

Burton Richardson's JKDU Unlimited High Performance Mixed Martial Arts

JKDU is a Mixed Martial Arts school located on the Hawaiian island of Oahu (the main tourist island of Hawaii which is home to Waikiki beach). JKDU is run by Burton Richardson. Burton has an excellent reputation in the international martial arts community, he is a former member of the Dog Brothers and he also has ties with the Matt Thornton's Straight Blast Gym, anyone who is into their stick fighting, grappling or MMA would appreciate the significance of a martial artist being able to have these credits amongst their credentials. Burton's bio has a whole lot more going on but rather than rave on about his qualifications you can check it out for yourself at the JKDU website. Burton has developed JKDU with focus on providing an MMA based street ready martial art. Street effectiveness is the primary agenda at JKDU but they also have the capacity to assist those wanting to compete in sport grappling and MMA. Just recently a number of Burton's JKDU students were promoted to Blue Belt and Purple Belt in BJJ and the cool thing about it was that they were graded in No-GI BJJ (a pretty rare opportunity and something which I imagine we'll start to see more of in the BJJ world).

So, anyhow, in 2004 my wife and I were passing through Hawaii on our way to meet up with the CST crew in Atlanta. I had become pen/email pals with a guy in Hawaii named Jarlo Ilano who co-moderates the CST Forum with me and some other kind folks. Jarlo and I thought it would be cool to catch up while in Hawaii and once Jarlo learned I trained in BJJ he suggested I come in for a training session with him at Burton's JKDU. I knew Burton was a former Dog Brother and also very talented in all ranges of martial arts, two facts which had me feeling pretty darn intimidated. Based on the fact that the full name of Burton's school is JKDU High Performance MMA I also figured my traveller's health insurance would likely get a thorough workout. Well, as it turned out nothing could have been further from the truth, Burton turned out to be an awesome bloke with a very rare ability, the rare ability of being able to have his class work hard, push the envelope and yet stay shy of the line where one crosses into a high risk of injury. Anyone who has trained in the contact forms of martial arts would know what I mean by this.

Judith and I met up with Jarlo at our hotel and he drove us to the hall where JKDU's classes are held. Although I found Oahu a pretty confusing place to get around I do recall that JKDU wasn't too long a trip from the heart of Waikiki, we even had time for dinner after training. Upon entering the hall we were greeted by Burton's wife Sarah, Sarah is an integral part of JKDU and she made us feel right at home. Burton then came over and introduced himself and he was so welcoming and accommodating that any onlooker could have mistaken us for being long lost members of the Richardson clan.

As we set up the mats all the members of the class introduced themselves and once again made me feel right at home (Jude sat the class out as she was still feeling pretty jet lagged). A few minutes into the class I had totally forgotten I was training a group of relative strangers in another country, I was just lapping up the training and having a great time (not to mention a great workout). The training session itself went from stand up work, to clinch and then finally to ground. We covered striking, grappling and then a combination of the two in a very well planned format (as one would expect from an instructor of Burton's reputation and a school with MMA in its title). The training session progressed in intensity in an incremental fashion from warm up to the hard work. I think this incremental way that Burton ramps things is a key factor in how the JKDU can end up functioning in a physically tough manner and yet still have such a great degree of safety in their training. This is something which few schools seem to have mastered and as such they usually end up presenting their students with training sessions that are so light on contact that it fails to be of much practical value or sessions that feature such hard levels of contact that students have trouble going to work the next day. Under Burton's watchful eye JKDU manages to find that perfect balance and this is something that many martial artists would benefit from.

Although there was no stick and knife work in the training session I attended I know that JKDU does do a lot of stick and knife work, this gels well with their street ready emphasis and is not surprising given Burton's vast experience in the FMA's. Burton is actually in the process of releasing an instructional series on the practical aspects of stick and knife work and by the time you read this it may already be up on his website (I think it is called Battlefield Kali), this could certainly be worth a look for those wanting the practical aspects of stick and knife work without the impractical fluff that seems to proliferate in some systems.

One thing that really shocked me about my training session at JKDU was just how friendly and accommodating Burton was. He kept coming over to ask how I was going and if there was anything in particular I wanted to work on. Few martial arts schools are so accommodating to visitors or even their own students for that matter. This level of friendliness was especially nice to see from someone of Burton's standing in the martial arts community. There was certainly no hint of the "holier than thou" attitude which is sadly quite common amongst many high level instructors. It was proof that you don't have to be a wannabe dictator with a chip on your shoulder to hang at the top of the martial arts food chain.

After training a few of us chatted for a while and then Jarlo and his wife Theresa took us out for a delicious dinner, truly a great way to wrap up a great experience.

All in all I can't speak highly enough about how impressed I was with my terrific (albeit brief) experience of JKDU. If you ever get the chance to check it out then do so, be sure to do the courteous thing first of contacting JKDU ahead of your anticipated visit and remember to leave your ego at home.

Thanks very much to Jarlo and Theresa for arranging my chance to share a training session at JKDU and thanks very much to Burton, Sarah and all the JKDU gang for making me and Jude feel so welcome.

Aloha,

Matt :)