

EASTON

WINTER 2024



VOL. 2

THE PEOPLE EDITION

FROM EASTON'S PRESIDENT

Another year has passed since our last Zine (I had to look up what this meant, but that's what this thing is called) and though much stays the same – Colorado is beautiful, the outdoor adventures are endless, our Jiu Jitsu and Muay Thai teams keep growing in skill and size.

There is also change that takes place, and what better time to reflect on that change than in the fall? Leaves are falling and all the greens now turn to ambers, yellows, and brown. Summer activities have come to a close and we can smell winter on the air.

Just as seasons come and go, so do the rhythms of our lives, offering us a moment to pause and recognize where we've grown and where there's room to improve. At Easton, we have our values of Excellence, Trust, Compassion, Stewardship, and this year we have added Adaptability.

Adaptability is something that we hold in very high regard. As Darwin once suggested, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most adaptable to change." I think about this quote a lot in everyday life. Not everyone can be the smartest or the strongest, but we all can adapt.





In Jiu-Jitsu and Muay Thai, this ability to adjust and respond is what enables us to keep coming back, learning, and improving. That opponent who once overpowered us only made us sharper as we learned to counter, creating a continuous back-and-forth—a dance of adaptation and growth that, ideally, never ends.

At Easton, we want to perpetuate this value because we know it is a foundational principle that will help us thrive in this world. It helps us not fall victim to the world happening to us but rise to the idea that the world happens, and it's up to us to sift through it all and adapt. It won't always be easy, sometimes near impossible, but we are here as a community, lifting each other up when life is hard.

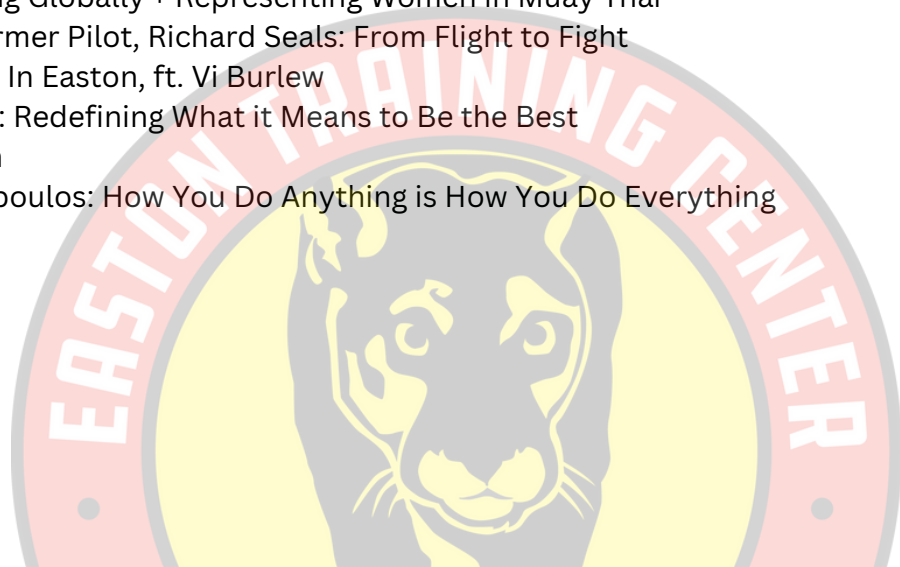
The seasons come and go. Fall bids goodbye to Summer and lets us know the cold is coming, but it also lets us shed our old, unwanted habits and build new ones. The trees may lose their leaves, but they're also growing stronger and heartier through the winter months. They are adapting, changing, and improving. When Summer comes, they'll get to shine their beauty once more. We can and should do the same. I am not saying the winter has to be a struggle or that Fall has to signify change, but it is an opportunity to look back, take note, and improve for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mike T'.

Mike Tousignant
CEO of Easton Training Center

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EXPLORING JIU JITSU'S AMERICAN ROOTS AND GROWTH OF THE ART FT. AMAL EASTON

On one of our best episodes of the Easton Community Podcast, Mike Tousignant sits down with our founder, Amal Easton, to talk about how Amal devoted his life to his passions and turned his passion for martial arts into a school that, 25 years later, has just opened its eighth location.

While Easton has successfully scaled its business model from one school to a network of academies across Colorado's Front Range thanks to its adaptation of a military-like system of decentralized command (also seen in the world of academia), its roots have a more organic, creative start.

For the full episode, listen on [Apple Podcasts](#) or [Spotify](#)!

MEANING OVER MONEY

Professor Amal, who received his black belt from Renzo Gracie, was born to a pair of educated hippies who had left the East Coast for off-grid life in New Mexico, with no running water and a teepee for shelter.

Amal grew up nearly entirely in nature for his first few years and developed a strong penchant for all kinds of outdoor activities. While Amal didn't excel in team sports, he had good balance and coordination and did well in individual sports like skiing, kayaking, biking, skateboarding and martial arts.

A small kid for his age and frequently picked on, focusing on his strengths and getting really good helped Amal find a sense of confidence and belonging, and he spent all of his other free time outside of school training and on the slopes, skiing.

Amal had a unique childhood in that his parents sought a deeper connection with and understanding of the world around them than a traditional lifestyle could offer.

This meant that Amal both got his first job at age eight on his own, and was also told that he should always pursue his passion, with happiness valued far over traditional “norm” and financial status.

Amal's focus was laser sharp from an early age – he graduated college early and was ready to devote his life to skiing.

While he loved – and still loves – life on the slopes, eventually Amal realized that the sort of lifestyle he'd need to maintain to make it work didn't seem quite as appealing or sustainable with age.

Amal redirected himself back to school for a certification in acupuncture to pursue a more “proper” career. Then, in 1991, he discovered Jiu Jitsu.

For the rest of the story, how he found BJJ, trained with the Gracies in Brazil and opening his own school, [read the full article!](#)



THE SOUND OF TEAM SPIRIT: EASTON KIDS COACH, EMMA SOJO

Centennial Kids Coach Emma Sojo, 23, has trained with Easton since 2010, when she and three of her siblings found Easton's former Aurora location after her first academy closed.

She began assisting kids kickboxing classes at age 12, and over the years Emma has become a vital part of our Kids Program as an irreplaceable coach, an MMA competitor, and the unofficial amplifier of Easton's team spirit.

"In my own personal fighting experience," says Emma, "I've heard and imagined people chanting in my head and visualized it. When it really happened, it was so gratifying. It felt special to have people support me and put it out so vocally!"

Along with her technical martial arts expertise, having competed dozens of times and at high-level tournaments such as PANS, Emma pulls from a range of personal experiences to inform the way she moves as a guide between the adult's world and the child's.

