

# THE ROAD AHEAD

## PROFILE OF A PROGRESSIVE MARTIAL ARTIST

Interview Conducted By World Wide Known Blog Author Ron Goin



You ever try driving forward while looking in the rear view mirror? Turns out it doesn't work very well...seems you gotta look straight ahead...see what's coming down the pike.

As I near 50 years of training in the martial arts I'm tempted to think back on the old days. But if you start going down that path, reminiscing, looking back, you soon lose sight of the here and now, or worse yet, you forget to see farther down the road, the road to the top.

That road...the road ahead, the future of the martial arts, is in the hands of the young, up-and-coming guys...the guys who got into what my friend Brad Whitlow calls the "cool stuff" early in their martial arts journey. The

guys who've who've grown up with the UFC, who've grown up with reality-based self defense and combatives, with good training equipment, and with a wide variety of training styles and techniques ripe for experimentation. You wonder where they're going to take martial arts training. You wonder what's the proverbial next level.

I have met one of them. In fact I consider it a privilege to call him my friend.

I first met Billy Brown in the mid 90's. This young, energetic guy was already a very talented and athletic martial artist when we met, but he's gone on to gather even more information, master more and more techniques, become one heck of a martial artist.

He's been involved in the martial arts for most of his life, starting with his first instructor, his dad, almost as soon as he could walk. He has since trained in and researched many different styles and systems. He was teaching classes at the young age of 14 and was teaching professionally by age 16.

In 2000 he founded Progressive Martial Arts Training Systems. He is the founder of Counter Assault Tactics Program, which is dedicated to training civilians, business professionals and law enforcement officers in realistic and effective personal protection skills. This has led many law enforcement and military units to his door as well as presented him the opportunity to work security details for such noteworthy celebrities as Brooks and Dunn and George Jones.

His Woman's Counter Assault Tactics Program is known as being one of the most effective, yet easy to learn courses available to date.

Seeing the weaknesses of so many self defense courses and schools for both civilians and tactical professionals, he sought to form another amazing organization that was highly innovative and ahead of the curve. So, in 2009, Defend USA was born.

He has a fun, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and energy-filled teaching style, putting him in high demand to lead seminars and workshops.

His goal is to change lives and empower others, and he stresses to his students that they should not only perfect their individual martial arts skills, but that their character and conduct should constantly be perfected also. He sincerely believes that each of us should strive for never-ending improvement in every area of our lives and in everything that we set out to accomplish, always keeping a critical eye on ourselves, and always giving thanks for all the opportunities that come our way each new day.

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**RON GOIN:** *You started out as a very young man in MA didn't you? Can you tell us about your early years?*

**BILLY BROWN:** My mom tells me that my father started training me when I was only 3! I have memories starting around 5 or 6. My dad was a very self-sufficient man--the kind of guy you could drop off in the woods with nothing but a blade, and he would walk out a week later and cook you a dear stew. He was a very nice man--would literally give you the shirt off his back--but I am told that he had that switch. He could go kind-to-beast in a blink. He died when I was 11, and as I get older my memories of him fade more and more, but the ones which remain so vivid in my mind are the ones where he is training me. Holding cardboard and making me turning round kicks. Side kicking trees. Or taking my grandparents expensive knights helmet, shield and swords off the wall when they would go to church and take me out front and dress me in it and teach me sword fighting! I don't think they ever knew. These are the great memories that my mind holds on to.

I saw my father in a real fight one time when I was around 8 years old. A guy on drugs pulled a machete on my father, and I happened to be nearby. Protecting me he went into action. I will never forget the calm he showed. I watched in awe. After he disarmed and subdued this person, he walked back over to me and continued to be a dad like nothing had just happened! I will never forget that moment.

After my dad passed away, I went on to Tae Kwon Do. I received my first degree black belt when I was 13 years old. When I was 15, I got into an

altercation with an 18 year old on the soccer field. He beat me up. My ego was hurt more than anything, because here I was a second degree black belt, able to jump up in the air and kicking basketball goals, so how in the world did THAT happen!? That incident really was the catalyst that started my focused approach on real-world combatives.

**RG:** *You seem so athletic...did you ever participate in team or individual sports other than MA?*

**BB:** No, I never really excelled at any thing else. I remember sitting in on a parent-teacher conference in 6th grade. The teacher was great and really cared about me. Anyway, she jokingly looked at my mom and said, "Billy's a jackass, all he can do is kick!" I played baseball for a short time. Hated it! Soccer, I liked...just because I could kick people. I guess my math teacher was right.

