

The History  
of  
Minna-Jiu-Jitsu

## The History of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu

It's a typical, everyday scene. It can happen in a parking lot, on a dark street or anywhere a big, strong bully decides to pick on a smaller and to him an 'easy' looking victim.

Usually the bully has all the best of it. Either the stranger backs off and escapes without his self-respect or he stands his ground and exchanges punches with an enraged madman. But not always, because sometimes what happens is this:

A Minna-Jiu-Jitsu block stops the punch; a Savate kick wracks his shin (which cannot be protected) and is extremely painful; and a karate chop breaks his collar bone or neck, disabling him. All of this occurs in approximately five to seven seconds. The fight is over--neatly, correctly and with no heavy breathing.

This is the aim of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu: self-defense. It's name is Japanese for "All Arts", in recognition of the fact that it is a flowing combination of many arts and of many styles under one system.

MINNA-JIU-JITSU = "ALL ARTS" for SELF-DEFENSE

It leans most heavily on Jiu-Jitsu, Hapkido, Karate (Tae Soo Do Chang-Mu Kwan) and Savate; the first three being Oriental and the last French foot fighting--"L'art de la Savate".

The idea of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu is to make available to a large variety of people some way that they can protect themselves and provide a system that is practical and easy to learn.

Frank F. Kovacs, the originator of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu, studied many systems and styles over forty years. He noticed that often a technique of Jiu-Jitsu flowed quite smoothly into a karate strike or a Savate kick. The possibility of meshing the martial arts like gear teeth fascinated him. He explored further, first in Europe and later in the United States and wound up devising some 300 techniques that are based on practicality and effectiveness. The big question has always been, "Will it work on the street?"

Minna-Jiu-Jitsu means different things to different people. While Kovacs is inclined to introduce some effective but not flashy technique by saying, "Not good for show but it works, very effective", there are those among the higher belts who yearn for the theatrical. For them there are all sorts of flying kicks that are good for the soul and the gallery, even though they would bring the victor flat on the same cobblestones as the vanquished if they were used out on the street.

This is a different century where men talk peace and carry a big stick. Deep in every man's soul it is natural to defend himself no matter how meek. He is troubled today when he feels that there is no way he can defend himself in the jungle that our cities have become.

A great many of the white belts started taking Minna-Jiu-Jitsu because they have been beaten or threatened. They find it unrewarding to slink through life. Many find they enjoy Minna-Jiu-Jitsu and stay. Some have a definite purpose in mind: mastery of perhaps a few simple techniques that they feel will give them an edge over an attacker. After they learn these they leave.

Minna-Jiu-Jitsu is taught by the continuous grind method. The same class goes twice a week for years with new members doing the best they can and receiving praise for their small accomplishments.

Proficiency is dependent on individual effort. Certain techniques come more easily to some than to others, but all techniques are given a solid base by continual stress on fundamentals: striking, blocking, kicking, throwing, rolling and falling. These form a part of every training session. They become second nature -- mind over body.

Minna-Jiu-Jitsu teaches basic, simple defense against various attacks -- gun, knife, baseball bat or chain, as well as unarmed attacks. The students become more proficient as they go on. Women learn special techniques to defend against attacks most likely to occur on the playground, at school or on the sidewalk.

Clausewitz, the biggest war strategist said that the best defense is a good offense, but Minna-Jiu-Jitsu does not hold that. It is taught from a defensive position, although the advanced practitioner could easily figure out ways to use it to initiate an argument.

The idea of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu instruction is to give a variety of techniques so that they can be fitted to an individual's needs and abilities to boost his self-confidence as well as his skill. To this end no one is allowed to advance in rank until he has a feeling of self-confidence which the techniques and his own obviously improving physical abilities generate.

A standard class lasts two hours. It starts with thirty rigorous minutes of calisthenics that wind up with blocking, kicking, striking and falling techniques. Then the people in the class take partners, high belt with low. The instructor explains the defense to the attack he is teaching. It may be from the front, side or back. He throws in a few words of caution if the defense may be a killing technique. Then he and an uke demonstrate the technique. After this, a few black belts to the technique. Then the instructor calls for questions. After that, the partners practice what they have learned with black belts circulating to catch mistakes at the beginning. After practice, each pair is brought out to do the technique or series of techniques with an experienced uke replacing the white belts who may lack confidence.

Four to six techniques a night are taught, each one ending with a finish. A finish in Minna-Jiu-Jitsu is a strike or kick to some vital point of the attacker once you've got him to the ground. This insures his demobilization.

