

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Rear Naked Choke

Becca Borawski



One of the most popular moves in martial arts is the rear naked choke. The rear naked choke can be executed with or without the traditional gi (kimono), and variations are put to use in every venue, from professional wrestling to law enforcement. The choke is known by many names. Called the Lion Killer or “Mata Leão” in Brazil, its lineage reaches back to traditional Japanese jiu-jitsu and judo, where it is known as the “hadaka jime” or “naked strangle.”

The rear naked choke is the move most feared when

a competitor gives up his back to his opponent. The name describes the central components of the move: it is “rear” because the attack comes from the back, or rear; it is “naked” because it does not use the gi; and it is a choke, meaning it constricts either the air or blood flow to the brain, thereby potentially rendering the victim unconscious.

In this month’s article (the last one in our series with world champion grappler Valerie Worthington), we will walk through two variations of the rear naked choke.

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## Rear Naked Choke (continued...)

The first variation begins with Valerie in the dominant position (Photo 1). In this situation, for whatever reason, her opponent, Andy, has his back to Valerie. She has capitalized on this by getting her “hooks” in (Photo 2). This means she has her legs wrapped around Andy’s waist and her feet are hooked inside his inner thighs. She is able to control and restrict his movements with her feet hooked in this way. Her hands are gripping his lapels (Photo 3) and she is hugging herself tightly to his body, while he bears her full weight on top of him.



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4

While still on all fours, Andy can potentially buck Valerie off (Photo 4), or at least distract her with trying to maintain her position. To execute her offense, the next thing Valerie wants to do is flatten Andy out and restrict his movement. She does this by arching up and putting all her weight into her hips. She drives her hips forward while maintaining her hooks, flattening Andy out onto the floor (Photo 5).



## Rear Naked Choke (continued...)



Photo 5



Photo 6

Once Andy is flattened out, Valerie presses her upper body down (Photo 6) on him, but maintains her hooks throughout the execution of the choke. She lets go of his lapel with her right hand and begins to slide it underneath his neck (Photo 7). Her goal is to reach her arm far enough through that the point of her elbow is underneath his chin. She can use her fingers to help pull her arm through, gripping his shoulder and walking her fingers forward. Once her right arm is through, she will release her grip of his lapel with her left hand and bring that arm over his shoulder. Her right hand will then grip her own left biceps (Photo 8).

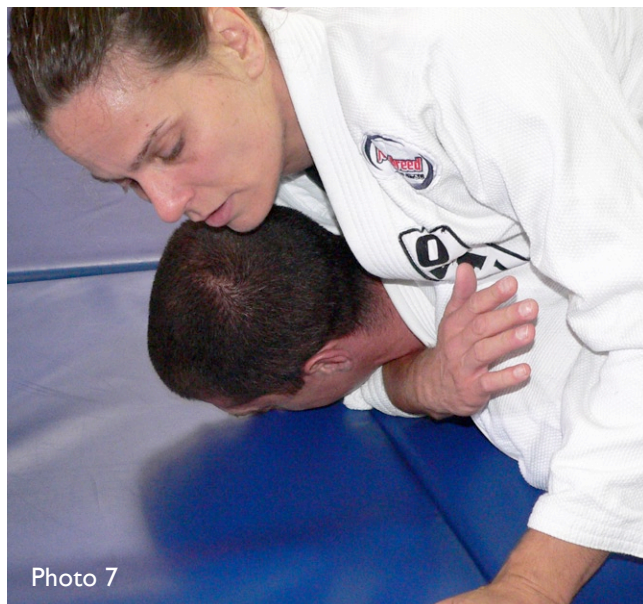


Photo 7

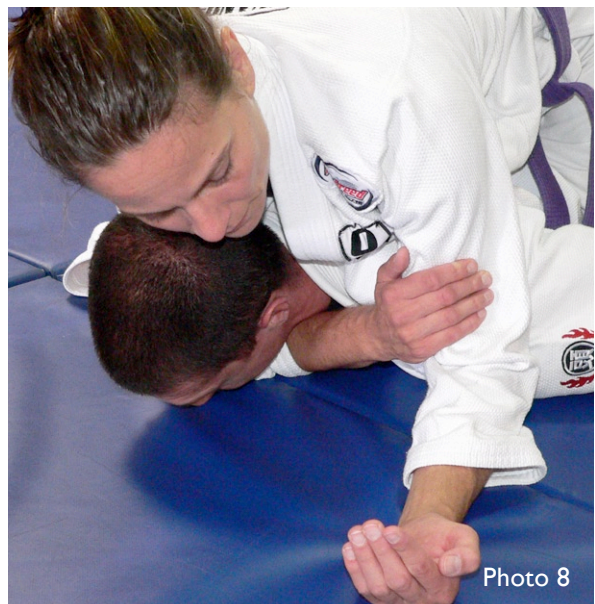


Photo 8



## Rear Naked Choke (continued...)

At this point Valerie will make a “blade” with her left hand (Photo 9) and slide it behind Andy’s head. She will use the blade shape of her hand to make a slicing motion downward to get her hand low at the base of his head and behind his neck. Her head will move down close next to Andy’s ear. She will expand her chest to create downward pressure, and squeeze her elbows together (Photo 10). These movements will close up the space around Andy’s head and compress his neck, putting pressure on his carotid arteries and reducing blood flow to his brain. Andy will tap out or risk quickly becoming unconscious.

