

## CASE STUDY

## WORKING AT THE FRONTLINE

Like Stephen Wood, Jiu jitsu coach **Stephen Millard** wrote for *FHS* in January 2005. Here, 18 months on, he reflects further on his coaching life since then – a time that has been akin to being on a roller coaster. Here, he provides us with an insight into the challenges and achievements he has faced and, essentially, what he has learnt from his experiences.

Everything is done quicker these days. We have fast food, high-speed Internet connections and even speed dating! So much to do and so little time – that pretty much sums up my life and, certainly, the last three years. In September 2003, I took on quite a big responsibility. One of my jiu jitsu instructors asked me if I'd like to take over his club. He wanted to concentrate on his own training and, in order for me to be considered eligible for taking my black belt, I needed to run my own club for at least a year. In the blink of an eye, the deal was done and there I was, in charge of not only coaching but also administering a club.

The first year of teaching the club was easily the hardest. I experienced a steep learning curve and the personal commitment in time and effort was far greater than I had originally anticipated. The club grew from strength to strength. Some of this growth was due to us running more sessions and making the club that bit more accessible; some was due to the success we began to have at competitions and courses. However, I believe that most of the club's success can be attributed to a more fundamental change – a change to its culture.

Most people view martial arts as being a sport for the individual; every time you train with someone, you seem to be going out of your way to try

and hit or throw your partner to the ground. It can be quite hard to build a rapport with fellow jiu jitsists in that sort of environment. So, in my first year as the club's instructor, I began trying to build up a 'club spirit'.

With a mixture of team-based games in the warm-ups, trust exercises, organised social events and pitching courses and competitions as team-based events, there was a massive shift in the way the club felt. People were happier and coaching became that much more fun – and time flies when you're having fun!

My second year at the club should have seen me building up my preparation for my black belt, but a recurring injury early on put me out of training for a few months. So, I refocused my attention on the club and on my coaching skills. There wasn't much time to spare but, somehow, I managed to speed-read a couple of teaching or coaching books each month, and I started trying to evaluate how effective I was. I began structuring my lesson plans differently and my long-term planning helped make sure that everything was running along smoothly. All the time, the club was growing bigger; we were getting to the point where we were really going to need a lot more space.



© Christopher Maughan

'WHILE BEING A PASSIONATE COACH IS CLEARLY BENEFICIAL, HE NEEDS TO BE A ROLE MODEL ON LIFE AND SET GOOD EXAMPLES IN SO MANY OTHER WAYS AS WELL.'

## CASE STUDY



The club was internally strong, so the next step was to expand out a little. I had the opportunity to get involved with the start-up of a local group called Active York. This started to broaden my understanding of the world of sport in general and, through this, I began building relationships with the sports development unit within the council. As a club, we began offering to do workshops and demonstrations, the most prestigious of which was a series for the Royal Armouries in Leeds as part of their Shogun exhibition.

Soon enough, the year was over and my third year as an instructor was beginning. One of the senior students also became mandated to teach the club. With a new role at work and a stable club, I decided it was time to focus on me for a little while.

I began training for my black belt once more and I started a part-time sport development course at one of the local universities. My workload, understandably, increased substantially. I worked hard and even found time to continue developing my child coaching skills. With more demonstrations, extra training courses, homework and requests to develop a coaching course for other instructors, I found myself careering through the year without a second to spare.

The third year drew to a close with a bit of a bump. The training didn't pay off and I missed out on the elusive black belt. While I felt disheartened, I also felt a great weight lifted and I began to re-evaluate the last few years and finally slow down a bit.

Several years ago, I read a story about a great Samurai. A true warrior poet, he worked slavishly hard each day and partied long into the night.

**'MOST OF THE CLUB'S SUCCESS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO A MORE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE – A CHANGE TO ITS CULTURE.'**

© Christopher Maughan

He made each day count by experiencing as much as he could. I've been trying to spend my life as he spent his, except I missed the point...until now. His days were full but they were also balanced.

I'm not only an instructor to my students but a role model as well. This year, I'll be hoping to set a new example for them – as a coach who fills his days in a more balanced way.

### In Summary

Coaches not only coach their athletes on their technique, but often on things outside their sporting arena. While being a passionate coach is clearly beneficial, he needs to be a role model on life and set good examples in so many other ways as well.

At the end of the day, sport is about being great and about focusing on the win. Perhaps, to be truly great, you instead have to focus on finding a balance.

## Profile

**Stephen Millard** is a brown belt in the martial art of jiu jitsu, which he has been studying since 1993. He has taught at national and regional events and courses, as well as at various clubs. In 2003, Stephen became the lead instructor for a club based in York. As well as acting as a volunteer jiu jitsu coach, he is also heavily involved with Active York (the local CSN) and works full-time as an IT consultant for a leading insurance company.