The attacks consist of strikes aimed at the body or face, all forms of grabbing and pinning, weapons and multiple attacks. Controlled body contact is allowed to permit stronger feel for the technique as well as to condition the uke.

Sparring is similar to the kumite of Karate. But to relate it to street fighting, the scoring areas include the knees, groin and other vital areas. Only light contact is permitted where permanent or serious injury might result. A black belt has amazing control of his contact, white belts much less control, naturally.

Judo throws are permitted if one fighter can throw the other before he himself is scored upon. Techniques of street fighting are emphasized by the open fight. Because the basic class stresses only self-defense with no flourishes, special classes are held for those interested in tournament sparring.

Minna-Jiu-Jitsu looks for essentially the same points in doing techniques as are stressed in Kata of Karate. When a student practices by himself outside of class, the repetition of strikes, blocks, stances and their combinations are done in a manner similar to Kata. This practice shows up in his techniques. Kata means the same as stances or the proper stepping to a different way with much speed.

There are interclub competitions in techniques demonstration and sparring with occasional open tournaments where other unarmed self-defense styles can compete.

There are clinics for black belt instructors to standardize techniques so that all students will be taught the same thing. It would be easy for variations to slip in without this periodic tuning up.

The ranks range in ascending order of ability -- white, yellow, green, blue, purple and brown belts.

Although the head instructor of any school may test through the rank of purple belt, a black belt test requires a minimum of three higher black belts to form a testing committee. Each test for a rank requires from the student a demonstration of self-defense techniques divided into categories: hand, foot, Jiu-Jitsu, throws, weapons defense and sparring; miscellaneous such as attacks by multiple attackers; controlling techniques and others. Master Frank F. Kovacs can test alone up to his own belt without the assistance of a testing committee.

The committee grades the techniques on the basis of the student's knowledge of techniques, speed, focus, control, power, concentration, balance and attitude.

The minimum time for advancement between the first five ranks is 14 weeks for each belt. The average time is four to six months. From brown belt to black requires a minimum of nine months of work but the average time is between 12 and 14 months. An industrious, talented student can reach Sho-Dan in two to three years with approximately 300 techniques under his or her black belt.

Classes meet twice a week for two hours each and there are two to four hours a week of practice outside of class on open-mat nights. Students are expected to be able to help teach up to one rank below theirs, although no one below brown belt can have his or her own school. Every school must be approved by the Jiu-Jitsu Black Belt Federation of the USA and is required to register yearly with the JJBBF.

A black belt cannot promote students until he becomes a certified instructor, which takes six months of training after becoming Sho-Dan. During this period, he must teach satisfactorily under a higher ranking black belt.

These rules were set up by the Federation, a group formed in 1962 in Cleveland after a number of schools had been attracted by Kovacs' interweaving of Oriental and European defense arts. The

organization is chartered by the State of Ohio. Although Kovacs taught his combination in Europe before emigrating to this country in 1950, the name originated here when his first generation of black belts figured that some special term was necessary to prevent fragmentation.

The Federation has been rewardingly successful. Membership as of 1980 reached approximately 3,000 not including white belts, who may or may not stick it out, hence are not counted. Minimal fees are charged each year for student and school registration; also for new rank changes. Besides private studios, classes are conducted in YM and YWCAs, recreation centers, elementary and secondary schools and colleges. Several colleges, in fact, offer Minna-Jiu-Jitsu for physical education credit.

The idea of self-defense has branched out. Guards at the Cleveland Workhouse are taught Minna-Jiu-Jitsu and several greater Cleveland police departments require it of their police officers. Frank F. Kovacs is a certified Police Self-Defense Instructor for the State of Ohio.

Although it requires vigorous work, it is by no means beyond the motivated graybeard to progress through the ranks of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu. A few men started in their fifties and are still at it after several years. They no longer huff and puff as they keep up with the teenagers.

There are special courses for those who cannot hear, for the mentally retarded and the handicapped. The idea is not only to impart techniques, but to also build up confidence. Where a handicap forbids truly adequate learning of techniques, certificates of completion are given in place of belts.

The managing director in the JJBBF is Frank F. Kovacs, the man who devised the combination of defense arts. He was born in the beautiful Transylvanian mountains of Hungary in 1923. Living under the old regime, he was brought up in military fashion popular with the ranking families of Europe. From childhood he was fascinated by the martial arts, starting with Savate at the age of six. He studied with a variety of instructors, both European and Oriental. He continued his education through military academy which fortunately offered three years of instruction in Tae Soo Do Chang Mu-Kwan.