DYNAMIC COMMUNITY

Emma first began studying martial arts at age six. At the time, she found herself getting bullied for a speech impediment, and she wanted the confidence to start defending herself. Two of her brothers and sisters wanted to try it too, so her parents put them in a self-defense class.

Maintaining her connection to both ends of the spectrum has allowed her to not only bridge the gap but tap into magic that only a conductor can create.

Some of her first experiences in a dynamic group setting involved choir, drumline and playing trumpet in her high school's mariachi band!

Today, conducting the supportive energies and good vibes for her Easton's Kids competitions, from local and regional to Kids PANs at a national level, Coach Emma calls every voice in the group together to create the bigger sound – Easton's team spirit.

“Kids want to have fun and feel like it's easy to be part of the group,” says Emma.

Outside of the confidence and skill that martial arts instills, it's the team spirit, Emma tells us, that builds a family. Everyone there has chosen to give up their time to do something hard, and they don't know anything about you except that you've done the same thing.

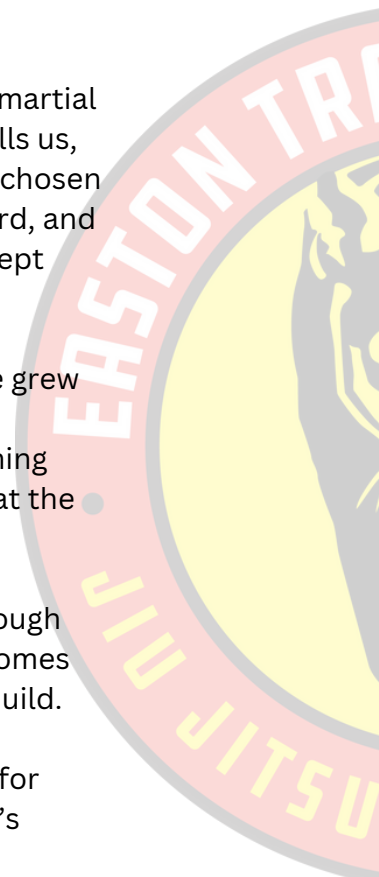
To this day, Emma still talks to those she grew up training with. Birthdays and holidays became filled with the coaches and training partners who showed up far beyond what the mat required.

That family connection you develop through time spent in the trenches together becomes the foundation for the community you build.

As a coach, having a different approach for different ages becomes key to everyone's success.

Kids develop at different speeds, so you'll always have little kids that excel and can handle being treated a little older, but in the end a four year old needs to learn BJJ as a four year old. When you adjust your standards, you can meet them where they're at.

For the full story, [read the article here!](#)





PRO MMA FIGHTER AND EASTON BLACK BELT BOJAN VELICKOVIC: SELF-RELIANCE, VERSATILITY AND LIVING FULLY

Pro MMA Fighter and Easton Denver Kids Department Head Bojan Velickovic remembers watching his dad's Judo training lessons as a kid – a requirement of the special forces police unit his father worked for in Novi Sad, Serbia.

Bojan's dad held a brown belt in Judo and a black belt in Karate, but Bojan grew up playing soccer. He didn't hit the mat himself until middle school, when his friends all decided to give it a try. With that, Bojan fell in love with Judo. Today, he holds a black belt in Jiu Jitsu and a Brown Shirt in Muay Thai.

For a while, he practiced both Judo and soccer, but once he realized how much more control he had in Judo, the choice became easy.

With team sports, you must depend on up to 10 or 11 others to achieve your goal. With martial arts, you rely on nobody but yourself. You get to decide how much work you put in and what you want your outcome to look like.

"I always embraced hard work," says Bojan, recalling from his soccer captain days. "It was frustrating having lazy boys on the team, having to get into fights with them."

In martial arts, we still have teammates and training partners who help us learn and level up, but ultimately you alone suffer the consequences if you fail to show up.

LIFE JOLT

Bojan found Easton after he'd already been fighting professionally for five years. At the time, he lived in Florida, and upon his 2010 fighting debut with reality show "Road to the Ring of Fire," had come to Denver in 2011 for his first US fight.

He met a promoter that invited him back to Denver in 2014, where he met a couple of guys who told him that if he ever wanted to come train with them, they'd help him become a better fighter.

They trained at Easton Denver, and several months later, Bojan found himself back in Colorado helping them train two local UFC stars, Neal Magny and Brandon Thatch, as their sparring partner.

During the six to seven months he stayed in Denver, Bojan trained at Easton and fell in love with the community. He went back to Florida and officially moved to Colorado in 2015.

Bojan started coaching in June 2021, and today teaches advanced BJJ and works the front desk at Centennial along with running Denver's Kids Program!

A pivotal jolt in Bojan's fighting career, and life, happened in May 2017 with a fight in Stockholm, Sweden. He had trained for weeks, slated to fight a tough, local guy in the UFC, and his entire family had come to watch.

On the flight to Stockholm from Denver, his plane suddenly dropped – twice. For a second, everyone braced for the inevitable crash and Bojan thought he was going to die.

The plane didn't crash, but when things settled, Bojan had a ringing question left: if he did die, what would he regret?

At that point, Bojan had around three fights in the UFC – a win, a loss and a draw. However, he hadn't yet had a performance he was proud of, one where he amazed himself.

Bojan realized that in pacing himself so cautiously, for fear of losing, he had never shown his real self – he didn't actually know what he could achieve.

To learn what happened next -- how Bojan silenced an arena full of 20,000 people, received Best Performance of the Night, and a generous \$50K bonus as a result of his jolt of mortality -- [read the full article here!](#)



MIKE



PHIL

PROFESSOR PHIL LIETZ: ART, MARTIAL ARTS, AND THE SEARCH FOR MASTERY

Last October's episode of the Easton All-Staff Podcast spotlights one of our newer GMs at Easton, [Professor Phil Lietz](#). One of the few GMs we've had who comes from a different school system, earlier this year Phil took over Longmont when its original GM, Jordan Shipman, became Program Director of Kids Jiu Jitsu for all of Easton.

Professor Phil is a long-time competitor and student of BJJ, [an artist](#) and a lizard extraordinaire with his own [lizard business](#). He joined Easton about two years ago and has been teaching classes since.

Listen to the full episode on [Spotify](#) or [Apple Podcasts](#)!

An avid competitor, our Easton team first encountered Phil at tournaments over a decade ago and had followed his Jiu Jitsu for years. In fact, Professor Ian Lieberman once came up to Phil after he finished a fight with Mike Tousignant (yes!), complimented Phil's BJJ and warmly offered to train together sometime. (Listen to the podcast for Mike's side of that story!)

