

Faster, Higher, Stronger

Up Close With Olympic Bronze-Medalist Ronda Rousey

by Gary Goltz

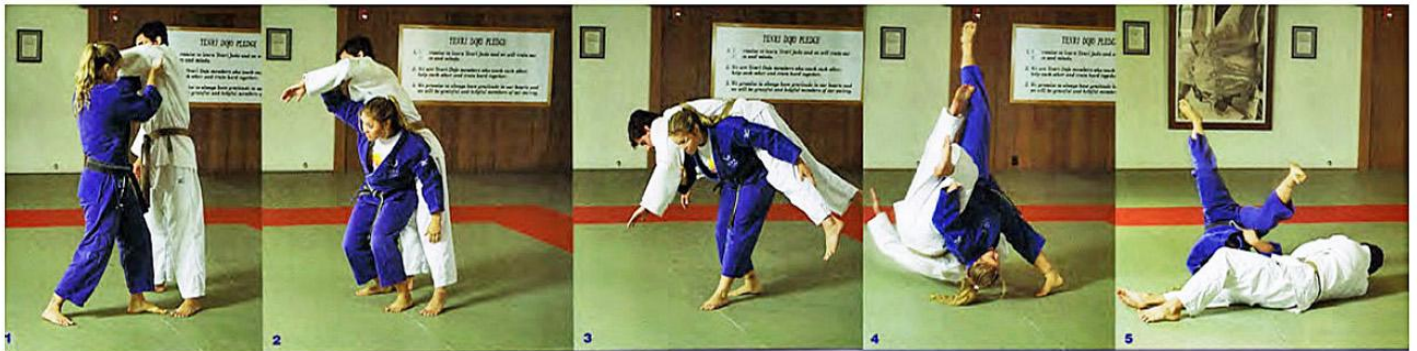
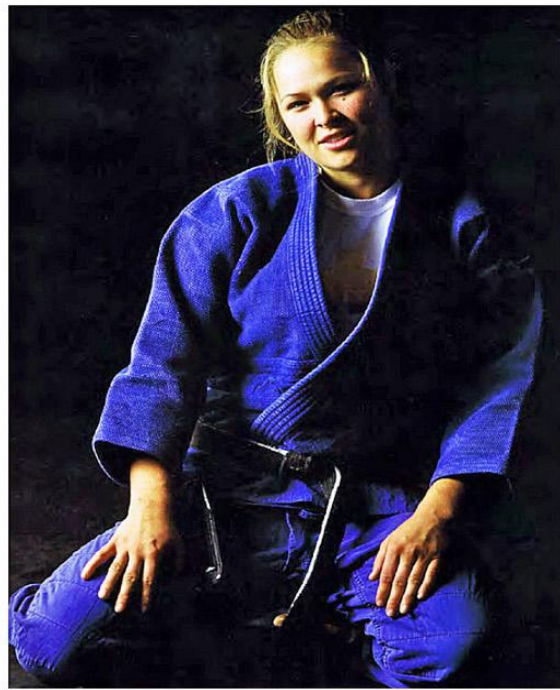
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Photos by Rick Husted

Anyone who's a true fan of the Olympics knows the motto of the games by heart: *citius, altius, fortius*, Latin for "faster, higher, stronger." The phrase dates back to 1894, when a Frenchman named Pierre de Coubertin initiated the rebirth of the Olympics, created the International Olympic Committee and proposed it as the organization's motto.

Not coincidentally, those three words are tattooed boldly around the ankle of Ronda Rousey, a fourth-degree judo black belt and 2008 Olympic bronze medalist. Two years after she made history by becoming the first American woman to score an Olympic medal in judo, the 23-year-old remains the golden child of the grappling sport in the United States. >>





LIFT-PULL HIP THROW: Ronda Rousey closes the distance on her opponent, lifting his left arm (1) and pivoting under it (2). She maneuvers his weight onto her back (3) before flipping him to the mat (4). The momentum of the throw takes her to the mat, as well,

but a breakfall minimizes the force of the impact (5).

