

A Tale of Two Kinds of Throws

Over the years I learned that these two families of throws have distinct names: load-bearing throws and non-load-bearing throws. Below are some thoughts of how each kind works, when you would choose one over the other, and how you can train to use them efficiently.

The Load-Bearing Throw

The defining feature is that your own mass stays connected to the opponent throughout the entire movement. Classic examples are the major hip throw, the inner-thigh throw, and the shoulder throw. In each case you slide a hip or a shoulder under the opponent, use the strength of your legs and core, and drive the opponent straight over the balance point and down.

Because you remain in contact, the opponent's balance is broken by the combination of your pressure and their own forward momentum. The power comes mainly from gravity and your body weight, so the technique feels solid and reliable, especially when the opponent is already leaning toward you.



The Non-Load-Bearing Throw

The hallmark here is a short airborne phase where you let go of the direct weight contact and rely on speed, rotation, or a sweeping motion to topple the opponent. Typical moves include a sweeping hip throw, foot sweeps, wrist twist throws, and four corner throw.

The energy in these throws comes from a rapid turn or a sudden sweep rather than from the opponents weight for short periods of time. Because you lose contact for an instant, timing becomes

critical; a mistimed sweep can leave you on the ground or give the opponent a chance to recover. Nevertheless, when executed correctly, a non-load-bearing throw can be very efficient.

What Both Types Share

Even though they feel different, load-bearing and non-load-bearing throws share three essential ideas. First, they both **rely on leverage** rather than brute strength; a well-placed hip, shoulder, or leg acts as a lever that magnifies your force. Second, a **secure grip** on the opponent's collar, sleeve, or belt is the gateway to any throw—lose the grip and the technique collapses. Third, both require you to **break the opponent's balance first**. In jiu-jitsu this is called kuzushi, and it is the foundation for every successful takedown.



When to Choose One Over the Other

If an opponent is pressing forward aggressively, a load-bearing throw such as a hip throw works best because their forward momentum adds to your hip drive, turning their pressure into a takedown. When the opponent stands tall with a wide stance, a sweeping, non-load-bearing throw can be more effective because a quick leg sweep can knock a high center of gravity off balance.

Non-load-bearing throws tend to require less energy and therefore are often a better choice when trying to

conserve energy.

How to Train Efficiently

The first step in mastering both families is to build strong, reliable grips. Simple tug-of-war drills with a partner help you feel the right amount of pressure on a collar or sleeve. Next, practice breaking balance without completing the throw; stand opposite a partner and pull them forward or sideways, focusing only on the kuzushi phase.

A solid core and flexible hips are essential. Hip circles, lunges, and plank variations give you the stability needed for load-bearing throws and the rotational power for non-load-bearing ones. For load-bearing drills, try stepping between an opponent's legs, dropping your hips low, and practicing "hip taps" without finishing the throw. You can also execute hip-throw entries, learning to carry weight safely. Working against a wall while performing shoulder throws forces you to rely purely on hip and shoulder drive, sharpening your grounded technique.

For non-load-bearing practice, focus on explosive sweeps. Start with a compliant partner and

perform sweeping hip throws, emphasizing a clean “fly-over” motion. Air-throw progressions, such as practicing circular throws on soft mats with a cooperative partner, help you become comfortable with the brief airborne phase. Reaction snap-downs—where you wait for a partner to shift weight and then quickly reap a foot—train you to seize split-second openings.

Finally, integrate both styles into sparring. Set short “throw-only” rounds where points are awarded solely for successful takedowns. Begin some rounds from a close clinch to encourage load-bearing attempts, and start others from a distance to promote non-load-bearing sweeps. This kind of focused sparring teaches you to read the situation and select the most appropriate technique on the fly.

Some final thoughts

In jiu-jitsu we often speak of rootedness versus fluidity. Load-bearing throws teach us to stay grounded, to use our own weight wisely—much like standing firm on a riverbank.

Non-load-bearing throws remind us that sometimes the best move is a brief, graceful leap—like a fish darting through water. Mastering both means you can be steady when the situation calls for it, and swift when the moment demands a quick sweep.

When you meet an opponent, remember that each throw is a tool, and the best tool depends on the opponent’s posture, the space you have, and the timing you can achieve. By practicing solid grips, learning how to off-balance, and drilling both grounded and aerial techniques, you’ll be ready for any situation that arises.

Canadian Jiu Jitsu Council Directors



Shihan R. W. Forrester (d. 2013)