This moment – the kindness of a human connection – stayed with Professor Phil for years. He developed a respect for Easton and its culture, and also a first-hand connection to the kind of community it fosters.

Phil had taught at The Sanctuary BJJ in Lakewood since 2015, but had begun to feel that if he wanted to grow, he needed to put himself in a bigger room. When an opportunity to work at Easton arose, it felt like the most natural next step in the right direction to join the team.

THE ART OF MASTERY

Before Phil became a black belt in Jiu Jitsu, he first became interested in talent through fine art.

“It always seemed like there were people around me who were much more talented,” says Phil. “And then I realized, it's not necessarily about natural ability, this really has everything to do with time spent practicing whatever it is you're practicing.”

He went to Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design with a focus on illustration, attending from 2005 – 2008 before graduating early and moving to Austin, TX for a post-grad apprenticeship.

Through a lucky connection, Phil got hired to go to Berlin, Germany and work at a concept art studio called SixMoreVodka, where he applied his creative skills to outsourced deliverables for studios that were making games and film.

Though he came to Germany for art, he found that the majority of his time spent outside of work always came back to Jiu Jitsu. He became more and more obsessed with Jiu Jitsu, and it became evident that his art was leading him in that direction also. Anytime he wasn't at work, he was at the studio training, and even traveled for a training camp to Greece.

While many artists might have a hard time letting go of an idea of “success,” Phil made the decision to follow his heart over his ego in pursuit of martial arts.

It doesn't surprise us that teaching art and Jiu Jitsu have a lot more in common than one might think, both requiring dedication, technical practice and a commitment to something greater. For the full story of how he came to Easton, [read the article here!](#)



PERFORMANCE COACH + MOUNTAIN GUIDE JASON ANTIN: OVERCOMING LIMITATIONS AND GETTING OUTSIDE

How many times have you wished you could do something – make a trip to see a friend, hike a new mountain, take a course, do a retreat – only to have the logical part of your brain table the idea.

“Just for now,” you tell yourself. “There’s not enough time.” (Or, “It’s not in my budget, I can’t take off work.”)

Then, before you know it, months have passed. You’re still in the same grind, the bucket list remains untouched, and more time still hasn’t materialized.

Easton student, mountain guide and performance coach Jason Antin has managed to take this quandary and put it to bed.

In 2014, the outdoor athlete, along with his good friend Mike Chambers, launched something called Beat Monday. The project, designed to get people outdoors and making time for what they love, inspires people to “push the boundaries of what’s possible between Friday night and Monday morning.”

NEVER SAY NO TO OPPORTUNITY

Generally, the barriers that hold most people back from following their adventure day dream come down to skills, finances and time.

Some things are intimidating – physically and mentally – and staying confident in your body’s and mind’s abilities becomes crucial in prepping your mindset.

Born out of the difficulty of finding time that worked for both founders to take an adventure together, Beat Monday has since evolved into a TV show that takes its audience everywhere from the trails around Lake Tahoe to the Green Mountains of Vermont.

Having a family or a job shouldn’t mean you can’t keep following your other dreams.

With the mountains, however, Jason tells us, it’s a bit tricky because you don’t necessarily want to encourage people to “just go do it.”

Technical knowledge and ability to manage risk are paramount when outdoors, so before chucking yourself into the wilderness, you need to first feel proficient in those areas.

After skillset and finances, usually time is the final barrier. Often, this part is mental and it becomes the first huge step.

Rather than waiting for the right time, stop thinking about all the reasons it may not work, and book the flight. Book the permit on the mountain, block off the time. Plan it out, precisely and strategically.

“I try to never say ‘no’ to an opportunity,” says Jason. “Even if at the time it’s not the best financial decision on paper.”

Time does become trickier when it’s not just you; balancing a family and work make it harder but not impossible

For more on integrating family, work and adventure, [read the full article here](#). You’ll also find a link to a podcast episode Mike hosts with Jason Antin at the bottom of the article!





MIKE



AMY

**EASTON BLACK BELT
AND LOWRY CO-OWNER
PROFESSOR AMY
FIDELIS: COMMITMENT
TO CONQUER FEAR**

This summer, on the Easton Community Podcast, Mike Tousignant sat down with Easton Black BJJ Belt, competitor, teacher and co-owner of Easton Lowry, Professor Amy Fidelis.

For the full lowdown – including Amy’s journey through the ranks, what she’s currently reading and more, listen to the podcast on [Spotify](#) or [Apple Podcasts](#)!

Everybody’s journey in martial arts looks different. Even the highest-level among us had to start somewhere, and those starts often have rocky roads themselves. For competitor and multiple-time champion Amy Fidelis, we may think that Jiu Jitsu and competing came naturally, but what most people don’t see is everything that goes on behind the scenes.

A NECESSARY REFRAME

Amy, who co-owns Easton Lowry with Professor Junior, teaches a women's class once a week and competes frequently alongside her full-time job in the government.

Over the course of her competition career, she's won gold at IBJJF World Master as a Purple Belt, gold at Pans and Opens as a Brown Belt, and numerous gold medals at Black Belt with Pans, Master International, American Nationals and Opens, along with silver at Pans and bronze at World Master Absolute.

With nearly 15 years on the mats, Amy has had her Black Belt for nearly 3 of them. However, progress doesn't always happen in a linear fashion, and Amy calls her own journey a roller coaster, a progression through ego, injury, and learning to be a good Jiu Jitsu student.

Amy's dad trained Judo, BJJ and Kung Fu (among others) and she trained with him on occasion. Her mom also did martial arts; growing up, it was all around her.

She didn't expect to feel so uncomfortable that she opted out for almost a year, trading in rolling for striking instead.

Despite not feeling confident in Jiu Jitsu, Amy stayed with Easton and continued to train and grow with the community through Muay Thai.

At the time at Easton Denver, Junior Fidelis was a Jiu Jitsu coach. The two became friends, and he eventually convinced her to give Jiu Jitsu another chance. The rest is history – shown through Amy's black belt, their nearly 14-year marriage and the school the two co-own together.

To Amy, the battle lies not just in the technical movements and mechanics of the sport. One of the biggest things Amy has had to overcome on the mats comes back to the fear and discomfort surrounding her situation – something many women can relate to -- and the ability to be ok sucking at something.

A lot of people will quit at this point, afraid of messing up or looking dumb. If you can reframe the feeling, though, you can let this drive you to work at it until you don't suck anymore.