Kovacs holds rank in Jiu-Jitsu, Hapkido, Karate, Savate and Judo. He holds a 10th degree Master rank Black Belt in the Korean system of Hapkido. There is a problem in attaining high degrees in the United States. Where do you find the higher belts necessary for the testing? Kovacs was tested by a committee of lesser black belts who made motion pictures of his techniques. The film was sent to Seoul, Korea by sensei Kim-Sun-Ku, a USA Olympic referee, one of the committee. In due time, word came back that Kovacs had passed. The belt itself and the diploma were awarded by Kim who was asked by Seoul to make the presentation.

Kovacs had ample chances to test self-defense techniques throughout his lifetime. He was a border guard lieutenant in Hungary on the Frontier before World War II in which capacity he put his hand-to-hand combat to work. He was less successful against submachine gun attack and carries several scars to prove it. When he came to the United States, interest in self-defense was beginning in this country but it was by no means possible for a man, however black his belt, to support himself by teaching it. Kovacs found employment as a designer in electrical engineering, which had been his major in military college. Because of his accent and foreign background, he often was the subject of street attack, although never twice by the same fellow.

He figured that other people might be having the same harassment without the same background that would allow them to do something about it so he began teaching self-defense at night, stressing unarmed self-defense. He started teaching in 1957. By 1962 it was necessary to form the Federation to avoid the proliferation of sixty-day wonder black belts and fly-by-night schools.

One of the functions of the Federation is to monitor instruction at the member schools. Standards have been kept high and Minna-Jiu-Jitsu has prospered -- the main concentration of classes being in the Eastern and Midwestern areas of the United States.

Although it is quite pleasurable to practice and teach Minna-Jiu-Jitsu, there is also a serious aspect to it. Every Black Belt instructor and every school owner is responsible for his or her students. This responsibility is not to be taken lightly and is one of the main ideas behind the teachings of Minna-Jiu-Jitsu.

There is no claim that Minna-Jiu-Jitsu is the Jiu-Jitsu system of the universe or even of the world, although it is one of the largest self-defense systems in the eastern United States.

As Master Kovacs said, "One does not often read about styles specializing in self-defense since they do not produce big tournament winners. But they prove themselves on the street, where it counts."

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# Roots of Minna-jitsu

**JIU-JITSU** - The ancient art of unarmed combat was brought to Japan by the Chinese monk, Chin Gendin. Its precise origins are not known. Popularity of the martial art spread throughout Japan which was beset by civil wars and clan feuds. When an 1871 ordinance abolished samurai from carrying swords, use of jiu-jitsu increased.

**JUDO** - This invigorating, exciting and enjoyable modern day sport is derived from the more deadly serious jiu-jitsu. Formulated by Dr. Jiguro Kano at the end of the 19th century, it became popular in the West, eventually gaining world-wide appeal.

The Art of Judo lies in the ability to interpret body movements of the opponent. The practitioner skillfully applies power of resistance and a seeming-to-yield in numerous techniques to overcome brute force.

**Philosophy:** The devoted practice and rigid discipline of attacking and defending techniques and meditation refines the body and soul to perfect oneself and contribute something worthwhile to the world. It develops the most effective use of both physical and spiritual power and strength.

**KARATE** - The ultimate art of unarmed combat simultaneously develops all powers of body and mind. Physically, it strengthens and trains hands, head, knees, feet and elbows as powerful weapons, capable of delivering effective blows. Spiritually, it develops self-control and presence of mind that helps one handle even daily problems with confidence.

The Art of Karate harmonizes subtle balance and controlled strength techniques while the mind masters self-discipline through meditation. This combination is expressed through self-confidence and self-awareness.

**Philosophy:** Development and perfection of physical abilities and spiritual discipline to unify the whole person for the benefit of all Mankind.

