



Episode 196 – Miss Caitlin Dechelle | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio and here we are with episode 196. In this episode we hear from Ms. Caitlin Dechelle, a world champion martial arts competitor turned actress known for her athleticism and stunt work. At whistlekick, we make the world's best sparring gear, and here on martial arts radio we bring you the best podcast on traditional martial arts twice every week. Welcome, I'm Jeremy Lesniak and I'm the founder of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel. Thank you to you returning listeners and welcome to the new listeners out there.

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When it comes to stunts in Hollywood, there are a number of names many martial artists recognize. Most of that name recognition comes from their time on screen though. We have far fewer individuals we look to and call ours--people who share stories similar to ours. Competitors. People who have trained

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for years, decades. Today's guest is one of those exceptions. Competing worldwide on the NASKA circuit led Miss Caitlin Dechelle to a Jackie Chan movie, and ultimately a career. We get to go behind the curtain with her today and find out not only how that happened but why it's been the realization of a dream.

Ms. Dechelle, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Hi, thank you so much for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for coming on the show, been looking forward to this. As I was telling you listeners, as I was telling Ms. Dechelle, she, for quite a few months now, has been the most requested guest that we haven't managed to coordinate but, you know, took us a little bit of time but here we are now and I'm looking forward to learning more about you.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah, thank you so much ____ (00:02:14.641) was like the most requested next to some of the amazing people that you've interviewed on the show, I'm so honored so thank you. And thank you to all the fans I guess out there, too who have been requesting me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, it's cool. You are one of a handful that we get to look at as martial artist that came out of the competitive circuit. We know your chops, we know your skills inside the ring, and some of us have followed you for years and now you've made the transition, you're on the screen doing big things, headed for even bigger things, I have no doubt. But there aren't a whole lot of you that we get to look at in that way and it's just great and I think that that's why fans, the listeners of the show have really taken you.



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Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah. Well, thank you. I mean it's definitely been an experience in my martial arts career and competing all of those years have definitely given me the opportunity that I do have out in the industry, I mean I'm greatly thankful for all of that and all the fans who do support me and do enjoy watching the journey because it's definitely been a fun one for me so thank you to all of you, and even you for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, thank you. Thank you. You get to put me in both of those categories. I am a fan as well as the guy on the other side of the microphone.

Caitlin Dechelle:

No worries.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Regardless of how much we've seen of you, be it on YouTube, or TV or movies or whatever it is, you've got a starting point and we found that that's kind of the best way to get started on the show is to roll back to the very beginning. How did you get going as a martial artist?

Caitlin Dechelle:

So, I started martial arts when I was six years old. My mom and dad actually suggested it more so for the self defense side of things. And you know, just being a young girl and eventually being a teenager and a female and just having that background behind me, to be able to defend myself if I ever had to. And of course being six years old I was like, "Yeah, sure. Put me in whatever you want." So I found this martial arts school. I was born in Miami, so was living there, and they put me in and I started going to classes and I just really had a thing for it. I enjoyed it. It was fun, it was a challenge. Then my first instructor who was Rick Begley, his son Nick Begley was competing on NASKA. And when I kind of saw him and what he was doing and what he was training for I was like, "Whoa! That is what want to do next." So that's pretty



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much kind of what I jumped right in to. I started learning the tricks, I started learning the weapons, and it was just such like an eye-opening experience to be able to not only do classes but then to be training for something and to have goals to look forward to and work at, and I fell in love. I mean, I was starting to go six days a week. You know, I would go to school, I'd come home, I try to do my homework and then I would run right there and that was history from there. I learned how to do every weapon which I'm forever thankful that my instructor made me do that because now it's come in so much handy through my martial arts career and then especially in the industry. My first weapon was actually the Chinese fan, the double fan, so of all the girls I was kind of cute. But then nobody really understood it, then as I got older I was like, "I think I need to switch to something a little bit more fierce. So I just _____ (00:06:02.327) for a very short time, and then from then, as you know I do sword, so I switched over and that's what became the weapon and it literally is my favorite weapon like if you give me a choice that's the first thing I'm going to pick up.