Read the full article here and listen to the podcast episode!



**CROSSFIT COACH +
BJJ PURPLE BELT
JASON ACKERMAN:
ALIGNING WITH
GROWTH**

A certified nutrition and Level 4 CrossFit coach, Easton BJJ purple belt and entrepreneur Jason Ackerman has devoted his life to helping people connect deeper to their bodies and live their most healthy life through one of the most necessary facets of training – coaching.

With multiple streams to help people find what they're looking for, Jason co-hosts a podcast, works for the CrossFit brand as part of its Seminar Team and runs a business helping affiliate owners and coaches get better.

His business, Best Hour of Their Day, which he runs with two other long-time CrossFitters and which began as a podcast dedicated to helping the CrossFit community, has since become an industry leader in business mentorship and coaching development with a roster of 300 clients, a Facebook study group, a published book and an online platform for coaches to learn from.

Jason grew up in New York and started wrestling in high school. A smaller kid, he joined a gym to help him put on some muscle and fell in love with weightlifting.

“Never in my wildest dreams,” says Jason, “did I think 30+ years later that would still be my career.”

By the time he finished undergrad with a degree in psychology, Jason realized he faced limited options and went back for his Masters. He knew he’d need to get a real job at some point, but he wasn’t quite ready to pull the plug on fitness.

He continued to weight-lift and worked at a few different commercial gyms throughout school, but in the back of his mind, Jason also knew that he could become a teacher.

In 2007, when Jason finally decided to take the steps to become a PE teacher and went back to school to get all of his phys ed requirements, he found CrossFit by way of Jiu Jitsu. The rest is history.

THE KEY TO COACHING

In Jason’s experience (and we would agree), the key to being a good coach comes down to caring about your people and what they need. Like Maya Angelou said, They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Another key to building up strong coaches rests in constructive feedback from better coaches. Sometimes, coaches will get their Level 1 certificate and the owner of the gym they work at is either burnt-out or otherwise not equipped to develop that coach.

Instead of getting guidance and correction to optimize their potential, those coaches continue to come up against the same challenges without understanding what they’re doing wrong. Whereas in a different environment that coach may have grown and thrived, in the wrong setting it can lead to wasted passion and short-lived careers.

Similarly, when you run a business, it helps everyone when you put your staff first. If you build solid relationships with people you trust and develop them to uphold your core values, you’ll have a much easier time of taking your product through multiple channels without watering it down.

For more on how Jason grew his CrossFit business and developed his career, [read the full article!](#)



MIKE



ANGELO

KION FOUNDER ANGELO KEELY: WHY LESS IS MORE

On a colorful episode of the Easton Community Podcast, Mike Tousignant introduces you to student and friend of Easton, Angelo Keely.

The founder of Boulder-born supplement company Kion, Angelo shares his philosophy on business success, the importance of simplifying, and the purpose of essential amino acids in muscle growth and recovery.

A supplement company specializing in high-quality products and aimed at supporting energy, muscle growth, recovery, and longevity, Kion makes one of our favorite, go-to supplements at Easton – Kion Aminos.

Listen to the podcast on [Spotify](#) or [Apple Podcasts](#)!

CREATING CLARITY

Angelo breaks down exactly what essential amino acids are and why we need them for muscle maintenance. As the building blocks of proteins, essential aminos provide us with the necessary support to continue growing actual body tissue when we do things like cut calories or engage in intense training sessions.

Naturally enhancing energy levels, promoting lean muscle growth and expediting post-workout recovery, aminos are like a secret weapon for athletes looking to maximize gains and minimize recovery time. Amino acids are proven to significantly enhance muscle protein synthesis, particularly when taken before training.

Because our ability to absorb and utilize protein diminishes as we age, supplementing with essential amino acids also becomes crucial to avoid losing muscle mass. For this reason, aminos help everyone from professional athletes to aging adults who have a lower sensitivity to the effects of resistance training.

This isn't the first time Angelo has brought value to Easton's community, however. We've talked about the importance of a command structure that functions by dissipating power effectively – decentralization.

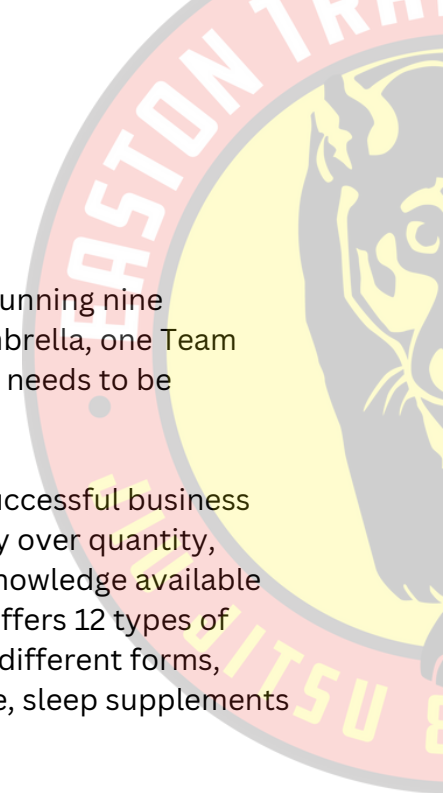
For us, this is vital because we're running nine different schools all under one umbrella, one Team Easton, and one curriculum. Value needs to be distributed evenly.