**LA SAVATE** - French foot-fighting was developed in the time of the French Revolution in 1489.

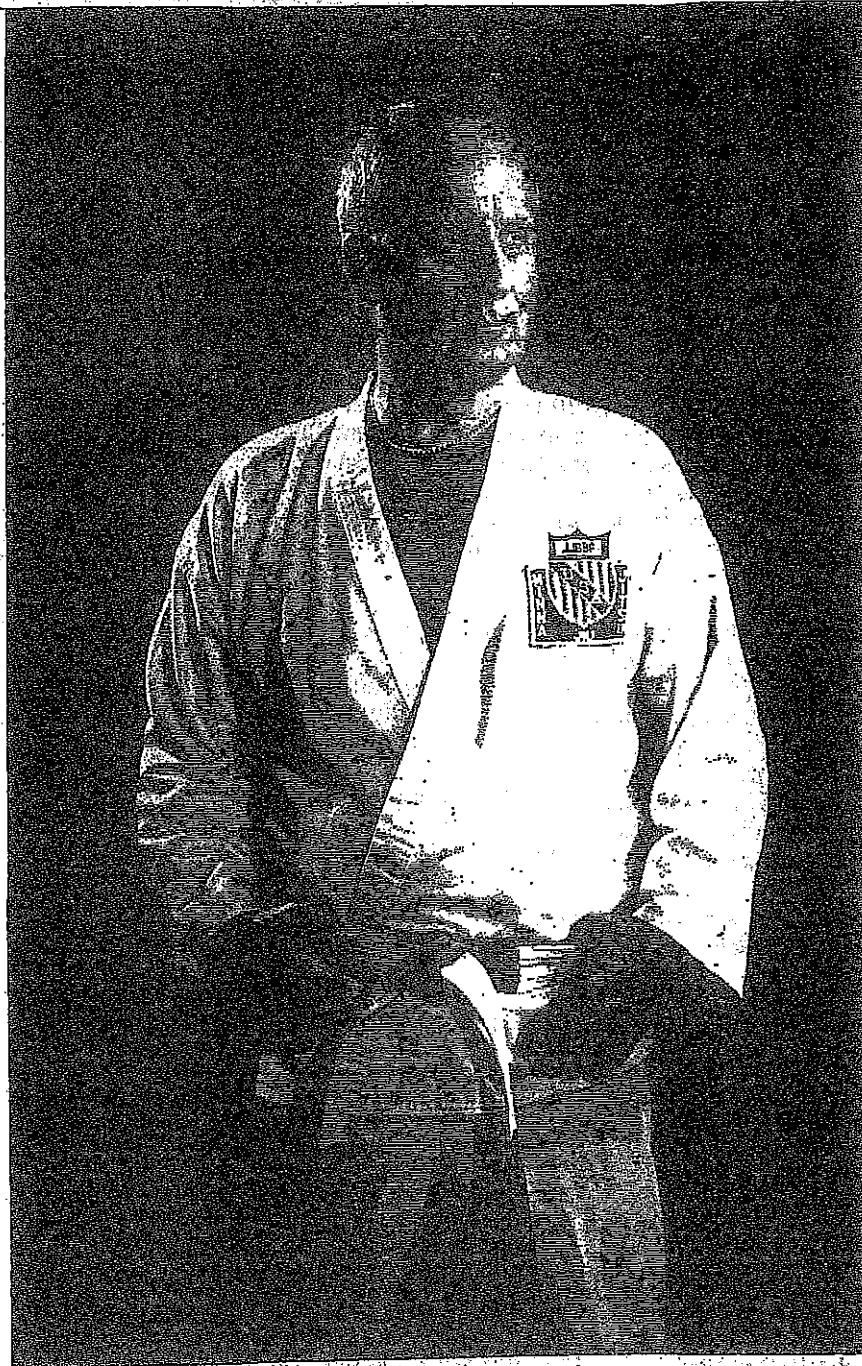
The Art of La Savate can stop any kind of attacker with techniques of foot kicks. These techniques are especially useful for women and children warding off a physically stronger opponent.

**Philosophy:** Any attacker can be beaten off with a common house-shoe.

**MINNA-JITSU** - Developed 40 years ago by Frank Kovacs for the American temperament and personality. It means "all arts" and encompasses the best of each martial art form.

The Art of Minna-jitsu combines the throws of judo, the chokes, grabs, flips of jiu-jitsu, the kicks of savate and the chops of karate in a self-defense art form completely personalized for the fast-paced American way of life.

**Philosophy:** The American way of self-defense, until recently, was the first fight of the Old West. The shorter, lighter opponent was at a disadvantage not knowing any other form of self-defense. Minna-jitsu was developed as a quick form of the Oriental art of self-defense without the slowness of repetition and meditation so unacceptable to Western thought. Minna-jitsu gives the best of all arts - now.



Frank F. Kovacs  
10th Degree Master

*Mayfield Academy of Karate and Self-Defense  
5844 Mayfield Road  
Mayfield Heights, Ohio*

*(216) 449-6891*