So I trained in Miami primarily with him and I give him a lot of credit to my career and to the martial artist I became. But then I also have a black belt in two other styles. So, the first one was Chinese *Kenpo*, then the second one was Japanese *Goju-Ryu* and the third one is *Taekwondo*. So it's kind of given me a little bit of a broad range and the different types of martial arts and what they encompass. So that's pretty much where I started, and then into my competing career.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did you get going with Chinese *Kenpo* and then move into *Goju* and *Taekwondo*? How did that all work?

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah, so the transition between all the black belts was just actually other friends who own schools in different places I went and trained. My first instructor had eventually ended up kind of closing down his school. You know, he was having some issues here and there, and I was like, "Well, I need somewhere to train" so I had found this *Goju-Ryu* school which was another girl that I used to compete against, Jenny Espina, and I kind of just started training there and I was like, "_____ (00:07:30.779) to train here" like I don't want to feel like the odd man out. I was like, "Let me learn. Let me learn the forms, let me learn the style." And then by that point I was there five, six days a week as well so, you know, you want to be part of the family and the structure and not just always feel like you were too cool for school to like



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come in and be a part of us. So that was how I ended up with that. And then for *Taekwondo* is actually through the ATA, and Jesse Isaac owned a school in Miami and he wanted to bring in XMA at the time through Mike Chat and I was on his team and I was kind of bringing that up with him and Mr. Isaac was like, “Oh well, I need someone to teach this.” But technically in their style, in their curriculum and everything else, you can’t really be involved or teach without being a part of them. So I was like, “Well, let’s do it. Teach me all the forms. Teach me the form I need for my belt rank and then let’s go from there.” So I did that, I tested in and started teaching for him as well with XMA and starting the program. And yeah, that’s how over my years I’ve accumulated three black belts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. You know, my favorite part in hearing you talk about this is not the number of black belts you have, but your desire to learn the material. I think there’s a lot of perception out there that those that end up in the competitive circuit. And let’s be honest, the _____ (00:09:08.793) NASKA is known for not as really having the deepest ranks of folks that focus on traditional elements. I think we can all admit that NASKA competitions have a bit more flash than some of the other competitions. And for some that’s not their cup of tea, and they’ll often point at that and say those aren’t real martial artists. And listeners and anybody out there is critical of that, I just want you to roll back and listen to the last 10 minutes, and the parts where you’re saying, “I want to learn the forms. I don’t want to just be here to train, I want to do it right.”

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah, I definitely agree because, you know, as much of it is about the flash and everything else, it is about the basics and that’s what I’ve always been rooted in and if you see some of my students who still compete in the circuit, it’s very rooted in martial arts. And if they ask me like “Hey, can I put this, you know, throw my weapon in the form?” Or “Hey, can I go from this trick into this trick?” I’m like, I stop them and I’m like, “Where’s the martial arts? Please tell me, you’re not in the trick circle or trick session, you’re in a form, this is a fight, so show me where the martial arts and where the practicality comes into it and then we can talk about putting it in.” And then they think about it and they’re like, “Oh yeah, that’s right.” and I’m like, “Yeah!” And I don’t mind it like, you know, saying that. I don’t want people to come back and say, “Oh, well.” You know, you don’t support that because I have to learn my sword in competition. I do the flips as well, but if you also look at my forms the basics are there and that’s what matters. Like throwing a side kick to me is still important because you find a lot of martial artists who can’t kick and they’re like, “Hey, how did you get a black belt when you don’t know how to throw a



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proper side kick?” So, forever in me will be my basics and just traditional karate as much as I love the flips, like that’s my ground, it’s where it keeps me and that’s where I started so I’ll always revert back to that first.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, it’s great to hear that you them as fundamental. You know, they are called basics for a reason.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah, for a reason. That’s where you start, those are your basics.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I’ve certainly seen people in competition who, as you say, can’t throw a side kick but will throw back flips and hurl their weapons and it’s just—there’s something about it, it doesn’t look right, you can tell.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah. Well, that’s good. I’m glad you ____ (00:11:50.725) and I hope it comes more back full circle to the basics again because I feel like at one point it did get a little lost in the world of, you know, how many times can you spin while you throw your weapon in the air. But I do encourage a lot of kids who do compete nowadays to still remember that they are martial artists and the basics is the most important thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Here on the show, we tell a lot of stories, and you told us a little bit there at the beginning. I’m sure with all of your travelling you’ve got a ton of great stories. But if somebody was to hold you down put a sword to your head and say, “Tell us your best martial arts story.” What would you tell them?



