

THE KIMURA POSITION CHECKLIST



by Stephan Kesting

THE KIMURA IS A POSITION

The Kimura armlock is a fantastic submission. The basic idea is to use both of your arms to force one of your opponent's arms up behind his back and get him to tap out.



However, treating the Kimura like it's just a technique to be deployed every now and then is a huge mistake...

You'll have a MUCH higher rate of success if you focus on the Kimura as POSITION FIRST, and as a SUBMISSION SECOND.

Applying a positional approach to your BJJ game can be absolutely transformative. Most people now understand that the vast majority of jiu-jitsu is spent in about six positions (guard, side, knee ride, mount, back, turtle) and that the game becomes fun when you have *a few escapes, transitions, and attacks from each of those positions*.

In the last few years, this understanding has percolated down to the leglock game as well. Being able to recognise, control, and transition between the main leglock positions (like ashi garami, double outside ashi, 50/50, the 411, etc) is what turns a bunch of isolated techniques into a system that leads you to the submission more often and much more efficiently.

The exact same approach applies to the Kimura.

This book will cover the 12 main positions you need to control a thrashing opponent, take his back, move into chokes, or finish the Kimura armlock itself.

You to understand the maintenance, submission and transition aspects of each of those 12 positions. These transitions are very important; after all, the Kimura is a giant handle that you can use to move your opponent AND to move yourself around your opponent.

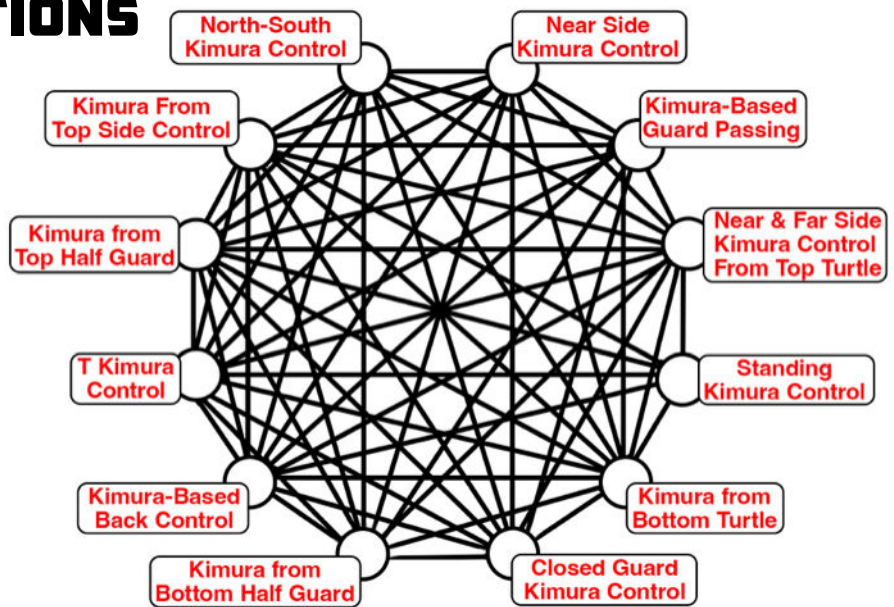
The paradox is that emphasising a position over submission leads to MORE submissions in the long run, not less!

A WEB OF KIMURA POSITIONS

In theory you can go from any one of the Kimura positions to any other. But not all transitions are equally likely.

Therefore we need to learn which transitions are high percentage and which work best for our own body type.

Here are two examples of Kimura pathways you might use...