The athleticism always came kind of easy to me. I just made myself be that. I wanted to be the fastest. I wanted to kick higher, and I wanted to be the most flexible. Still to this day I can drop down and do the splits.

I remember being 13 and learning a black belt form in TKD called Gae Beck. Anyway, the second move is a twist kick. I just couldn't get my foot to turn over correctly or at least to my liking. So for a week I actually taped all of my school books on top of my foot as I slept. I sure did walk funny for a while, but I ended up being able to do a pretty darn good twist kick. I have actually used that kick 3 or more times in real fights, so, I guess it worked!

**RG:** *For many years you were more of a traditional martial artist...what benefits did you derive from those years?*

**BB:** Now that I'm older, I see that the discipline was so crucial in my development, not only as a martial artist but as a business owner. This is one of the main things I see missing in many of today's MMA schools. Not just the mental discipline either, but the hundreds of repetitions we would do, that really helped my physical discipline. And later in life when I injured myself badly, to the point where doctors said that I would not kick again, those early traditional years, I really kind of reverted back to them in a way to get past that injury and rehab myself.

**RG:** *Have you done full-contact competition?*

**BB:** I have always loved sparring, and I have sparred full contact with many great fighters. From professional boxers (one of whom fought Mike Tyson) to pro kickboxing and Muay Thai fighters. I also got to do a couple of amateur Muay Thai bouts while I had my school in Louisiana in the late 90s, which really turned out to be nothing but Tough Men contests. I really never had the desire to pursue sanctioned fights any further.

Still to this day, however, I spar every week. From boxing, to kickboxing, to rolling, to full contact stick fighting with minimal padding--many times a week. I pick a handful of students that I believe can handle it, not just physically but mentally and emotionally, and these guys are my sparring partners.

**RG:** *You have one of the most thorough curriculum I've ever seen...can you share some insights about that curriculum and how you teach?*

**BB:** Well thank you for the kind words. When I first opened up Progressive Martial Arts Training Systems over 12 years ago, all I cared about was fighting. I had lots of LEO and military men, and all they cared for were fighting too. So my curriculum was nothing like it is today. It was a huge blend of things, and we would always spend most of the class putting the pads on and going. Sometimes even out in the parking lot! No wonder I couldn't keep students back then!

Later as I got older I really started to appreciate the art and the systems. I can honestly say that I have researched and/or trained in lots of different styles, and if I decided to not train in a particular system, it's really only because that focused research led me away from it.

Now I teach a mixture of the arts which I feel are the most effective in the world, not only for actually defending your life but also for health, and physical development.

**RG:** *Can your students pick and choose among curriculum offerings?*

**BB:** We have certain class times allotted for each, and while a few students choose to "specialize" in one art or training method, I must say that 98% of our academy train in everything we offer, and they get very

good very fast by doing this. We have fitness classes as well as martial arts classes. What we feel is unique about our schedule is that you can come in one day and get 3 hours of training in three different arts and training methods.

**RG:** *How important was competition for your growth, and how important is competition for your students?*

**BB:** Competition has never been that important to me. We do train fighters, but not many. I could care less about how many trophies my students win. What I care about is making sure they have a fighting chance at surviving that 3 o'clock in the morning home invasion. The types of students we get come to us because they don't care about that either. They want to push themselves, to compete against the road blocks and boundaries that they run into within their own day to day lives.

I do have many friends and colleagues and even a long time student and apprentice instructor under me that run great sport MMA programs. I am happy for them and wish them nothing but success.

**RG:** *Tell us about your self defense program for women.*

**BB:** In 2001, I had my martial art academy right outside of New Orleans. This was a time when women in the state of Louisiana were terrified--there was a serial killer by the name of Derrick Todd Lee plaguing the state.

I was approached by an organization named C.A.S.K. (Citizens Against Serial Killers). They were going around interviewing martial artists, cops and members of the military. They were trying to find someone that could put together a very unique self defense program. This program had to meet a few major criteria: First, it had to be easy to learn. Women from all walks of life, all ages and sizes had to be able to learn it. And, second, but most importantly, it had to be more effective than what was already being taught.

I am proud to say that out of all the programs they looked at, including some programs most people would recognize, my program is the one they chose. They rented out huge rooms on casino boats and would fill them up!

