



EDUARDO DRAPIER-UNSPLASH

Developing life skills through Brazilian jiu-jitsu

“Time’s up!” Emerging from a contorted position, I got up, smoothed my hair, and fixed my belt that came off. We shook hands, smiled, and mumbled “thank you” while catching our breath. While I lost in that round, I successfully defended a chokehold in the last 30 seconds.

I have been doing Brazilian jiu-jitsu since 2006. It is gradually gaining popularity in a country where basketball is the unofficial national sport. No, it’s not the same as karate; Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a martial art centered on applying chokes and body joint locks (elbow, shoulder, knee, ankle, wrist) to submit to the opponent or to earn points by getting into dominant positions. It is a full-contact sport, with most of the action happening on the ground. But is it all brawl?

On the contrary, this gentle art develops important life skills.

Think of jiu-jitsu as human chess — when you make a move, there will always be a counter-move to nullify it. The learning curve can be steep at first, but a good coach will help you clarify your goals so you can focus on moves that build your skills, one step at a time. I had a hard time when I was starting because I had poor body coordination, but my coach guided me well — he gave me many PEP talks after competition loss or when I felt unmotivated. We became good friends, on and off the mats, and he is instrumental to why I am still training, albeit intermittently, 17 years later. In life or at work, we certainly need people who can effectively mentor us so we can maximize our potential, reach our goals and make learning a safe space.

Being on the mat is always a humbling experience. There will

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always be someone better, stronger or faster. One popular mantra in most Brazilian jiu-jitsu gyms is “leave your ego at the door.” You do not always play to win; sometimes, you play to lose so you can learn. Part of our training is purposely putting ourselves in compromised positions to learn how to get out of it repeatedly, developing our muscle memory. This is the same when we are at work. In developing certain skills, making mistakes helps us learn better because we can scrutinize how and where things went wrong.

In the sport, you are put under pressure, quite literally. Applying submissions requires steady and constant pressure; being in a dominant position requires closing the space through chest-to-chest pressure to control your partner fully. You need to maintain your composure when you are at the receiving end of this. For a new player, this is challenging. It makes you panic, tires you out and leaves you vulnerable to attacks. More seasoned players can control their breathing, adjust their position and wait for opportunities to escape. Maintaining composure helps you clarify your thoughts so you can focus on the task at hand, whether to free yourself or to get through a mountain of tasks at work.

While Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a skill game, it is also a game of strategies. Different players have different techniques, so you need to adjust your game depending on what your partner is doing. Strategizing defines your ac-

tions and dictates how the game progresses. Sometimes you get to impose the pace; often, it’s a back-and-forth of moves until a breakthrough happens, and you get to a dominant position or your partner submits. Similarly, we are constantly faced with challenges at work that require us to employ critical thinking to arrive at a sound decision.

The mat is an equalizer. It does not matter if you are a business tycoon, an international celebrity or a working college student. When we are on the mat, we are just a bunch of crazy people passionate about Brazilian jiu-jitsu. When Anthony Bourdain visited the Philippines, I had the chance to share the mat with him. He was then a blue belt. On the mat, he was not a chef or a TV star; he was just a regular guy hanging out with fellows. Nowadays, I train mostly with jiu-jitsu nerds, and we would analyze and criticize our moves so we can polish our game. Anywhere else, building good relationships is crucial to enriching our experiences and advancing our personal development.

Beyond developing technical skills and physical fitness, Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a sport and martial art that enhances mental resilience and life skills. Practiced correctly and with proper guidance, it is a safe sport that people of all ages and sizes can do. ■

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The oil industry’s unhappy marriage is starting to face facts

By David Fickling

EVEN a marriage heading for its 50th anniversary will sometimes be overcome with bickering.

That’s what happened last week with the oil industry’s most important bodies, the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

OPEC risks weakening the global economy and accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels if its production cuts push crude prices too high, the IEA’s Executive Director Fatih Birol told Bloomberg Television on Wednesday. OPEC’s response was swift and intemperate: The IEA “should be very careful about further undermining oil industry investments,” its Secretary General Haitham Al-Ghais said in a statement on Thursday.

As with many long but unhappy alliances, what’s striking about this row is that the parties share a realistic fatalism about the situation they’re in. The bitterness of last week’s argument doesn’t stem so much from deep disagreements about where oil demand and the energy transition is headed, as from the vanity of small differences.

Both sides have been edging toward an acceptance that oil production will be lower at the end of the decade. Current levels of oil investment will only be sufficient to supply about 80 million barrels a day in 2030, according to projections presented by Saudi Arabian Oil Co., OPEC’s most important stakeholder, compared with the 101.9 mb/d that the IEA projects for this year.

That’s a lowball figure intended to shock the industry into lifting its spending to levels that would pump out about 106 mb/d. But

it’s not a million miles from what the IEA sees: Demand will be 93 mb/d if governments meet their climate pledges and 75.3 mb/d on a more aggressive net zero path, according to the agency’s energy outlook last year. In spite of its member states’ record profits and competitive cost positions, OPEC itself is doing very little to remedy the supply problem it points to, preferring to spend the money on real estate, overseas refineries and grand projects instead. Its revealed preference is for a picture little different from the IEA’s energy transition scenarios.

There’s a level of natural antagonism between the two bodies. The IEA was founded in 1974 in the wake of the previous year’s Arab oil embargo to represent the interests of the major petroleum consumers in developed countries. OPEC is 14 years older but rose to prominence at the same time as the IEA, acting for the

conflicting interests of the biggest crude exporters. They first held a joint press conference in 2002.

If that adversarial relationship has been blunted for decades, it’s largely because the rise of China and its voracious demand for commodities, combined with the absence (until recently) of any viable alternative to petroleum, meant their common ground of market stability has been more important than their conflicting imperatives of higher prices (for OPEC) and lower ones (for the IEA).

The climate transition is causing a reversion to the earlier paradigm, though. Electric vehicles’ share in new sales jumped from 2% in 2019 to 20% in 2023, the IEA’s Birol said on Wednesday, and will hit 60% in the largest markets of the US, China and Europe by 2030.

That accelerating rate of deployment matters. The lifespan

of a conventional oilfield investment is a bit longer than that of a typical car — 15 to 20 years, as opposed to 10 to 15 years — so a faster uptake of electric vehicles increases the risk that current projects end up facing glutted markets toward the end of their lives.

That’s not a problem for the IEA. It’s an energy agency, and its members don’t much care whether their energy comes from fossil fuels or zero-carbon alternatives as long as it’s cheap, clean and secure. OPEC, on the other hand, is a petroleum organization, and naturally sees a shift away from crude as an existential threat.

The IEA wants OPEC to ensure security of supply, so that its members don’t suffer blackouts and queues at the gas station. The oil cartel, on the other hand, is only prepared to promise that if the IEA ensures security of demand, so that its members know

their multibillion-dollar investments will still be throwing off cash in the late 2030s. The IEA’s members are unwilling to guarantee that, though. With gasoline demand already in decline, road fuels as a whole facing a near-term peak and Tesla, Inc. slashing prices to tempt buyers, it’s impossible to escape the conclusion that the best years for oil are already in the past.

As the world removes crude oil products from road transportation and even shipping, a growing share of demand will come not from fuel but from petrochemical feedstocks, asphalt, lubricants and waxes — everything except energy, in other words. OPEC is responding as jilted partners often do, with bitterness and recrimination. Both sides have to accept, however, that their marriage of convenience is coming to an end. ■

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