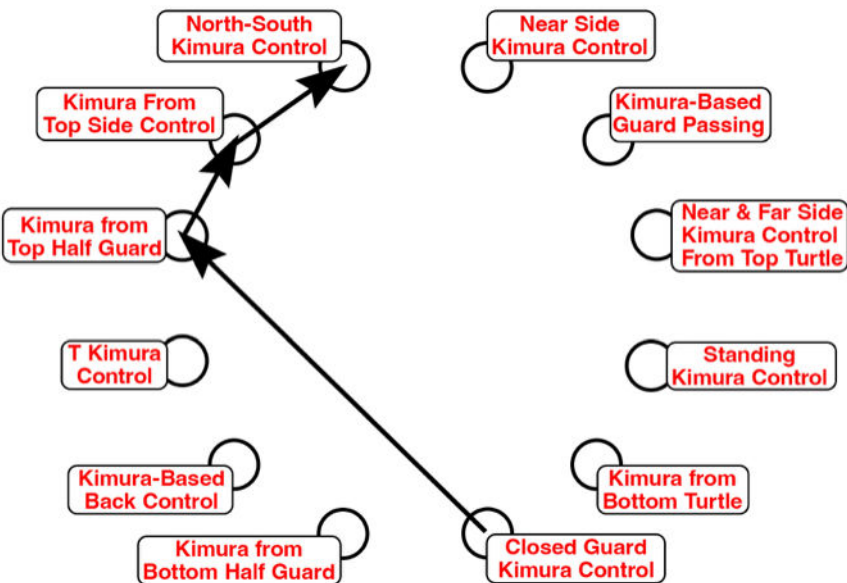


ATTACK PATH EXAMPLE 1

In this example we start in **closed guard** and secure the Kimura grip.

Our opponent resists the submission, so we sweep him using the Kimura as a giant handle.

We end up in **top half guard**. We maintain the Kimura, pass to **side control**, and proceed to the **north-south control** position where we finish the submission.

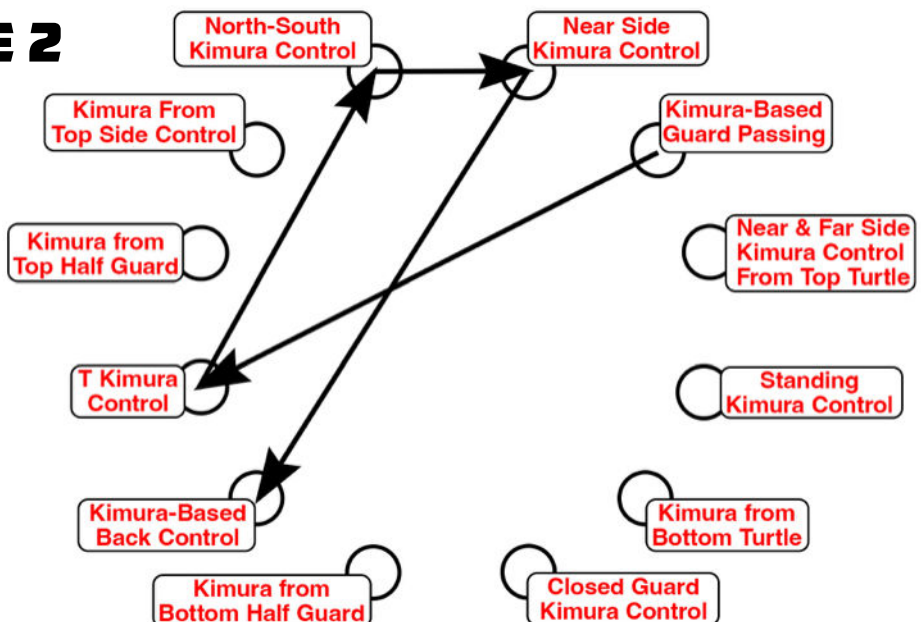


ATTACK PATH EXAMPLE 2

Here we start in our **opponent's guard**, secure a Kimura, and roll through to the **T Kimura position**.

From there we achieve **north-south control**, but our opponent escapes; we maintain control by switching to the **near side Kimura**.

Now we chase and achieve **the back** where we finish our opponent with a rear triangle choke.



SIDE CONTROL KIMURA



The Kimura from side control is one of the most commonly taught submissions in the jiu-jitsu arsenal for a good reason; it is a very legitimate submission threat that has ended a great many jiu-jitsu, submission grappling and MMA matches.