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Caitlin Dechelle:

Wow! You're right, there are a lot of stories throughout these years. But I probably have to say the most and the best, exciting and everything else kind of story that I would have is when I was competing in the circuit, I would say the US Open was probably one of my favorite tournaments, just the level that it held and being on ESPN, there was just a lot there, that was always a hectic and just fun and thrilling weekend. But I remember winning the ISKA form and weapon title on stage one year and, I guess this is going to lead into another story, stories in stories. But I remember getting an email from someone involved in Jackie Chan's team and it was the shortest, most brief email that came through my website and just said like, "Hey, would you be interested in being in a Jackie Chan film?" And that was the end. I was like, "OK, this is funny." Like someone's just messing with me. But always, of course, I will write back respectfully, and I was like, "Hi, yes. Gosh! That would be an honor. Thank you so much. Please give me more information." So, then they wrote back, it was kind of, you know, wasn't too much but communication. Disappointing, but hey maybe the opportunity will come at some point, right? Then I get an email about six months later and it said, "OK." It pretty much said that we're ready to go. "We're ready to book your tickets to Beijing. Are you ready?" And I was like, "Ready? Ready for what?" And they were like, "Yup, but we're filming, we're ready to book you, to bring you out, blah blah blah, let's talk details." And I was like, "This is really happening. This thing actually really happens." And I was like, "Yeah, sure." So, you know me, I'm going back and forth, I'm excited. Next thing you know, I had a ticket to Beijing. I knew I was doing one of Jackie Chan's film, I don't believe I knew the name of it, I had no idea what I was doing on the film, but to me it didn't matter, you know. I mean, in the martial arts world and being a martial artist, he is a legend. So, whatever you wanted me to do I was going to do it. So, I got on a plane, went to Beijing, landed, I was so jet-lagged, so tired. I think I was maybe about 18 at the time. And I got off the plane, and nobody speaks English really, it's all Mandarin, so there wasn't a lot of communication when I got there, I was just kind of being, you know, talk from this person in production, to this person, "Oh, go see them, fill out this form..." It was a whirlwind. So I went to sleep that night and I was like, "Wow! I have no idea what to expect tomorrow." And I got to set, I got into hair and makeup, first day, again I had no idea what I was doing, and Jackie was in the room. And he just like looks over at me, half asleep, it's like 5 o'clock in the morning, and he looks over at me, puts his hand out and says, "Hi, I'm Jackie Chan." I was like, "Hello, sir! Yes, I know who you are, very nice to meet you." He sat there next to me and we just got hair and makeup done, then someone handed me a script and they're like "Alright, are you ready?" and I was like, "Ready for what?" and they're like, "Oh, you have lines, here's your character." And I was like, "Character? Woah! I have a character in a Jackie Chan film? OK." So my first day on set was shooting dialogue with Jackie Chan, then I later came to find out I had my own fight scene against his girl counterpart because I was, I guess, "bad" even though there's never anyone necessarily bad in a Jackie Chan film. But I wasn't on his side, let's just say. So I ended up having dialogue with him in the film and ended up having my own fight scene. So I definitely think, you know, saying it