Once DTL was finally caught the organization fell apart and my services were no longer needed. It was as if they all thought that women were forever safe and would never be attacked again since the big bad wolf was behind bars. So I quit teaching the class for a bit.

But I started to receive email messages from women wanting the class. So, I put it back together, and I have offered it FREE of charge nearly every month since then! I have testimony from women who say the class saved their life. I have had letters sent to me from rape victims who tell me that my class gave them new reason to move forward. This ultimately is why I do what I do. A local Fox News affiliate station just came out and did a story on the program. You can view it by going to our website: [www.EMPOWERUSA.net](http://www.EMPOWERUSA.net)

**RG:** *Do the females in this program end up signing on for additional training?*

**BB:** Many do, yes. And even with those who don't, many end up coming to each and every class we offer. Some have gone through the class 20 times! For many, I certify to teach it, and they start teaching it to their church group, ladies group etc.

**RG:** *How does your kids' curriculum differ from adults'?*

**BB:** It really doesn't! Kids can learn sometimes better than adults. We have many many parents who enroll their kids into our program after being at other schools. They are shocked to see the things our kids can do! They are literally light years ahead! The reason for this is that we put NO limitations on our kids! We are not a day care and never will be. We teach them the same curriculum as the adults and they benefit greatly! For one of our kids to obtain black belt they have to show us that they can fight in all ranges. They then put on the gloves and kick box, grapple and stick spar with adult students!! And they love it, and the parents love it!

**RG:** *You do stick fighting, knife defense, and hard core combatives...How do you ensure safety at your school?*

**BB:** We have been very fortunate. No real injuries at all in the 12 years I have ran my school. I think that teaching proper technique first, before they ever spar is the major reason. My students need proper mechanics

and also respect. We are really like a big family here, no ego. That helps, and that is one of the main things that separate us from many, not all, but many MMA schools.

**RG:** *Tell us about how your training has helped you in real-world experiences.*

**BB:** Oh, this could be a long one...Well, let me start out by saying I have been a bouncer, well we prefer to use "doorman" nowadays, since 1997, and I still do it to this day 3 times a week at the biggest club in town. I can honestly say that I have been in more altercations than any person I know, excluding my LEO and military friends, who go out there and risk their lives for us each and every day. I have had to fight more than one person at a time, and I have been involved in what I call mass attacks with up to 20 people! I have had multiple weapons pulled on me, been cut a few times and almost lost my cheek and ear by a beer bottle being smashed over my face. Thank goodness I had a good doctor who knew how to sew! And I have been seriously injured in a fight and this injury will follow me for the rest of my life.

Now, I said all that not to brag--trust me as I get older I eschew personal violence, and I try to make sure future altercations go differently, more peacefully.

What this did do for me, though, is to give me a different perspective than many instructors have on real-world fighting. Instead of going into the techniques I have used--it just so happens that I DO have a formula so to speak that I tend to stick with when I do have to fight--but more than this the training has affected my mindset. The ability to problem solve in the middle of chaos and even injuries. The ability to turn the proverbial amplifier up to '11' as they say in the movie "Spinal Tap", and become an animal and get the job done, but also the ability to turn it down again when its over. This is what the training does.

**RG:** *How important is technique? Is it all about power, size, speed, or is technique relevant?*

**BB:** I always tell my adult students that our training must be perfect. So that when 'it' hits the fan, we will have a little wiggle room for screw ups!

Yes, technique and proper mechanics is extremely important to us. We feel that this not only allows the student to get the most out of his or her training experience, but it also lessens the chance of injury.

**RG:** *How do you continue to learn and grow in your own personal development?*

**BB:** Well, I am truly a lover of training, learning and researching. I try to always keep my white belt on.

As I get older and with the injuries I have had I tend to go back and look at things with maybe different eyes. By doing that maybe I can get something else out of it that I might have missed the first go around. I think that everybody I come in contact with usually has something to offer me. If I find it, I'll take it and try to make it fit in with what I do. One of my favorite sayings is from Bruce Lee and it was kind of his credo in developing JKD. He would say; "Take What Is Useful, Reject What Is Useless and Then Add What is Essentially Your Own." Man I like that!

**RG:** *You experienced a severe injury...how did you rehabilitate yourself from that injury, and how did you achieve such incredible fitness results?*

**BB:** Well this is a 2-part answer. I sustained a completely torn rectus femoris (quad). This was in one of those altercations I mentioned. I and a young lady who was with me were jumped by 4 guys, and it was really just a freak accident, but I slipped in the rain. I immediately heard it and felt it, a feeling I never want to revisit. Needless to say, it also didn't end that well for them, but that's a story as they say for another day.