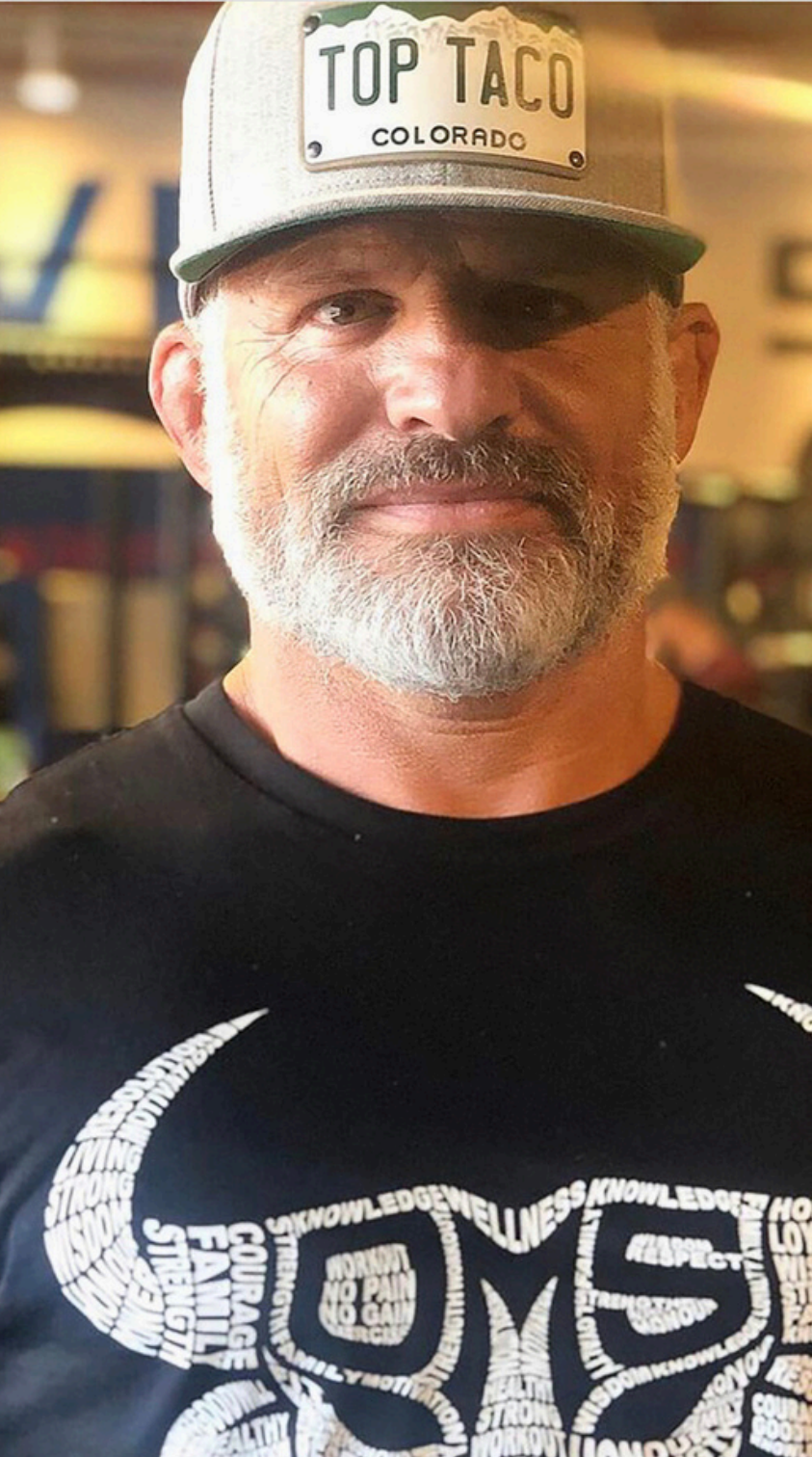
For Angelo, the key to running a successful business comes down to focusing on quality over quantity, consolidating the best scientific knowledge available to create top-tier products. Kion offers 12 types of supplements, distributed in a few different forms, including aminos, protein, creatine, sleep supplements and coffee.

If you believe in what you do, it doesn't have to fill an extremely niche hole in the market to find success. It comes down to what's important. What can you feel confident committing your life to? Angelo ended up founding a supplement company.

When it comes to what you offer as a business, staying true to your core values and not diluting your product or brand with lots of iterations and alternatives shows that you stand behind it confidently.

For more on creating clarity in your vision, and the benefits of aminos, [read the full article here!](#)





EASTON BLACK BELT AND PUBLISHER JEFF SUSKIN: SINK THE FINISH + GIVE BACK

It's 2019, and 10 couples are getting ready to walk down the aisle – on the same day, in the same place. Masterminded by publisher Jeff Suskin of DiningOut Magazine and his wife, Shalisa Pouw, the day symbolized a way to honor love without the stressors and expectations of a traditional wedding.

The event, developed in partnership with Denver's DiningOut Events and Ben Higgins of ABC's "The Bachelor," called The Wedding Party, brought 2,000 guests in for a collaborative ceremony and massive reception featuring food from 25 of Denver's top local restaurants, cocktails mixed by the city's best bartenders and more.

Publisher, event producer, and Amal Easton's 6th Black Belt, Jeff Suskin, who married his wife that day, could've never imagined the scale of success that the company he co-founded with a fellow Black Belt would one day reach – yet there gathered an entire community to celebrate.

Jeff credits his resilience, tenacity and determination to stay the course in the publishing world largely to his nearly simultaneous journey in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Jeff started BJJ in the summer of 1999, shortly after Easton's 1998 opening.

REFUSE TO GIVE UP

Around that same time, he and now-fellow Black Belt Josh Dinar launched local publication DiningOut Magazine, which debuted in 1998, with insights, reviews and articles about restaurants, food trends and culinary experiences across Colorado.

Jeff had always been enamored by the magazine world. In the early 90s, he and a friend from college, Jeff Smith, moved to Boulder from Massachusetts to start their own DIY college publication. Connecting campuses across Colorado, the irreverent, local rag wrote about things like movie openings, music, and pop culture for students before the internet.

At the time, the two were living in a house with 12 other people up Boulder Canyon. Jeff, grinding at a career in the pre-internet magazine world, was making barely enough money to eat while his friends in hospitality were rolling in dough as bartenders and servers.

The publication miraculously survived its first season, and as they launched the second, its popularity skyrocketed. Revenue more than tripled overnight, going from just under \$5K for \$15K. With more resilience than actual plan, they learned about publishing, advertising and distribution as they went.

No sooner had they established themselves in the industry than a few factors brought them to a gradual decline, followed by a halt. The rise of the internet was pulling the rug out from under the print media world, and paired with The Onion moving (literally) next door, Jeff found himself struggling with the motivation to push on. They had a \$30K loan on the table to keep the magazine going, but Jeff wasn't sure he should sign it.

The same time, in Jiu Jitsu, Amal was teaching a technique that had Jeff trapped and ready to tap to his opponent's pressure. Little did he know, tapping was just the easy – and not entirely necessary – way out. Right before he did, Amal saw and rushed over.

“No, no, no,” said Amal, who'd never taken much notice of Jeff before. “Just turn your body. Take his arm.” As he guided Jeff out of the masapone and to an armbar on his opponent, Jeff completed his first submission in Jiu Jitsu!

“Jesus,” said Amal to him, “you just give up, huh?”

Jeff went home and signed a loan that was going to determine the future of the publication the next day.

For the full story and Jeff's journey in BJJ and the publication world, [read the article here!](#)



MIKE



ALLIE

EASTON'S ALLIE READMOND: COMPETING GLOBALLY + REPRESENTING WOMEN IN MUAY THAI

On an exciting episode of the Easton Community Podcast, we welcome Muay Thai Coach Allie Readmond, who competed in Patras, Greece, earlier this year, representing the United States at the 2024 IFMA Senior World Championship.

