

Train, Compete and Repeat: A review of BJJ 24/7's growth in the UK and its aspirations of expansion in the UAE

Sayed Abdul Majid Gilani¹, Mohammad Arif Peer², Mona Golshan Sorour³, and Aiden Gilani⁴

1. Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK, sayedabdul.gilani@bcu.ac.uk
2. Handwara College, Kashmir, India, Peerarif81@gmail.com
3. UCAM Catholic University of Murcia, Spain, mona.golshansorour@gmail.com
4. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK, aidengilani@hotmail.com

Abstract

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) is a form of martial art that involves submission grappling which mainly includes elements from Judo, Sambo and Freestyle Wrestling. BJJ was developed in the early 20th century through a collaboration between Mitsuyo Maeda and his students Carlos Gracie, Helio Gracie and Oswaldo Fadda. However, there was a slight stylistic difference between the style of BJJ taught by the Gracie brothers and Oswaldo Fadda where Fadda's style was more based on leg locks. BJJ grew in popularity around the world due to its widespread exposure to the masses through the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) events in the 1990s. BJJ was proven to be the dominant martial art in the earlier UFC events. The audience witnessed a far smaller Royce Gracie defeating much larger and more intimidating-looking opponents through BJJ in the UFC events. This exposure led to an eventual demand and growth for BJJ Schools and competitions in the United Kingdom (UK).

BJJ 24/7 is a business which organises BJJ competitions all over the UK. This business has held competitions in all major cities in the UK since 2015. BJJ 24/7 is formerly known as Grab and Pull which organised BJJ competitions and sold martial arts equipment under the leadership of Gustavo Oliviera. However, Grab and Pull changed ownership and name in 2015 when Lawrence Dutton acquired the business from Gustavo and changed the business name to BJJ 24/7. Lawrence also added the 'Train, Compete and Repeat' to the logo to further appeal to competitors, especially, UK-based competitors. BJJ 24-7's events saw a significant rise in competitors and events from 2015 up to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic era in early 2020. At the height of its success, there were around 8 events with over 250 competitors per event organised and executed by BJJ 24/7 every year. Lawrence's success with BJJ 24-7 is attributed to his innovative approach to designing the logo for the business, for different events and the medals awarded at the events. He was also innovative in the integration of new applications like Smoothcomp which were groundbreaking in enhancing the customer experience through an interactive and real-time registration system for competitors to track their registration and the timings of their matches (*Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure*). Other businesses in the same industry followed BJJ 24-7's approach and methods and greatly benefitted. During this successful period, Lawrence always aspired to expand into other regions outside of the UK. In collaboration with the Pakistan Ju-Jitsu Federation (PJJF), Lawrence tried to execute an event in Pakistan in 2015. However, due to a lack of understanding of the market and political instability, the event did not take place.

The restrictions imposed by the UK government during the pandemic era had a detrimental impact on BJJ 24-7 events as no participation in contact sports was permitted during this period. This harmed the health and well-being of BJJ practitioners and regular competitors at events like BJJ 24-7 where there were cases where these individuals suffered mental health issues and health issues due to an increase in weight (*SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being*). After the conclusion of the pandemic era, Lawrence has re-emerged as a leader in BJJ competitions through the BJJ 24-7 events. In 2024, BJJ 24-7 successfully delivered 9 events. However, due to the significant increase in the emergence of competing events, Lawrence would be better placed to consider expansion opportunities in other regions to ensure the survival and growth of BJJ 24-7.

The purpose of this case study is to provide insight into the emergence and growth of BJJ 24-7 as well as the trials and tribulations encountered by Lawrence. This chapter also wants to challenge students to evaluate BJJ 24-7's potential entry into the UAE market where there appear to be limited options for BJJ practitioners looking to compete outside of the events governed by the UAEJJF (UAE Jiu-Jitsu Federation). Additionally, the authors provide recommendations for BJJ 24-7 to better inform the business in its future steps.

Keywords: BJJ 24/7; Brazilian Jiu Jitsu; UK; UAE; SDGs; Innovation

Introduction

Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) is a submission and position-based martial art which consists of elements from Judo, Sambo and Freestyle Wrestling. BJJ's origins can be traced back to Japan and Judo where BJJ was invented by a few martial artists in 1920 (Essential Jiu Jitsu, 2025). Carlos Gracie was one of the prominent figures behind the development of BJJ (BJJ Heroes, 2014). Unlike other martial arts, BJJ was created to make the attainment of belts/ranks challenging for students where belts were awarded based on practical competence in the art. White, Blue, Purple, Brown and Black are the belts awarded in BJJ where the White belt is the starting belt (360 Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy, 2019). As shown in Fig. 1, on average it takes 1-3 years to achieve a Blue belt, 3-5 years to achieve a Purple belt, 2-4 years to achieve a Brown belt and 2-4 years to achieve a Black belt (360 Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy, 2019). Blue belt is widely known as an indication of an intermediate level of knowledge in BJJ whereas Purple belt onwards indicates an advanced level of knowledge in BJJ (360 Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy, 2019). BJJ has changed the lives of people around the world in terms of confidence, lifestyle and health where it has transformed people from vulnerable backgrounds into confident individuals leading their lives.