In the event that Andy is defending effectively and Valerie is unable to get her right arm all the way underneath his neck, there is an alternate version of the rear naked choke. This version does not allow for as much control over the opponent’s head, but it can be an effective move. In fact, this variation of the rear naked choke is sometimes referred to as the “Severn Lock” or the “Dan Severn” due to his successful use of the technique in several early UFC events.



Photo 9



Photo 10

To execute the Severn variation, Valerie needs to get her arm through only enough that her forearm is under Andy’s chin (Photo 11). She is going to position her forearm so that the “blade,” or bony side, of her forearm is pointed upward. Again, by gripping Andy’s collarbone or shoulder she can use her fingers to help pull her hand through.

When her arm is far enough through that she can reach it with her other hand, she will clasp her hands together (Photo 12) in a “Gable” grip. This is a grip common to wrestling and it means that the thumb stays with the fingers and the hands clasp together like two paws. (It is also the grip used for thumbless pull-ups.)

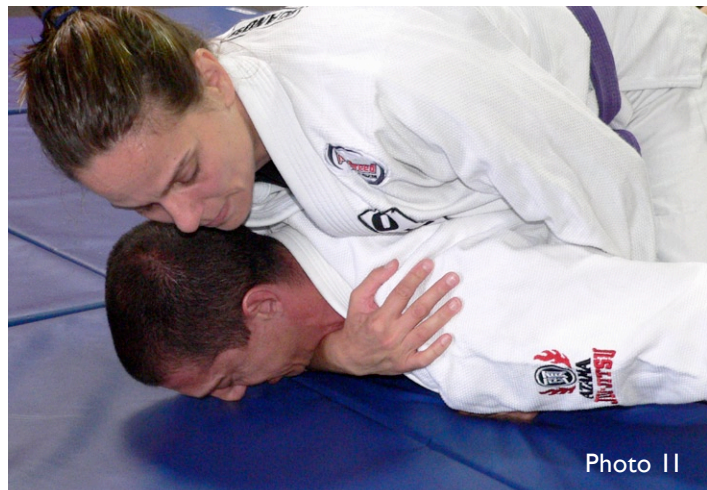


Photo 11

## Rear Naked Choke (continued...)

Valerie will then expand her chest and create downward pressure, just as in the first variation of the rear naked choke. She will put her head down close to Andy's ear and she will pull upward with her forearm (Photo 13), pressing the bony blade into his throat. This variation of the choke is more likely to be an air choke than a blood choke because the pressure is applied directly to the front of the neck. It is not as quick a choke as the first variation, but it is more painful.

The rear naked choke, in either variation presented here, is one of the most popular and recognizable grappling moves—and not just because the name lends itself so easily to jokes. It has been featured in television shows and movies; it has a history in professional wrestling and catch wrestling, and it is put to practical use frequently in mixed martial arts (MMA) and in the real-world law enforcement.



For some exciting examples of the rear naked choke in action, check out the following MMA matches:

- *Pride Fighting Championship 26: Fedor Emelianenko vs. Kazuyuki Fujita*
- *UFC 80: BJ Penn vs. Joe Stevenson*
- *UFC TUF 5 Finale: BJ Penn vs. Jens Pulver*
- *UFC 45 or 52: Matt Hughes vs. Frank Trigg*
- *UFC 1: Royce Gracie vs. Ken Shamrock*

Valerie Worthington earned her Brazilian jiu-jitsu purple belt from Carlson Gracie and Carlson Gracie, Jr. She currently trains at the New Breed Academy in California. A dedicated member of [Petranek Fitness/CrossFit Los Angeles](#). Valerie was a gold medalist at the 2007 World Grappling Championships in Turkey.

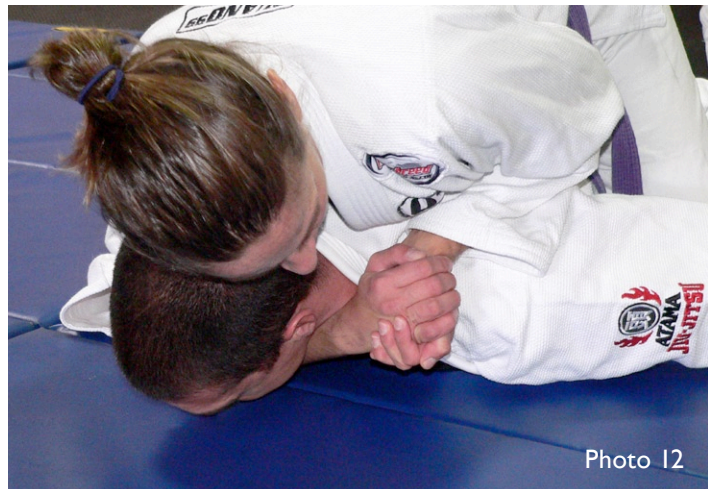


Photo 12



Photo 13

Becca Borawski teaches and trains at [Petranek Fitness/CrossFit Los Angeles](#) in Santa Monica. She has a master's degree in film from the University of Southern California and a background in martial arts training. She has blended these skills together to produce DVDs and build websites for professional fighters. Her main job is as the music editor on the TV show *Scrubs* and she currently trains jiu-jitsu under Eddie Bravo at 10th Planet Jiu-Jitsu in Hollywood.