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being my best martial arts story, I would say it would have to be that because he found me by watching that ESPN show. He told me the story himself, because I asked him ‘how did you find me? How did that even come about’ He was like, “I was sitting in the United States, just watching some TV one day and martial arts came on the TV.” So of course he saw, and I came up on screen, he watched my performance but he missed my name. So he was like, “How am I going to find this girl?” So he kept sitting there and watching, and watching, and then of course I came up again and he snaps, he was sitting there, he sat in front of the TV with his phone just waiting. And he said when my name came up he took a picture, he sent it to his producers and said, “Find this girl.” So that would probably have to be my greatest martial arts story ever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I’m wondering because I’m trying to put myself in your place there. Did you have a moment where you just said, “It’s all downhill from here”? Because that just seems...you know, to have Jackie Chan reach out to you just because he was that impressed with you, and for them to have so much confidence in you and your abilities that they don’t even feed you your lines ahead of time. They don’t even tell you your role, they just say, “Come on out,” because I’m assuming they believed you could do it.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Right. Yeah. It’s crazy when I think back and I tell this story, it’s just like...it’s wowing to me because I’m like, “What if I wasn’t able to speak well? What if I wasn’t able to pull off the fight scene he wanted? There’s so many what ifs, and I think just my martial arts had helped me so much in just so many other areas of my life, and on one just being confident in my skill and just taking what I learned all those years and all the different styles, and my instructors, and just putting that all into one and saying, “I could do whatever’s thrown at me,” and if I can’t I’m willing to learn.” And that’s the thing about me, I’m always willing to learn. I don’t think I know everything. I don’t think I’m some huge master who never needs to be told anything. I will always try to take a tip here and there from somebody because I feel like if you do that you just learn so much more and then you’re so much better off prepared for when you are thrown into a situation like this, when you don’t know what you’re necessarily going to be doing, but you find a way to make it work and to push through it.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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What was the name of that movie?

Caitlin Dechelle:

Chinese Zodiac. And I am in some fierce-looking gold shorts, so you won't miss me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fierce-looking gold shorts. OK, I feel like I've seen that one because it definitely rings a bell.

Caitlin Dechelle:

You might have.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I may have seen you and just not realize it was you, so I'm going to go back. That will be part of this week's TV time.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yes, definitely. It's a good one, a lot of some crazy stunts that he does in it. I would say our scene was one of the best, and probably the opening scene. I'm not going to tell you about it because I don't want to ruin it but he is crazy, and it's amazing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. Awesome. That was a great story.

Caitlin Dechelle:



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Thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, you're welcome. We're starting to get a better sense of you and who you are, and there's a lot going on kind of in between the things that you're saying that I'm sure listeners are picking up on it as I am. Obviously martial arts is big part of your life, maybe even the biggest part of your life. But is there room for anything else? Do you have any hobbies or is there anything else that makes you tick?

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah. Of course, as much as I am a martial artist and that's all I do and train and everything else, I do try to still be the most normal person I can be and just have a life and have fun and have friends, and I'm super, super close with my family, like, they are my rock. And so, as much as I can travel and see them and go home, I do. It's actually just what I did last week. I went home and I was there for my mom for mothers' day, so I love that. Number two would probably be working out, it's just something that I think has grown off my martial arts and as much as I do like going to the Dojo and training my skill, I love to be in the gym. I love just like a good run, some weights, some hip-cardio workout, I just really like to mix it up just to keep me excited and going. And then of course that helps my martial arts so it's like, you know, kill two birds with one stone. And then lastly, I guess I would say acting. When I moved out here I gradually had just kind of wanted to do stunts, and acting was always in the back of my mind but I was never a theater major, I never took acting classes when I was young, so I was like, "Ah, maybe that's a long shot." But then funny enough I have this character in *Chinese Zodiac* and once I did that and did my own fight scene, I was like, "This is what I want to do." Like, "I want to be a female Jackie Chan, I want to be a female Tom Cruise," like, be the character and do my own stunts. That is my dream job. So right now I kind of, you know, obviously still doing stunt work. I'm heading out to a job shortly in Vancouver, I just did *Wonder Woman*. But I am in acting class and I am definitely pursuing that, just not heavy because it is something that I really enjoy, and actually it's a really good challenge for me, just mentally because my career and my life has been so physical, and all still mental because, you know, the determination and focus and stuff like that, but acting makes me kind of have to really expand my mind. So it's kind of like using a different muscle. So for me it's very intriguing, and I've actually really have grown a life to it lately so, yeah, I would say those are my three things; family, working out and acting.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

What's the hardest part about acting for you?