Whether you're a blue belt, green shirt, or brown belt, competition offers a way to test yourself under pressure in the safety of an organized event. S

ome competitions, such as the IBJJF Denver Open, which brings international champs right to our backyard, offer the opportunity to test yourself against some of the best of your time at your level.

To hear the full hour – including Allie's experience going through fight camp, coming up as a woman in Muay Thai, and how competition has shaped her confidence (and vice versa) – listen to the episode on Spotify or Apple Podcasts!

BUILDING EQUAL GROUND

For Allie, who holds a Brown Shirt in Muay Thai, Easton's inclusive culture for beginners played a key role in her own journey to the mats.

Entering the world of competition, while exciting and challenging, also created a new set of challenges for Allie to navigate physically and mentally – one being the inherent, underlying discrepancy between the male and female fighting experience.

Whereas she has always felt welcome, respected and valued regardless of her gender at Easton, that's not always the case in combat sports where women are under-represented.

“In general, with combat sports,” says Allie, “I have a little frustration because women are kind of expected to be really, really nice...and that doesn't necessarily serve us for wanting to go after each other [in the ring]. Being super nice, smiling in weigh-in pictures – that's an aspect that's really unequal. Men are not expected to do that.”

While making friends from all over is often a result of the competition experience, Allie describes that it's almost expected of women. It can feel like an imposed patriarchal pressure geared towards making others feel better.

In competition, you're not there to play to anybody's feelings. You're there to do your job: be ruthless, respectful and focused.

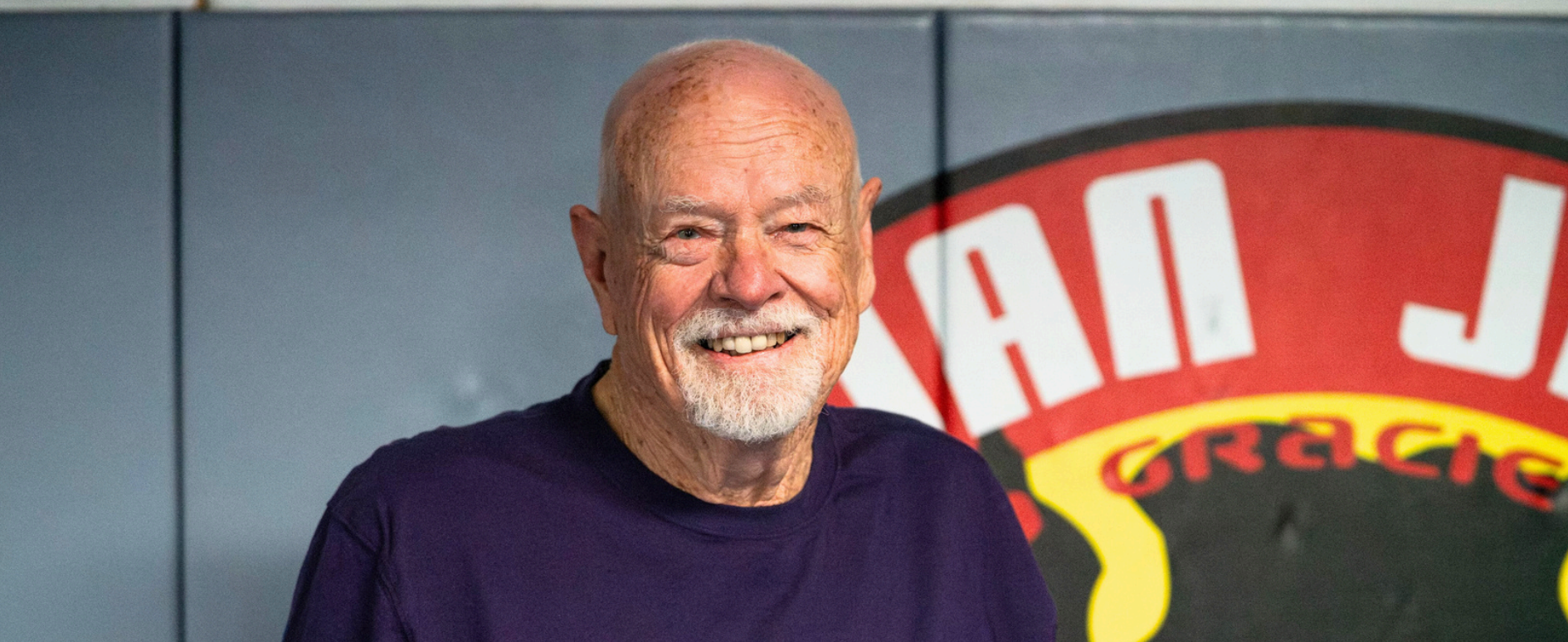
“I resent the fact that I need to be everyone's friend,” says Allie, “that I may have to swallow any opinion I may have or beat down my own expertise around something to play nice and make nice with the people around me.”

Afterwards, you can connect over something real – a match you both just fought, an experience shared by none other than the two of you. The intimacy is real, not superficial, projected or expected.

As important as dropping our ego is in the practice room to embrace humility and learn all we can, it's equally important to reel it back in when it counts. Some aspects of the ego can be beneficial in a fight.

Just as we need our egos at the most fundamental level to help stay out of harm's way, we also need to find a way to lean into its inherent confidence that we do know best and do have what it takes. For that, we need to learn how to work with the ego.

For the full story and more on confidence versus arrogance, [read the article here!](#)



**EASTON MUAY THAI
PURPLE SHIRT +
FORMER PILOT,
RICHARD SEALS:
FROM FLIGHT TO
FIGHT**

For many of us who engage in growth-oriented activities, especially physical activities, we hope to add years, quality and more vitality to our lives.

For this reason, we highlight the story of Richard Seals, an Easton Muay Thai [Purple Shirt](#), retired pilot and an avid biker – the Harley Davidson kind – who launched a brand new chapter of his life at 80 years old with Easton, and has been going strong for seven years.

Richard first experienced Easton Training Center in 2017, when he took his grandson Jake to a Tigers class in Centennial. Watching how much fun he had, and seeing all the Jiu Jitsu and Muay Thai students on their respective sides of the mats, Richard decided that this had to be more fun than lifting weights.



LIFE IN MOTION

“I told them, I thought I’d like to try the Muay Thai stuff,” Richard said, “and they acted like some 80 year old guy was ok! Come on in!”

He took his first Kickboxing class and fell in love. Richard began to go three to four times a week, and the further into it he got, the better he got.