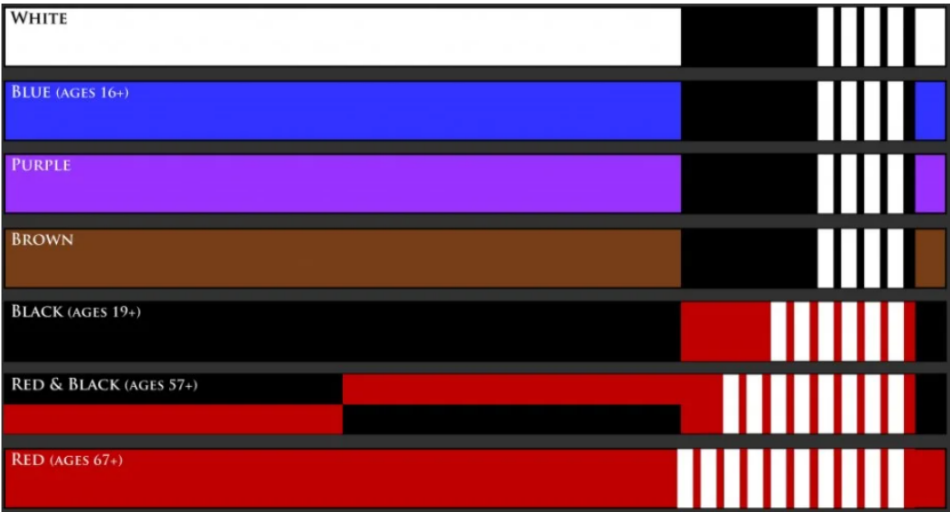


Fig. 1. Belt Ranks in BJJ
Source. 360 Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy, 2019

BJJ gained prominence in the late eighties and early nineties through numerous Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) events which pitted martial artists from different styles against each other to determine the most dominant martial art (King Jiu Jitsu, 2025). The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) was one of the more prominent MMA events which provided a platform for martial artists to test their skills (King Jiu Jitsu, 2025). BJJ was proven by Royce Gracie (Fig. 2) and Rickson Gracie in numerous events to be the most dominant martial art (King Jiu Jitsu, 2025; 360 Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy, 2019).



Fig. 2. Royce Gracie winning UFC 1
Source. King Jiu Jitsu, 2025

This led to an increase in BJJ dojos across North America which was attributed to the increase in demand for BJJ amongst consumers. This also led to the emergence of BJJ-related competitions around the world where the Abu Dhabi Combat Club (ADCC) Championships and IBJJF (International Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Federation) were the pioneers of such events (Evolve Daily, 2025).

The success of BJJ competition-based events led to the emergence of smaller events which were on a more domestic level. The Grab and Pull events under the leadership of Gustavo Oliveira were one of the earlier events in the UK which eventually transformed into the BJJ 24/7 (Fig. 3) brand under the leadership of Lawrence Dutton (UK Government, 2014).



Fig. 3. BJJ 24/7

Source. UK Government, 2014

History of BJJ 24/7

BJJ 24/7 emerged as a submission grappling competition brand in late 2014 under the ownership of Lawrence Dutton (BJJ 24/7, 2025). BJJ 24/7 carried out events in UK-based major cities like London, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Belfast, Newcastle and Glasgow from 2014 to the end of 2019 (BJJ 24/7, 2025). The events averaged 300 competitors and the brand became widely known for innovative designs for medals, and generous prizes and for adopting innovative technologies like Smoothcomp to enhance the customer experience where the role of innovation has been demonstrated to have an impact on business growth (Gilani et al., 2024). However, the authors do explain that the significance of the impact of innovation on business growth may be attributed to the infrastructure and leadership styles of the organisational hierarchy (Gilani and Faccia, 2022). Lawrence had major ambitions to expand his brand into other nations like Pakistan and the Middle East. However, due to political instability in Pakistan, Lawrence opted to leave the expansion into Pakistan to a later date.