Caitlin Dechelle:

Letting go. Just being open and immersing myself into the character I'm playing because I think through all the years of martial arts I've taught myself to be so guarded and so strong and so resilient to the outside. That's how we're taught. I'm sure you see some resemblance there also and when you're acting you have to almost be the opposite, you have to be open and you have to be vulnerable, there's just a lot more feeling to it. And it's just different, like there is all of that in the martial arts sense but it's definitely a lot stronger of an attitude and that, then there is necessarily in the acting. So, yeah, I would definitely say it is tough. Like I said, a new way of being, a new way of seeing myself so I do learn a lot in that sense as well which is great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've heard a lot of high points so far in the bit of conversation we've had so far. But I can't imagine life is all high points. I'm sure there's somewhere along the way things got difficult. I'd like you to think about a tough time in your life and how you were able to lean on your martial arts to get past it.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Definitely. Of course there's always the highs and lows in life. There's no one person who lived at a high a hundred percent of the time, I think that's impossible. So, yeah, I would say maybe a low point where martial arts definitely helped me was at one point, forgive me for not knowing the exact age, but I want to say it was in, maybe sixth grade, and there got to a point in my training where my ankle was always hurting, like, I'd finish practice at the end of the night and I would just complain to my dad and be like, "God, dad. I'm hurt, I can't walk, I can't do another flip, I can't do another form." And it was hard and especially being young, it's weird to know what being hurt is, so it would get me down and I would not want to train because I didn't want to be in pain per se. So my dad used to take me to clinic and they would just be like, "Oh, you got a sprain. Just ice it up and you'll be good." So after I had done that maybe three, four, five times, I was at a point where I was like, "Dad, I can't anymore. Something is wrong." So we went to an orthopedic surgeon and I remember having MRI, X-ray, _____ (00:26:36.652) done. And I just remember the doctor walking back into the room and just looking at me and being like,



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“How long has this been happening?” and I was like, “I don’t know, maybe a year or two. I’ve lost track at this point, you know.” And he was like, “Yes. Well, I can definitely see that. You completely broke the bone off the bottom of your ankle, your ligaments are all torn, you have bone fragments.” Pretty much everything that could’ve been wrong was wrong. And I was just like, “Oh my gosh, what am I going to do?” I had a tournament I think was in five weeks. I don’t remember exactly which one it was but it was something that I needed to be at. But this guy with the doctor was like, “You need surgery. We need to completely reconstruct what is going on in your ankle.” So I was like, “OK, I don’t mind but I need to recover as fast as possible because I will be at this tournament.” And the doctor just looked at us like we were crazy. He was like, “There’s just no way.” I was like, “OK.” So I went into surgery in the next few days. They took bone fragments out, they tried to reattach my ligaments the best they could. I had scarred tissue, I had all kinds of stuff because obviously your body tries to heal when something is wrong, so that’s what it had been doing all these years. So I had surgery and I was completely taken out. I had a cast up to my knee, I was on crutches, in school I remember hobbling around and it’s just been so difficult, and then I couldn’t train the way I had to or I wanted to but I knew that I had this tournament coming so as I finally got better, took the cast off, I went right into physical therapy and I told them I have like three or four weeks to recover, like, “Go, do whatever you need to do, make me do whatever exercises I need to do, I need to be as close to a hundred percent as I can. So I think what martial arts had kind of taught me was it gave me that drive and the determination and the willingness to work through the pain because of course after having surgery I lost all the muscle in my right leg ‘coz I couldn’t really use it. You also imagine having one completely strong healthy leg and then one not so great leg, and you know I land a lot of tricks on my right foot, my 540, my gainer, all the tricks that I was primarily doing at that time as a kid, I have lost that muscle. So once I finally started going to therapy again, I was training again, and I think I just...sure, what I had been through in the past in my training it gave me just the confidence to get back into it and push through it and know that I had this tournament coming and I had no choice. I had to put my mind to it, I had to prepare the best that I could and go win, you know. Like, have that willingness, even though I know I maybe not at a hundred percent, so get as close as I can and just be ready. So, I did. I competed at that tournament four weeks later with an ankle brace so if you ever see pictures of me as a kid wearing an ankle brace, now everyone knows that story. I had full reconstructive surgery and got up on stage and competed anyway. So, yeah I would definitely say that was one of the lower, harder point of my career at one time in my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Have you reflected on the idea that you completely sheered the bottom part of your ankle? And you were still not just moving around but active and doing things that most people can’t do with all of their bones intact? I mean, ‘coz that’s the part that struck me as you’re telling that story.



