



Colorado carrier takes on jiu-jitsu

An athlete most of his life, Mark Eder has tried quite a few sports. He wrestled from elementary school through college, played football and other sports in high school, then played professional rugby for seven years after college.

“Then I had to hang up those spikes, because it was a rough sport,” he said. “So, I was thinking to myself, ‘What else can I jump into that would really go hand in hand with my previous experience?’ ”

The answer came to him while delivering mail.

Eder, a letter carrier since 2020, delivered to the Katharo Training Center

in Littleton, CO, a few times, and seeing the Brazilian jiu-jitsu, kickboxing and Muay Thai that the facility offered piqued his curiosity.

The Centennial, CO Branch 5996 member, a self-described natural competitor, decided to give Brazilian jiu-jitsu a try. “Once I got on the mat and started learning, I just fell in love with the sport,” he said.

Choosing jiu-jitsu because it’s a “grappling” style of self-defense that he thought would complement his wrestling skills, Eder found that it was a tougher transition than expected. “In wrestling, you want to be this individual who’s constantly going at it and putting a lot of pressure on your opponents,” he explained, “where jiu-jitsu is kind of like you’re moving—or you’re reacting—toward your opponent’s moves. So, it’s a little bit more—I would say, a calm calculation kind of attack.”

Fighters start off with a white belt, then move up to blue, purple, brown and then black belt. Masters with decades of experience can obtain a higher coral belt, though there are only about seven people in the world with that designation.

In between belt color levels, there are four degrees that are earned as fighters progress and that are awarded by the professor. Eder currently is a three-stripe blue belt.

When fighters advance to the next belt, a ceremony is held because it’s “quite the achievement,” the carrier says.

He practices at the training center four to five days a week after work. “It’s a lifestyle,” Eder says. “I try and get my route done, and then I go straight to training, where I decompress and de-stress.”

That constant practice has made a difference for Eder. “I got really good at it really quick,” he said. “I’ve jumped a few belts within a short period of time,

which has allowed me to then join into competitions.”

Brazilian jiu-jitsu teaches even the smallest person to be able to defend themselves against the biggest opponent, he explains, so there are no assigned training partners—it’s whoever shows up that day.

Eder loves that the jiu-jitsu community as a whole helps each other develop. “There’s something about going into a battle, or a hand-to-hand combat kind of experience, with another person,” Eder said. “It’s almost like an intimate moment that you share with that particular person, and that particular person knows exactly what you’re going through. They share the same struggles, they share the same difficulties. And when you guys come out of that together, it’s just a wonderful celebration. I love feeling that elation.”

For training, he walks in and suits up in his gear, called “gi,” a traditional kimono-style uniform used for jiu-jitsu, although sometimes he opts for “no gi,” which instead consists of tighter clothes, like shorts and a shirt, and doesn’t allow for opponents to grab each other’s clothing. The former puts the focus on leverage and technique, while the latter puts emphasis on speed and agility.

“When we start our 6 p.m. class, we do a 30-minute hard roll,” Eder said. “That means we put the timer on for 30 minutes, and you pick a partner, and for five-minute matches, we go hard.”

He continued: “We try and tap each other out. We try and choke each other out. But there’s an etiquette there. We’re not trying to hurt our training partners. We do that to our competitors. So, you have to have a certain maturity level.”

Afterward, they’ll have a half-hour class from his professor, the training

center’s owner, Steven Hordinski III, to learn technique and new moves, and then practice them. Following that, Eder generally mixes it up—either attending a beginner jiu-jitsu class both to learn fundamentals and help newer students; taking a mixed-martial arts or kickboxing class; or hitting the weight room.

Eder competes in Brazilian jiu-jitsu tournaments every two months, the most recent being in February. He generally competes within Colorado but has traveled to Texas and Arizona for tournaments.

Last fall, he also started participating in cage fighting matches, where it’s a no-striking/submission-only jiu-jitsu match in the cage. “There’s no point system—you go until somebody gets tapped out or somebody gives up,” he said.

Though his current record is 18-6 in Brazilian jiu-jitsu tournaments, he’s gone 9-0 in his last nine matches, and he’s won both of the cage matches he’s fought in. “I’m looking to continue that success this year,” Eder said.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the name he fights under is Mark “The Mailman” Eder. And the crowd is sometimes filled with two dozen supportive co-workers chanting “Mail-man, Mail-man,” which the carrier called “really awesome,” adding that it brings the postal community closer together.



Mark Eder

Below: The belt levels in Brazilian jiu-jitsu
Bottom: Eder practicing at the Katharo Training Center





Eder grapples with an opponent during a tournament.

His postal customers, on the other hand, don't generally know about his hobby. "I'm not really this

in-your-face type of person; I'm kind of reserved. I'd rather ask about my customers' lives," he said, though he added, given the opportunity, "I always relish the chance when I can bring it up, because I think jiu-jitsu can provide so much to people's lives that I just want to promote it to everybody."

Eder loves the physical and combat-oriented aspect of jiu-jitsu. "I'm a fighter. I love fighting," he said, "and so this provides me a legal way of getting out there and fighting in a sport that is quite the adrenaline rush."

He continued: "I love getting out there and using my muscles. If my muscles don't ache, it's because I'm not using them. I crave the pain of physical confrontation. It's part of our DNA as animals, as human beings. It's ingrained with us, this physical aspect. It's fight or flight."

To prepare for a match, he'll go through a two-month preparation camp, with extra cardio and training, and he'll study video of his opponent and develop a strategy on how to beat him.

Fighters are matched based on the type of competition, Eder says. Normal Brazilian jiu-jitsu tournaments are grouped by belt level, weight and age, while in the cage matches, it's by belt degree and weight without age consideration. (The two competitors the 43-year-old carrier beat in the cage matches were 27 and 32 years old.)

Some tournaments have absolute divisions (in which he participated in last month), where they are fighting for a belt, so it is by belt level. "So, if a guy who wanted to win the belt in this particular belt level was 135 pounds, he's going to have to beat the guy who's 200 pounds because they're in the same belt level," he said.

Patience, trust and vulnerability are required traits for pupils of jiu-jitsu.

"Throughout my whole jiu-jitsu career, my professor is going to be paying attention to my success, and he's going to be paying attention to how much mat time [I have] and how much I come in to train and how much I'm learning from him," he said. "I have to remove my ego so that I can learn from somebody else and accept the fact that I'm below this person in knowledge. It's very humbling."

Eder loves the fact that there are so many benefits to the sport. "It creates self-confidence, which allows me to perform at a higher level in every aspect of life. I love that it provides problem-solving skills," he said, adding that jiu-jitsu allows him to get any aggression out "so that when I'm out in the public, I'm just this happy-go-lucky guy who wants to pick up flowers and hand them out."

Eder plans to continue competing "until I feel like I can't," he said, "because I've still got the fire."

He'd like to obtain his black—or even coral—belt and eventually open up his own Brazilian jiu-jitsu fitness gym.

"I want to spend a lifetime learning jiu-jitsu and teaching other people," he added. "If I can develop a spot for a community where people can come in and then leave [as] a better person, that's really a huge goal. But for right now, it's all about learning, competing and advancing." **PR**