one of them to devastating effect.

Those reading this article understand that a wide-ranging, multiple-art kind of training available in the AJA provides a much broader tool-kit to use when Your Worst Nightmare suddenly imposes itself. That said, I think all of you have also found that several techniques work especially well for you. For me, it is *sutemi-waza*, sacrifice moves, or closing hard with an attacker against his expectations, and perhaps using a knee against a thigh-pad or fingers in the face strategically. I personally know some people who can use a *koshi-nage* with devastating results — they know it well, they are good at it, and they like to use it often. For them, this has become a “high-percentage” move. It is something they can and would literally bet their life on.

The really great leverage we have as Jujitsukas comes from the enormous range of systems and techniques we are taught to use. We are not limited to just punching or kicking, or tripping someone up, or a spin-kick. Anyone being trained in an AJA-affiliated school is taught virtually all of the high-percentage techniques. I have been impressed that those with Hanshi rank seem to know how to do most all of these techniques effectively ... that is the huge difference between them and a Nidan like myself. By brown-belt level, we all know the techniques, but by Hanshi level we can use them

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Will you be ready
to Bet Your Life?*

all. This large package means that even at brown-belt level we have a much higher chance to develop the broadest tool-kit of techniques that work — right now — for us. Now, I am fairly short (but wound tight, my kids tell me), and something that works well for one of my sons with their long limbs and two meters of height does not generally serve me very well. There are other things that work better for me.

Over a period of a year, a dedicated Jujitsuka may practice several hundred different techniques. From this large selection we will naturally gravitate towards a number of high-percentage moves — in the Reston Dojo we are encouraged to do this. When Your Worst Nightmare finds you (and the nature of the Beast is that you generally will not find it), you will have a lot of things that you may — literally — have to bet your life on. And you will have just 3 – 5 seconds to do it.

So ... when your Sensei insists that you practice that *ude-garuma maki-kome* yet another thirty times, listen. Your life may literally hang in the balance. Just two years ago, Your Worst Nightmare happened to one of my sons — a five-on-one attack. I am convinced he is alive today because of his AJA training. He very literally bet his life on his training ... and won.

Jeff Wynn recently moved from Reston, Virginia, to Vancouver, Washington to accept a position as chief scientist for Volcano Hazards with the US Geological Survey. He was suffering from serious Jujitsu Withdrawal and eventually opened his own dojo with his sons.

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