Should I go under the knife like everyone was telling me to or do I risk what the doctors were saying, that I would never kick again, probably not walk for that matter? Well, for better or worse I chose to rehab it myself. After a bout with depression because of this, I decided to move forward. At first it was slow and very painful. I actually taught classes sitting down and then with a cane for almost 6 months.

After I was able to walk again and really do a lot again, I realized that I had put on a lot of weight. I was actually wearing a 42 to 44 size pant--the worse shape I had ever been in in my life.

Once again, I made a decision. And this is where PRO-F.I.T. was born. I devised a training regimen for myself, and I went from a size 42 and 44 pant to about a 34 pant in 9 months! I am in better shape now than I can remember. And although the leg still hurts, and probably always will, It is manageable, and I continually shock people with what I am able to do with it. Yes, I have many limitations that I have had to train myself to work around, but my sparring partners will never know what they are.



After

seeing the results I had with myself, I started getting many people wanting me to train them. So I put a name to my program; PRO-F.I.T. PRO- for Progressive, yes this is the first word of my Martial Arts organization but also because the training is HIGHLY Progressive. Next, F.I.T. - Functional - Intensity - Training effect.

Pro-F.I.T. differs in a lot of ways from other programs like Cross Fit for example. We stress flexibility and full range of motion, but what really sets it apart is that every workout is super-setted with core workouts like push ups and crunches. We are doing amazing number of push ups--like 800

and 900 in one session in under 20 mins. And up to 2000 crunches at the advanced levels of Pro-FIT.



This type of training we find really strengthens your entire body, especially your core and back. This way of training also develops lean, fast-twitch, explosive muscles and not stiff bulk. Our clients are military and law enforcement men and women as well as moms and dads, and they are getting amazing and fast results.

**RG:** *Can you tell us about Defend USA?*

**BB:** Defend USA is what I call our Specialty Training Organization. This is for our LEO and military students as well as everyday men and women who maybe do not have the time to devote to training with us multiple times per week. We have included training modules to combat such things as home invasion and car-jacking.

We teach Tactical Handgun and Carbine use. It expands on what someone might learn in a formal academy situation. Defend USA is also where our Women's Counter Assault Tactics Program falls under.

We go to office complexes and train the entire staff in how to respond in situations like an active shooter or an irate customer. We also have something here that we call our Fear Into Power program. This is really like a motivational Team Building class that is backed with solid self defense skill sets. We see great things for the future of Defend USA.

**RG:** *What do you think is in the cards for the future of MMA? Is it sustainable? Will it supplant boxing and other combat sports? Does it have Olympic potential? What changes would you like to see in competition/ combat sports?*

**BB:** This is a tricky question for me. I am split down the middle when it comes to the "sport" of MMA. On one side of the coin, I love it! To see these young men and women, the way they train and the passion that many of them possess, it makes me all warm inside.

On the other side, many MMA schools have lost the martial aspect. Many of the kids coming up these days think that MMA is a martial art form itself. If you learn a little of BJJ, and a little of boxing and a little of Muay Thai, you are now an MMA fighter!

MMA instilled a thought in peoples' minds that there are such a thing as superior arts! "Ground Fighting is the only way to go!" I hear it all the time! Many "MMA" schools are not MMA schools at all but BJJ schools with a little bit of mediocre striking thrown in. This is not MIXED MARTIAL ARTS at all. There are NO Superior Arts, There Is Only Superior Men and Women!

The True MMA fighter is good at it all! I don't see this as much anymore.

Another problem with MMA in my eyes is the lack of discipline in many, once again, not all but many, MMA schools. You walk in and you can feel the EGO floating in the air. Lets roll, all I want to do is roll! Once again, this is because the "MARTIAL" aspect has been lost in translation.

As far as it sticking around, sure it will. But there will be a change eventually, there will have to be for it to survive. I hope to see more humble but extremely talented fighters come along. Fighters like Georges St-Pierre and Lyoto Machida. Guys and girls that really want to get good in all the ranges and have the discipline to actually train it all, A LOT and not just look to fight in 6 months!

**RG:** *Martial arts is often associated with violence. It's a violent world after all. Does MA contribute to violence? Does it curtail violence?*

**BB:** I teach and try to portray to my students that we do this to not become violent people but to have an answer to violence. My goal is to be able to provide as many answers that I can so that If ever my students are attacked, their survival rate goes up dramatically. So ultimately, we train to preserve life even If that takes violence to do so.