Seven years later, the many benefits martial arts has added to his life include a loss of 35 pounds and the fact that Richard no longer has to take blood pressure medicine!

Richard never liked being tied to the ground. Ever since he was a little boy growing up in Tulsa, he dreamed of being up in the sky – of flying.

“When I was just a little kid,” says Richard, “there was a place they called a bomber plant nearby where they built B-17s for the war. I’d lay in the grass and watch them fly over. That’s when I first fell in love with flying.”

Over the course of his 30 year career with Delta, Richard flew out of Dallas, Salt Lake City and Los Angeles for the last six years before moving back to Colorado, bringing his wife and kids along with him.

On the mat, Richard keeps his primary focus honed on the kicks and the coordination. The endurance of maintaining his cardio while keeping good form, his strikes long and kicks high, was one of the biggest challenges Richard has had to overcome.

Easton’s Muay Thai program puts a strong emphasis on cardio, with lots of conditioning to enhance your endurance. This means often doing burn-out rounds on the bag or with a partner – calling for sequences such as 10 round kicks, followed by 10 speed punches followed by more fast-paced striking techniques. Currently, Richard trains three days a week at Easton, with a day to rest in between each, and takes the weekend off.

“I firmly believe I’m still here because I’m doing this,” he says. “It keeps all my muscles and tendons lubricated and stretched. You can’t do that sitting at home doing the daily ten exercises. But getting down here, punching the heavy bag, doing that keeps you active and keeps all your joints and stuff loose.”

Along with having a positive impact on Richard’s physical health, Easton has also provided a rich community where he’s made new friends, including post-class lunch buddies.

For the full story, [read the article here!](#)



THE HEROINE'S JOURNEY: GROWING UP IN EASTON FT. VI BURLEW

On one great episode of the Easton Community Podcast, our host Mike sits down with Boulder Academy Operations Director and comic book aficionado, Viola Burlew – or Vi, as we know her.

Vi has been with Easton for 17 years, having started training at the age of 8 back in 2007, nearly the same year as Mike Tousignant himself. For the full hour and a deeper dive into Vi and Mike's discussion on comics and literature, Jiu Jitsu, family and life, listen to the episode on [Spotify](#) or [Apple Podcasts](#)!

Today, Vi helps run Easton Boulder with [General Manager Matt Bloss](#), and serves as our regional go-to point of contact, along with Sarah Rochniak, for anything related to our new CRM, Wellness Living. She also gets to work daily with her younger brother, [Flynn](#), Boulder's Jiu Jitsu Department Head – and the reason she came to Easton (and stayed with it) in the first place.

Before she helped run the academy, however, Vi first spent years on the mat coaching kids as well as behind the front desk, as a First Impressions Specialist. Later, she would run the front desk as the Director of First Impressions. This experience on the frontlines gave her a unique, first-hand perspective in understanding what people need and when.

You can think of it like a performance. From the moment the academy doors open, the coaches, GM and front desk are working to create a dynamic atmosphere where students feel inspired and welcome, all while carefully managing pacing, flow and energy level. Vi had to think on her feet, command the surrounding space and solve problems under pressure.

Today, Vi's role puts her more into the space of a producer. It allows her to take a look at those same problems under a microscope, analyze them in her own space and test solutions. This analytical approach to problem-solving allows her to not just fix something in the moment for one person but to potentially eliminate the problem altogether for everyone.

We designed the General Manager (GM) and Academy Operations Director (AOD) positions to compliment one another, an ergonomic fit that streamlines operations and acts as a hivemind. The AOD can manage the more analytical aspects of operations while alleviating some of the GM's administrative duties, freeing up their time to to be the face of the school.

After 3 PM, the GM's role has them out in the crowd, greeting students, interacting with parents and overseeing the academy activities from within. The AOD provides on-hand support to anyone who needs it while making sure everything runs smoothly backstage.

"Matt is people and I'm numbers," Vi jokes about the way they've played into their strengths.

What can she do to make operations flow more easily? How can we optimize our organizational systems? Where are the persistent loose threads? Do we need to rework how we handle a certain process?

Vi's analytical mind makes her powerful at creating problems and solving puzzles out of almost anything – as long as she can shut the door and put in her headphones for a couple hours.

Seeing the behind the scenes from a less performative and truly data-driven, analytic perspective, has in turn helped her with the people side of the job as well.

For more and to learn about what the Heroine's Journey has to do with how Vi views the world, [read the article here!](#)



EASTON LITTLETON'S GM, NICK MAVRICK: REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE "BEST"

At Easton, we have two kinds of awesome GMs – those who open a school and those who inherit one to lead to its next evolution. Often, the gap between the two ends up being much smaller than it seems.

We highlight Professor Nick Mavrick, GM of Easton Littleton, Black Belt, nutritionist and Jiu Jitsu dad, as our newest location picks up speed three weeks past opening.

Nick first became Littleton's GM in January 2022, after its 2018 opening, when GM Peter Straub left to take over as GM at Easton Centennial. His [journey from student and blog writer to coach, Department Head and finally General Manager of an Easton](#) was a snowball effect of momentum paired with good timing.

Professor Nick originally started training Jiu Jitsu at Easton Denver in September 2007. He took a two-year break at blue belt when his first daughter was born, and re-entered the community permanently when blog writing provided a membership exchange. Gradually, coaching and a front desk position opened up, and Nick became even more ingrained.

RELENTLESS PROGRESS

With a competitive streak that simply won't let him back down, Nick has never let Littleton's size (a 2,000 square-foot facility, compared to Boulder's 10,000) deter him from driving its success. Any limitations only posed new challenges in reframing.

"No matter how much I wanted to be the best," Nick says, "the most profitable, or the best percentage of retail, the space I had could only accommodate 300 people tops."

One of the hardest things Professor Nick has had to overcome includes learning how to be bad at something. Growing up, much of what he did came easily. Like many high achievers who thrive on wins, his external input rarely included anything but affirmations, which created a tricky gap to manage between expectation and reality.

"I spent my first 38 years in a fixed mindset," says Nick, referencing the book Mindset by Carol S. Dweck.

"This paralyzed me from doing a lot of things I really wanted to do. As a young person, I'd pick things up really fast and be really good, competitive even, but then I'd get to a level where it required actual work... and I didn't want to do that. I wouldn't want to be seen failing."

While this may be hard for people who fear starting something they won't have the time to perfect, it also can serve as a test of ego. For Nick, this also meant that if he did anything, he'd make sure to excel.