There are a variety of grips you can use to control the Kimura here, including methods where his elbow is at 90 degrees (pictured above) and others where you bring his hand much closer to his body.

Finishing mechanics here include moving the elbow *up* towards his head (or, alternately, moving his elbow away from his fingers), and then lifting his upper body while rotating his arm. The higher his elbow is, the less rotation will be required.

Some grapplers prefer to finish the Kimura from side control by first rotating their body by about 45 degrees, bringing their hips towards their opponent's head and their own head towards their opponent's hips. However, if your opponent is particularly strong or stubborn, then you should circle towards his head and proceed to the next position, the north-south Kimura.

Alternately, if it makes strategic sense, you can also transition from the side control Kimura to the T-Kimura position and start working for the submission from behind him.

NORTH-SOUTH KIMURA (TEABAG CONTROL)



For most people the north-south Kimura is the strongest way to finish the actual Kimura armlock itself.

There are many different ways to get here, but the most common is to start in the side control Kimura and circle towards his head, turn him onto his side, and twist his head downwards between your knees to disrupt his spinal posture and weaken his ability to defend

From here, you're set up to use the strength of your spinal erectors to free his arm and apply a very powerful Kimura finish, putting his arm behind his back in a triangle-shaped motion.

The main variations of the north-south position include having both of your knees on the ground, stepping over his bottom arm with your front leg, or forming an outrigger with your back leg. Each of these variations enables us to have different grip breaks and follow-ups.

Your opponent will almost always protect his arm by linking his hands or grabbing his body, but fortunately, there are many effective ways to break all of those grips.

NEAR SIDE KIMURA



The near side Kimura is the most important Kimura position that almost nobody uses.

This is superficially similar to the north-south Kimura; you still have the Kimura grip and your opponent is still on his side, but now you have both of your knees behind your opponent and position yourself at roughly a 45-degree angle to his body.

His main defence in this position will be to rotate his body downward and get his trapped elbow to the floor. To shut down this defense focus on punching his arms down towards his hip, lifting his elbow and rotating it inward, and clamping down on the front of his shoulder with your forearm.

Also, the more you circle towards his head (as opposed to staying directly behind him), then the harder it will be for him to escape.

There are a lot of attacks from the near side Kimura, including straight armlocks, taking the back, and a very powerful submission I call the “Fat Old Lazy Man Kimura” (don’t laugh, a LOT of people have made this one of their favourite finishes now).

This position needs to be sharpened by through positional sparring, but if you put in the work, I guarantee it’ll become one of the most important tools in your Kimura toolkit.

HALF GUARD TOP KIMURA



If you're in someone's half guard then one very powerful option is to attack his far arm with a Kimura. Not only does he now have to contend with a legitimate submission threat, but his ability to attack you from half guard has now been dramatically reduced.

There are many ways to get to the half guard top Kimura, but most commonly you'll capture his arm as he frames on your face with it, or lock the grip on as he threatens to take your back with an underhook. Either way, one moment he'll think that he's doing so well and then - BOOM - you catch his arm and now he's fighting off a Kimura.

Tapping your opponent out with the Kimura submission inside your opponent's half guard is possible, but can be a little tricky. That's why the best strategy is probably to mix the threat of the submission with the threat of the guard pass, and if you do pass his guard, then you'll still have the Kimura grip and will now be in a much more dominant position.

Most often, passing the guard from here will take you directly to the side control Kimura position, but you can also end up in the north-south Kimura, the near side Kimura, or even the T Kimura. This is a very powerful position with many possible outcomes that are very much in your favor.

HALF GUARD BOTTOM KIMURA



The Kimura from half guard is a non-optional Kimura position; it comes up way too often for you to ignore it.

Playing the Kimura from here is also quite a sophisticated game. Sweeps, reversals, backtakes, armbars, and Kimura armlocks are all threats. There is even an entire series of swinging moves where you disengage your legs and spin underneath your opponent to take his back.