**RG:** *How important is it to work on a specific style? Is it better to use techniques like a buffet table, picking and choosing, or to pursue one path at a time...stay dedicated to a style and see it through?*

**BB:** The beautiful thing about cross-training is that each and every art and system and training method brings out and develops a different feeling, a different energy and movement in the student. Even a different mindset.

From a physical view we are training multi stress movement on our bodies. One art will teach you to move a certain way...for example Jeet Kune Do can be very straightforward and explosive, whereas in the Filipino Martial Arts many times we prefer to zone and move off on angles.

Now in a real fight, you might end up needing both of these types of movements and because your body has trained them, it will know how to put it into motor skill in that valuable, time-is-life situation.

Another reason why we put such an emphasis on the cross-training is because you really never get bored. Our adult retention rate is amazing, and the reason why it is is because they have so much to choose from. I have had adults spend 4 years learning just one art that we teach and all of a sudden out of the blue they come up and say I think I want to start training in this one too! This keeps them challenged, and I'm going to tell

you a black belt of mine, kids and adults, can do it all--they box, kick box, they have good solid ground skills, and they can pick up a blade or stick.

The growth here because of the way we have the programs structured is really amazing thing to see.

**RG:** *The MA business is filled with con-men, hucksters, and frauds...how do you convince moms and dads, men and women, college students, to sign up for classes? What do you offer them that differentiates your program from the others?*

**BB:** As soon as they walk through our doors they can sense that we are different. I even encourage them to go and sit in on other classes at other schools before coming here. And then I make sure our presentation, our energy and our professionalism is LIGHT YEARS away from what they just witnessed somewhere else.

Next, the classroom, the material being presented. I make sure that they watch and learn in awe. I want them to see real martial arts unlike anything that they ever thought of when they thought of Martial Arts. I make sure that they see how effective and dynamic the training is, but, more importantly, I make sure that from the very first day they leave feeling that they grew in some way, and every day that they come back they are going to leave with that same feeling! This is the key. This is what makes us different and they see it immediately.

**RG:** *How come traditional martial arts still pulls in so many people?*

**BB:** Well, because people just don't do the consumer research. When someone who has never trained in the martial arts closes their eyes, this is what they see: White uniforms and people doing KATA, bringing their hands back to their hips when they punch. Our goal is to make them see the difference, then feel the difference and leave Knowing the difference.

We have at least two new people every week that come talk to us after taking one of our classes and they always say some thing like this; I had NO clue that what I just saw and did was even possible! We love it!

**RG:** *You're always working on something new...How do you know what to work on next? What draws you to new stuff?*

**BB:** I get bored easy...a little ADD I'm sure. I have to be doing something. Building a website, listening to a motivational book on tape or training. Many times I do alot of these things at the same time! It drives those that are close to me crazy. I always try to be moving forward in some way, and I think that this is what keeps me busy and learning.

**RG:** *What are some of the things you want to be good at but just haven't gotten around to yet?*

**BB:** You know I would love to delve into Jui Jitsu with a gi someday. Right now I'm just so into the street application that the Catch As Catch Can and Shoot Wrestling and Dumog and even Judo just fits me better.

**RG:** *If you could just go and train somewhere with somebody, where do you think you'd go...who out there really calls out to you?*

**BB:** Well I would love to spend some time at the Inosanto Academy. Each year it's getting harder and harder for me to catch all the seminars I would like to. I am just too busy growing P.M.A.T.S. I would also like to make it to the UK and train with Geoff Thompson. There are others. We will see. Never know what the future holds...

**RG:** *You're still young...you've got your whole life ahead of you...what would you like to accomplish?*

**BB:** I am going to first make sure that Progressive Martial Arts Training Systems grows into a well-known name in Tennessee.

Defend USA is next...hopefully we will get in with local and state Police Departments.

And of course I will continue to grow PRO-FIT as well as develop Instructors and coaches so that they will have the chance to go out and EMPOWER others as well.

I can never see myself NOT teaching! I am not one of those instructors that wants to build a huge nest egg so they can play golf and collect checks. I will be in the classroom until the day I die. As long as I continue to grow, and as a result of that my students continue to grow I will become

a happy wealthy man. That is true wealth to me; going to sleep at night knowing that my talents and abilities were used in a way that served others.