The best is an ever-changing mark, as times shift, techniques evolve and new players emerge. In the end, we have only ourselves to compare to along our unique journey – where we've come from, where we are and where we want to see ourselves going.

When Nick returned to Easton after an almost two-year break, he felt like the worst blue belt – like he was giving Easton a bad name. It took him nearly two more years to get back to where he was prior to the break, and then another three years to earn his purple belt. Nick earned his black belt on April 20 of 2021.

As we adapt to strive for the best, we continue to find new ceilings. At one point, for a martial arts academy, "best" may have meant simply teaching a good class and treating people well. Today, however, "best" also includes a multi-level curriculum and battle-tested martial arts at kid and adult levels.

When the people you surround yourself with have no ceiling for their best, the sky becomes the limit for you too. [Read the full article here!](#)



MIKE



REID

POWER OF THE GRIND, FEATURING REID DELMAN

On one inspiring episode of the Easton Staff, our host, Mike Tousignant, sits down with Professor Reid Delman – a wrestler, coach, race director and Jiu Jitsu back belt who has been with Easton since its inception.

Listen to the podcast on Spotify or Apple Podcasts!

Of all the paths Reid has taken throughout his life, his tenacity and the singular, undiluted ability to grind has driven him to persist and succeed at whatever he sets his mind to – from college wrestling to teaching high school, being a stay-at-home dad and ultimately launching his own adventure race company.

Perhaps the ability to face and overcome discomfort has to do with the fact that Reid started wrestling in middle school; we often see that confidence instilled at a young age has the ability to redirect a child's focus and commitment in all aspects of life from a young age. (Though, Reid will argue he wishes he had started even earlier for his own athletic dreams.)

We all have goals that can feel unattainable at times, but if we make them a priority and channel everything we've got into them, we can overcome the odds. This might mean more work on the front end, but if we can identify our goals and drive towards them with voracity, all the time, sweat and tears we put in have a container to funnel into.

Much like in running, as long as we're continuously putting one foot in front of the other on the trajectory towards our goal, we'll get there. And if we stay open, not only will we get there, but we'll pick up trades, ideas, lessons and important friendships along the way.

The key to getting to the end, however, requires falling in love with the process. While our goals may sustain us with a vision of success, we spend most of our time in the thick of the process.

To Reid, who tells us he didn't grow up naturally athletic, discipline became a key component to getting where he wanted to be. He could drill individual moves for hours, and became obsessed with the tiniest of movements that he could tweak.

"No matter how much I lost," Reid tells us, "I kept going."

It's this tenacity, this dedication to the process, that turns the dreamers into doers.

Eventually, this led Reid to a successful life as a coach and race director and founder of Gemini Adventures, helping others push themselves and crush their goals in a supportive, like-minded community.

With little to no glamor compared to what we envision, we face daily challenges both getting ourselves to focus and perform and then the challenges brought on once we do get there. It's exhausting, repetitive and not always our best work.

The truth is that we can't do everything in life and often, we have to choose. Sometimes, we may not be applying ourselves in any one direction because we simply can't choose a priority to focus on. Instead of thinking about it purely from the end result, or the perspective of what you hope to achieve, tune into the side of yourself that loves the grind. Smell, taste, and see it. What does it look like? How does it feel? Do you immediately need a good stretch and a shower?

Begin to see those moments as valuable building blocks of your life instead of routines you have to get through. Notice the shaping of your spirit as each day you grow more strong and resilient, capable of accomplishing not just what you initially set out to do, but so much more.

[Read the full article here!](#)



EASTON BLACK BELT + MD VASSILY ELIPOULOS: HOW YOU DO ANYTHING IS HOW YOU DO EVERYTHING

One of the best parts about Easton's culture is how so many different types of people come together on the mat, the great equalizer. We have everyone from high school and college students to comedians, neurosurgeons and doctors sparring together.

One of these doctors is Vassily Eliopoulos, an Easton Black Belt and co-founder of Rocky Mountain Regenerative Medicine, a Boulder-based medical clinic he shares with Doctor Koshal Latifzai specializing in non-traditional treatments and therapies like Stem Cell Therapy, PRP Injections, Hormone Therapy, Ozone Therapy, NAD+ and Peptides.

If you've been with Easton for a while, you may know him as Doctor Vass. He joined Easton in 2014, but originally Vass got into martial arts in med school while looking for a place to wrestle.

Having wrestled through high school and college, Vass missed the intuitive connection and physical release training gave his body and mind. He joined the New York Athletic Club and began to compete in USA Wrestling competitions while training with the New York Athletic Club Team.

Unfortunately, while coming in to work the day after wrestling rounds with a fat lip and a black eye didn't seem that unusual for a wrestler, Vass's mentor at the time, a doctor with a Madison Ave practice, noted that it might not be the best look for a medical student in a clinic.

“He pulled me aside,” recounts Vass, “and said, ‘I know you're a wrestler, I know – but the clientele thinks you've been in a bar fight. It's your choice but you need to be aware people are going to judge you when you show up like that.’”

Soon after that conversation, Vass stopped wrestling and picked up rock climbing, which eventually brought him out to Boulder, Colorado.

However, when having kids meant he could no longer chase adventure for days on multi-pitch climbs, Vass had to find something new. With the stress of work at the ER, he missed the physical aspect of grappling. When he discovered that Easton offered a wrestling class, he signed up and the instructor quickly noted Vass had wrestled before; he suggested Vass try Jiu Jitsu. Vass was instantly hooked.

Like wrestling, his body picked up BJJ easily. Balancing the mind's noise once more with the body's flow, moving through feelings, the sport helped Vass manage anxiety and not internalize stress from work.

Back in familiar territory, Vass fell right in and began competing, with wins starting at White belt level, including a local Fight2Win tournament where he won White Belt of the Year, Masters and the regular adult level. Today, Doctor Vass holds a Black Belt in Jiu Jitsu. Along with winning the IBJJF Denver Open in Gi at Purple belt, he also took the IBJJF Denver Open No Gi at Black Belt – all in Masters divisions.

“The mats – I do it because I love it,” says Vass. “I train hard. I like training hard – I enjoy the flow state that comes with that, the ability to relieve and release emotional and physical tension. I work as hard at my medical practice as I do on the mats. How you do one thing is how you do everything.”

Vass tells us that the supportive, positive and uplifting the community at Easton encouraged him to live life his way – from the mats to everything else, including leaving the toxic, traditional field of medicine to start his own practice. Rocky Mountain Regenerative Medicine was founded in 2017, and Vass can now truly say he's doing what he loves, which, as he puts it, is priceless.

[To read the full story, click here!](#)