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Caitlin Dechell:

You know what is funny is that I learned to deal with pain which is a good thing but a bad thing because obviously, like you say you're like, "Wow, Caitlin. That's actually really not normal, something's wrong with you." And it's like, yeah something kind of is but I learned to embrace it, and to know that it's not going to be all flowers and pretty and fun and happy. There's long hours of training and sweating and getting beat up, and that actually transfers right into my stunt industry out here in what I do because shooting for *Wonder Woman*, we shot for eight months including prep and shooting, and I worked six days a week for eight months, trained twice a day, rehearsed whatever it was I'm working out in the gym, and I think through my *Karate* years it kind of got me to that mindset to, like, keep pushing until someone says you're off the clock or you're done, even then you're not really done. Like, someone somewhere is training harder to beat you, to be in your place so you have to always keep that in mind and just always push regardless of the circumstances 'coz, don't get me wrong, there are plenty of days when I wake up and I'm like, "I'm so sore that I can hardly walk." But I'm like, "Find a way. Find something to do that can still benefit you even if it's stretching, even if it's going and taking a yoga class." Just something that moves you forward and I think definitely martial arts has kept my mindset like that in regards to whatever I do whether it's my career, my relationship, whatever, I always have that mindset that I have to move forward and keep working hard.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Excellent advice for everyone for sure.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've had the opportunity to train with utterly amazing people, the best of the best and probably a deeper list than most martial artists will have in their lifetime. If I asked you to pick out one of them, who is the most influential in your martial arts career, however you want to define that. Who would that be?



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Caitlin Dechelle:

You know crazy enough as this may sound to a lot of people and fans, I'm honestly going to say my dad. My dad was never a martial artist, no one in my family did martial arts at all, not only do I say at my level but just—period, and from day one he was always by my side in the *Karate* school. He never was one of those parents that just drop you off and say, "Hey, have fun!" Or come to one belt testing. He was there everyday, every hour that I trained, and he learned pretty much as I learned, and like I said he's never taken a martial arts class himself, he's not a black belt but he can tell you every little thing that you do wrong when he watches it. It is absolutely incredible. Like, if you do a side kick he's like, "Why isn't your bottom foot ____ (00:34:17.970)?" He's like, "Where's your ____ (00:34:19.422)?" If you do a chop punch he's like, "Why is your hand not chambered?" If you do a kick, like a kick slip he's like, "Why didn't you kick your leg higher? You would've brought in more height, that would have saved your landing." And you're just like "Whoa!" And then people see it, especially through my career, they started watching and they're like, "Cool! What degree is your dad?" And I'm like, "He actually doesn't have one." But he's just so watchful all those years and he picked up on it. So then at one point when I started training myself and making my own forms to where I almost didn't, where I was my own coach, he was my coach. And I would do a form and I would record it and take it home and be like, "Hey dad!" 'Coz at this point I can drive, I can go training on my own, he's at work, "Hey dad, what did you think about this form?" He was always honest with me. It was never one of those relationships where he would try to toot my horn and be like, "Oh Caitlin, that was amazing." He was like, "No, you need to fix this. And this, this is looking great, good improvement." And we would just go back and forth and we have this relationship to where he would push me and he would make me better. Because there'd be times where I feel like I don't know if I'm confident to throw that and he's like, "No. Go do it a hundred times if you have to, figure it out," "it looks amazing, get it done." And he would kind of be that push for me that helped progress my career, my competitive career. Of course we would have time where we would collide. No relationship when you get to that is perfect 'coz there are little bickers here and there, but he definitely pushed me always, whether I had a normal martial arts or not, to be that much better. Like there was no "Oh cool, second place this time, we can get it next time." No. We got home from a tournament, you got into the gym, you fix the form, you made it better and then you got ready for the next one. So I'm forever thankful for him and all the time and the hours, and the travelling he did with me. He was there every tournament until I was about 18, and even after 18 he was like, "Do you still want me to travel with you?" and I was like, "Yeah! Of course." I'm like "who's going to play my music? Who's going to be there to cheer me on and blah blah blah?" So he would still travel with me a little bit even after 18. And it's actually crazy that I say that 'coz when I'm actually at a tournament, let's say ESPN for example. You're on stage, thousands of people in the crowd, you got the camera in front of you, and I don't hear very much when I compete, I kind of go into this zone. And I could remember, it's replaying in my mind right now but I can hear him