Rousey's path to the top didn't start at the 2008 games. In 2004, when she was only 17, she secured a spot on the U.S. Olympic Team, which guaranteed her a place in the history books as the youngest judoka to enter the quadrennial event. The same year, she bagged a gold at the Junior World Judo Championships in Budapest, Hungary. Fast-forward to 2006: She once again hit gold, this time at the Birmingham World Cup in the United Kingdom. In 2007 it was more gold, this time at the Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro—plus a silver at the World Judo Championships in the same city.

The experience she gained at all those international competitions helped propel her to the winners' dais at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Rousey's success isn't the result of any single factor; rather, it stems from a number of sources. She possesses the athleticism that's needed to become an Olympian, she trained under renowned

Massachusetts-based coach Jim Pedro Sr. and she hails from one of the most pedigreed judo families in the world. Her mother, AnnMaria R. DeMars, Ph.D., was the first American to win the World Judo Championships in 1984.

It wasn't always judo-mania for Rousey. Originally a swimmer, she competed but eventually grew tired of the sport. At age 11, she set about persuading her mother to let her sign up for judo lessons. DeMars was hesitant at first, worried that expectations would be too high, but in time she acquiesced. Her decision would prove to be the

right one, for her daughter quickly rose through the ranks, exceeding everyone's expectations as she did so. When she started competing internationally, her grappling career took off.

Since her success, Rousey has been interviewed on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and photographed for *Vogue* magazine by the renowned Annie Leibovitz. She was named *Black Belt's* 2008 Judoka of the Year and received the 2009 Woman of the Year Award from the New York Athletic Association.

After years of rigorous training, traveling the globe for tournaments and participating in two Olympics—not to mention suffering and recovering from numerous injuries, some of which required surgery—a high-caliber athlete might be ready to slow down a bit. Not so for Ronda Rousey. I asked the champion judoka about her plans for the future and learned that although she admits to being

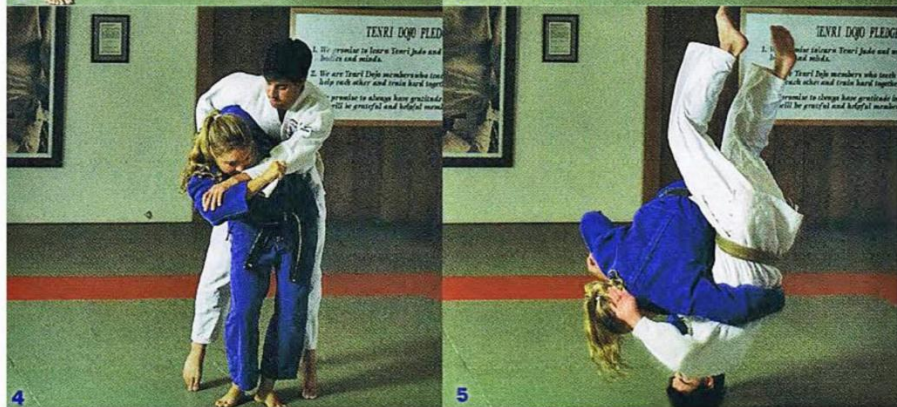
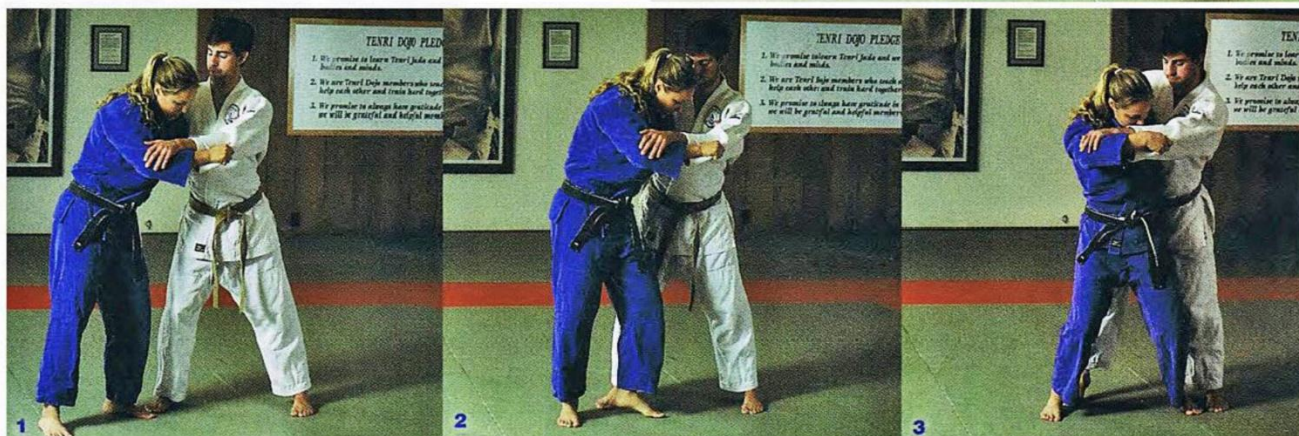
INNER-THIGH SWEEP: Judoka Ronda Rousey establishes a grip on her opponent's left sleeve and right lapel (1). She steps forward with her foot, turns her body and lifts his left arm (2). Next, she places her hips under his (3) and powers them up as she uses her left leg to sweep his leg