Despite the significant growth of the BJJ 24/7 events, Lawrence did encounter new challenges such as other brands closely imitating their brand to attract their market share which involved new rivals like All Stars allegedly replicating their design, brand and medals. This led to BJJ 24/7 re-evaluating its strategy to ensure survival and growth in the market. This involved BJJ 24/7 changing their strategy, design and branding as well as ensuring legal protection to ensure the protection of their identity and reputation. In addition to challenges presented by the emergence of All Stars in the English market, BJJ 24/7 encountered a new challenge in the Scottish market. Scottish Grappling which had a presence in the Scottish market long before the entry of BJJ 24/7, saw significant success through a significant change in its operations and marketing-based strategy (eg technological innovation, change in marketing and design of the events) where from 2015 onwards it re-emerged as a major player in the Scottish market. The success and growth of the Scottish Grappling events led to the eventual exit of BJJ 24/7 from the Scottish market. However, there was a bigger challenge awaiting BJJ 24/7 and Lawrence in 2020.

Temporary Closure of BJJ 24/7 Events during the COVID-19 Pandemic Era

In March 2020, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that all public, social, travel and gym activities to cease due to the emergence of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019). COVID-19 was a contagious virus which led to infection through close contact between individuals (Fig. 4) (BBC, 2023). Therefore, close contact activities like BJJ were prohibited by the UK government which had a detrimental impact on the BJJ 24/7 events (UK Government, 2021). BJJ 24/7 events were temporarily ceased until the end of 2021 after all COVID-19 restrictions were removed by the UK government. This took a major toll on BJJ 24/7 financially, however, Lawrence pursued other forms of income and government funding to ensure the survival of the business during the pandemic era.

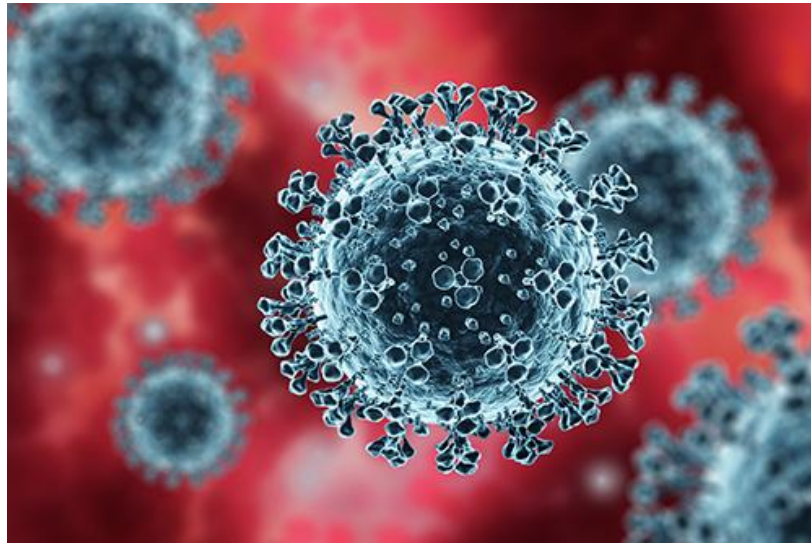


Fig. 4. COVID-19
Source. BBC, 2023

BJJ 24/7 re-entered the competition market in August 2021 with the Brighton Summer Open event. The event was a major success with over 300 competitors. After the pandemic era, BJJ 24/7 has re-emerged as a leading entity in BJJ competition events in the UK (Smoothcomp, 2021). However, there may be an argument that the growth of BJJ 24/7 has plateaued at the UK domestic level. Therefore, there may be scope for BJJ 24/7 to enter new regional markets.

Potential Entry into the UAE Market

Submission grappling/BJJ has been an acknowledged fixture in the UAE since the ADCC events in Abu Dhabi in the early nineties. Abu Dhabi World Professional Jiu-Jitsu Championship, the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam Jiu-Jitsu World Tour, Fujairah International Jiu-Jitsu Championship, the Mother of the Nation Jiu-Jitsu Cup, Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Jiu-Jitsu Championship, UAE National Jiu-Jitsu Championship, and the Asia Continental Jiu-Jitsu Championship are the most prominent events held in the UAE (UAE Jiu-Jitsu Federation, 2025). The events are mostly organised by government-related departments or gyms based in the UAE, eg Team Nogueira based in Dubai regularly organises grappling events throughout the UAE (Smoothcomp, 2025). Additionally, most of the events appear to be on a more international or grand scale and expensive which may be off-putting for new competitors looking to compete in BJJ tournaments. Therefore, there may be a demand for a regular domestic-level brand running more affordable and less intimidating tournaments regularly.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that BJJ 24/7 further explore innovative solutions to enhance their everyday operations like marketing, sales, communication, monetary transactions and coverage of events. Numerous authors have demonstrated the positive impact of innovative technologies on business survival and growth regardless of business sector and size (Al Jaghoub et al., 2024; Gernal et al., 2024; Moussa et al., 2024). The authors also recommend that BJJ 24/7 better adapt and change behavioural styles and characteristics to overcome challenges like the pandemic era which may aid the business in surviving and thriving; this has been demonstrated by studies in other industries and geographic contexts (Aseer et al., 2024; Krupicka et al., 2024; Sulthan et al., 2022).

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