Whistlekick, LLC 2030 Jones Brook Road Montpelier, VT 05602

Phone (802-225-6676) Email (preferred) info@whistlekick.com Web <http://whistlekick.com>



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when he yelled out or said something, or says “push!” Or “go!” Or “finish strong!” It’s like the one thing that I can hear in all the madness, in all the chaos at that moment. And it’s amazing, it’s such a bond we’ve created over the years and like I said in the beginning of this, my family is like, they’re like my best friends, like my mom, dad and brother, they are so close to me. So to be able to have them, so attached to my martial arts career and even now my career out here in Los Angeles, it’s such a blessing because I know that I always have the support of them. So, I know my dad will listen to this at one point and I just want to tell him that I love him and thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, shout out to your dad and all the martial arts parents out there. My mom did the same things for me that your dad did for you. She was my coach. It takes a special parent to push their kid in the right way and set them up for success, and clearly your dad did that for you, so that’s awesome. And for everybody out there listening that either has a kid that their pushing in that way, or somebody that pushed in that way, recognize that special bond and make sure you say thank you.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah, definitely. All the parents out there, that’s a bond that you’ll have with your kids forever. And I hope I get that, too. Even if my child wants to do martial arts or whatever sport they take, I will always remember what my dad did and how he was there for me. It’s taught me great things, that I want to be that for my children.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, if you had the chance to train with someone that you haven’t from anywhere in time, anywhere in the world, any martial art, who would you want to train with?

Caitlin Dechelle:

Wow, that’s a tough one. You know, through my martial arts career there have been so many people that I’ve fortunately been able to train with and to work with, any of the martial arts legends that are out there I would love to train, there are quite a few to list whether it’s in the world of film or even just our



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world of competition, but all those, like Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Bruce Lee, they are incredible people, I mean, Jackie fortunately I know as a friend, so that's one that I could say is such a great human being but I don't know. You know, it's crazy that I don't even really think in those terms like "God, who else would I want to train with?" But, I don't know. On the next interview, I'm going to have to come back to answer that one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fair enough.

Caitlin Dechelle:

I don't even really know, 'coz really like I said, anyone. Like, anyone who I could learn from or see kind of a new perspective, I would be interested in training with. Even kind of towards like the UFC and boxing. And even though I'm not a professional fighter on any level like they are, I still enjoy boxing and doing that because I learn different little things. As you see, it's like footwork and maneuvering around, and then I can take that into my stunt work, I can even take that into new little pieces of a form that would build. So, really anything where I could learn or progress, or see someone's skills kind of like at my level but just in a different realm, I would be so honored to train with.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let me flip the question a little bit then. Because you've trained with so many people, I'm sure that there are people you've trained with that you learned a ton from, that you said "I just got so much out of working in this dojo, or with this person, or with this stunt team," and then you've got the opposite, people that you're sitting there going, "Oh, how much longer am I here?" What makes the difference for you between those that you're going to learn a lot from and those that you don't?