out from under him (4). The opponent is spun over Rousey's left hip (5). The force of the technique carries her over his body, and she finishes the move with a roll and breakfall (6).





SIDE CORNER THROW: Ronda Rousey and her opponent tie up, with Rousey holding his right sleeve and the back of his gi top (1). She steps closer with her left foot and lowers her body (2). Rousey then drops to the mat, swinging her right leg between his feet and pulling on his uniform (3). The opponent is yanked off-balance, and he falls onto his back (4). Rousey is in control of his right arm, and her right leg prevents him from escaping (5).



MAJOR HIP THROW: Ronda Rousey and her adversary lock up (1). Controlling his upper body with her left arm and his left arm with her right hand, she steps forward (2) and turns so her hips are against his (3). She bends forward to bring his weight onto her lower back (4), then immediately extends her legs to execute the throw (5).



About the author:

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at a crossroads in her life, she's not ready to hang up her gi just yet.

Rousey did take off most of 2009. During that time, she hatched a plan to travel to Japan so she could join an elite female judo team and prepare for the 2012 Olympics. After a short time in the Land of the Rising Sun, however, she concluded that she didn't want to be away from her Santa Monica, California, home, as well as all her family and friends. Change of plans: Rousey opted to train locally. Southern California has deep roots in the sport of judo, with plenty of talented coaches and elite competitors within a 100-mile radius, so she's confident her skills won't atrophy.

The champ said she's considering pursuing her education and perhaps enlisting in the U.S. Coast Guard. She has even been toying with the prospect of becoming a professional mixed martial artist.

Although it remains to be seen which direction Rousey will take as the next chapter of her life unfolds, one thing seems certain: She's already left her mark on American judo. ✕



[Ronda's Uchimata Video at Goltz Judo](#)



In the Beginning

Dr. AnnMaria De Mars and her daughter, Ronda Rousey, began showing up at our dojo in the early 2000's. About a year before the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, AnnMaria told me of Ronda's intent to make the U.S. Team but needed the funding for training. So I mentioned this to my good friend and judo student Dr James Lally, DO. He in turn gave Ronda \$35K of support.

After winning an Olympic Bronze Medal, Ronda became well known in mixed martial arts eventually becoming UFC Champion, a movie star, and even hosted *SNL - Saturday Night Live!*