Your top leg (my left leg in the photo above) is an important part of the puzzle. Depending on the exact situation, your top leg can be triangled around your bottom leg (traditional half guard), push your opponent at the hip (low knee shield), push at the shoulder (high knee shield) or come across to the far hip to break defensive grips.

When you have the Kimura grip on the bottom of half guard you do need to watch out for your opponent somersaulting over you - if that happens keep your leg entwined and follow him to the top.

Also, watch out for him switching the grips slightly and applying a Kimura to you, and/or freeing his trapped leg, stepping over your head and spinning into an armbar. Forewarned is forearmed, though, and there are powerful counters for all of his counters.

KIMURA CONTROL FROM THE BACK



The Kimura control from the back is another essential position, especially in no gi. That's because it shuts down one of the highest percentage strategies your opponent will typically use to try and escape the back (i.e. turning to the side of your underhook and getting his head on the ground, and using the ground to scrape you off of him).

The Kimura grip creates a frame which elevates your opponent's head. His head is blocked from going to the floor by your arm, and thus he cannot start his escape.

This is also a very powerful position offensively, including a variety of armbars, triangles, shoulder locks and wristlocks.

To make the Kimura control from the back more powerful, adjust your legs so that your bottom calf forms a "lap belt" across his waist. This leaves your top leg free to entangle his top arm, which sets up many of your most effective submissions. Trapping his arm doesn't require as much flexibility as you'd think; the key is shrimping backwards to escape your hips up towards his shoulders. Now you can bring your top leg over his top shoulder very easily.

The Kimura control from the back requires you to invest time into positional sparring, using both purely positional rounds and rounds where you can apply submissions too. This training will pay huge dividends, and Kimura control from the back might just become one of your favourite attack strategies.

THE T KIMURA



In the T Kimura, you and your opponent form a large letter “T”. You’re on one side, lying behind his shoulders with his head on your belly, and controlling one of his arms with the Kimura.

Most of the time in this position, your arms will be relatively straight, punching his trapped arm forward onto his belly. This causes inward rotation of his shoulder and makes his most common escape (turning towards you) much more difficult to do. This mechanism, incidentally, is quite similar to how you control your opponent in the near side Kimura position.

There are many submissions and transitions available to you in the T Kimura, determined by two main variables.

The first factor driving your choice of attacks is whether your opponent is moving up or down relative to your body, or turning towards or away from your head. Each of those opens up different options.

The second factor determining your attack strategy is the positioning of your top leg (my left leg in the photo above). You’ll use different attacks depending on whether you catch his arm, his near armpit, far armpit with your heel, and whether your leg comes across his face, chest, and near or far shoulder.

CLOSED GUARD KIMURA



The Kimura from closed guard is commonly taught in many beginner BJJ classes, but I think it's one of the last positions you should focus on. That's because this position often turns into a stalemate, and you don't want to squander energy and burn out your grips against an opponent who has hunkered down and is using all of his strength to block your attack.

So of course you need to learn and train the closed guard Kimura, but you have to get the mechanics right in order to have any hope of finishing it against a reasonably strong or skilled opponent. These mechanics include positioning yourself at 90 degrees to your opponent's torso, and bringing all the elbows (both of your own and the elbow of the arm you're attacking) close in to your own body.

Of course, there are grip breaks you can use, which allow you to disassemble his defensive grips. A stalled closed guard Kimura is one of the best examples of where alternate grips - like the reverse Kimura grip - are invaluable. Switching to an omoplata armlock is another powerful option you can use in this situation.

Even if you can't break his defensive grips switching to a sweep is always an option. These are made more powerful by fact that one of his arms is out of commission and unable to base.

KIMURA-BASED GUARD PASSING



Using the Kimura grip to pass the guard is one of the recent innovations in the sport, and it's a very powerful strategy to add to your list of guard passing options.

Typically this will be done against an opponent in some form of sitting guard who you've managed to offbalance to the back or to the side, forcing him to plant a hand on the ground to avoid collapsing. Since it's fairly easy to predict where his hand is going to go it allows you to come over his shoulder, get your arm through his armpit, and begin to lock on the grip.

The Kimura allows you to dominate the gripping game, but if you just stay there, your opponent will either take your back or wrestle up to his feet into a single leg or rear bodylock. Therefore, once you get the Kimura grip, you have to roll past his legs immediately.

This roll most commonly occurs over the shoulder of his trapped arm; the picture above shows the moment before I roll over my right shoulder and go over the top of his right arm. In other situations, especially when he's basing on his elbow instead.

Most often, your shoulder roll will lead to you landing in the powerful T Kimura position. Be prepared to hug his arm tight during the roll, and then extend your arms immediately once you get to the T Kimura to shut down his most likely escapes.

TOPSIDE KIMURA CONTROL VS TURTLE (FAR AND NEARSIDE)



A desperate opponent can do some strange things, and that's why it's not uncommon to attack him with the Kimura in some other position and end up on top of him in turtle with the same grip on his arm.

There are two main ways this usually plays out: most often you'll end up holding the Kimura on his far arm (left picture above), but you can also occasionally end up in a twisted position where you have the same grip but on his near arm (right picture).

Either way, having the Kimura when you're on top of your opponent like this is very advantageous.

You could, of course, abandon the grip and go to conventional attacks, but if you don't let go, options include transitioning to the crucifix, turning him over to the near side Kimura position, or bringing your legs into the equation and finishing the Kimura with his face planted into the mat.

There are also Kimura strategies you can use if you're on the bottom of turtle and your opponent exposes his arm. Most often, however, the best strategy here is to keep controlling the arm with the Kimura and come to your feet, which we'll cover in the standing Kimuras section next.

STANDING KIMURAS



Start standing or on the ground, most typically in turtle with your opponent behind you (like Sakuraba did on a parade of Gracies in MMA).

The standing Kimura has a long history in classical Japanese Ju-Jutsu systems and in English and American catchwrestling, but it started appearing in BJJ and submission grappling more recently.

The catalyst for this unlikely-looking strategy coming into the sport was Japanese MMA fighter Kazushi Sakuraba. Doubt about the efficacy of the standing Kimura disappeared the night Sakuraba used it to snap Renzo Gracie's upper arm. Sakuraba continued using this technique during his MMA career, defeating a total of 4 Gracies and many other fighters.

The two most common ways you end up in a standing Kimura situation are standing up from turtle and hunting for a Kimura when your opponent is behind you, and using it to counter single and double leg takedowns.

Once you've locked on the Kimura grip you can either use it to do a takedown (typically something resembling sumi gaeshi or harai goshi from Judo) or lifting his elbow to the sky to finish the submission on the feet, or use the threat of a submission to spiral your opponent back down to the ground.

THE NEXT STEPS

In this booklet, we made the case for a positional approach to the Kimura and then went through the **12 most important Kimura positions**.

Now it's your turn...

You need to learn how to **maintain** each of these positions against a struggling opponent, **break his grips and finish** the Kimura, **transition** to other Kimura positions, **take his back**, and use the **many other submissions** that present themselves once you drag your opponent into this world.

When it comes to drilling this material in positional sparring against a resisting training partner, I suggest that you **focus especially on the T Kimura, the near side Kimura, and the Kimura control from the back positions**. Do both positional rounds and rounds where you can finish the submission, and your confidence in your new skills will explode!

NEW! THE KIMURA ROADMAP

If you want help with your journey to Kimura mastery, then don't miss this new resource I've got for you...

The Kimura Roadmap covers the techniques, concepts, tactics, drills, transitions, positional secrets, submissions, recounters, and everything else you need to become really freakin good at this technique.

This 6-hour, 12-volume, professionally filmed instructional features me, Stephan Kesting, teaching you everything I've learned about the Kimura in 30 years of training.

Go to [Grapplearts.com/Kimura](https://grapplearts.com/Kimura) to get access to all the material *instantly* in both online streaming and app format.

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