Caitlin Dechelle:

I think the only time I may not learn something per se, or... I don't even wanna say that 'coz I don't ever want to come off sounding rude or like I can't learn, but he's maybe someone that's just the same background as me who, you know, I've kind of been through that style, and been through that skillset



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and things like that, but yeah, everybody else that I could train from I learned some, and even if it's not necessarily, you know, when a martial arts fan like Mike _____ (42:27.441) for example was one of my coaches, I was on XMA when that first came out, he taught me a lot about performing and I had already kind of established my martial arts and where I was at, and then as always I was a kid, there was a lot to learn but he really propelled me in the way I performed, and the way the music resonated with the form and how that just sold my performance so much more. So, I think even if it's not necessarily in a karate form or martial arts type thing, it could be in a mindset type thing or as I said, my chat in the performance side. So I really always believed it that there's more that you could learn to make you better.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well said. Let's talk a little bit about competition. This is the point where I usually ask guests if they've competed. Of course we know that, we've heard a bit about that, we know how fundamental that's been in your career. And really, the platform that's launched you into this kind of adult stage of your life, your career. But I want to go back, I want to know more about why competition resonated so much for you. What was it that you found in there that just made it your thing?

Caitlin Dechelle:

You know, I think, and this coming from my dad in being a very competitive person and playing sports his whole life, I think that really, you know obviously he's my dad, that came to me in the gene pool there and I'm a very competitive person. And obviously as a kid, you don't sit there at eight years old and say, "hey mom, hey dad I'm really competitive," you know? But it's just something I think in music, click that makes you want to do it more, which keeps you so excited about it, and I think that once I saw Nick Begley and the way he competed, and going to tournaments and seeing him in that spotlight, I was like, "oh, this is something that is really cool." It kind of gave me another goal in my martial arts. I just wasn't going for my next belt, like, I was going to that next tournament. Then when I saw him compete and though he was on Paul Mitchell and I was like "oh, you're on the team that's like known as the best team in the world," like, "how did that happen? What did you do?" And of course in the karate school I watched him train, I watched him go through his steps and how he prepares, and I think it's just...I don't know, something about it was really attractive to me, and I think as I got older I realized how competitive I was. I remember being at some tournament and, if I ever got B or if I saw a new competitor come around I was like, "well, I have to do it better, I have to find a way." There has to be away that I could do it better or I could do something different to top that or there was just always thing on my mind and I



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think as a kid, it is hard. There are times when you're like, "oh, I want to go play," or "I want to go to my friend's house," but on the other side you have to be in the gym. And I think my dad definitely helped with a lot of that because, you know, as an adult, especially now that I'm much older I see my student's going through that with their parents and I look back and I'm like, "God, was I really this difficult?" It's like, call my dad and be like "hey dad, I'm sorry. Was I this hard?" And I'm sure that he would say yes but that's just life, you know. You go through the time of being a kid and wanting to do that and I remember there were times when I struggle with that, but then I think when maybe I was 14, 15 in my competing career, I really started winning, I really started dominating and I loved it. I was like I need to stay on top, I need to keep training, I need to keep working, I need to get better, and no matter who came at me, no matter what came at me, I just feel was me. I still kept, like I said, to my basics. I still kept to what I believed in. It's pretty much until the end of my career, I stood my ground with the way I did things and the way I competed, but I know that's hard because as times change, you try to keep up with the time to fit in, I guess you could say. Well it's what's going on. And whether that meant more tricks in your form or more throwing your weapon in your form or more...whatever it was, I always just try to stay me and my dad always kept me as me. And if there ever was a time he'd be like, "remember what you do, remember why you win, remember what's gotten you to this point." So I think between us two and like I say, him being competitive, me being competitive, and him just helping me along my journey and had always kept me motivated to just keep going, to keep winning and to keep pushing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk about movies. We don't have a whole of people on the show that have been in movies but those that have, it doesn't seem like this question has changed. Do you have a favorite martial arts movie?

Caitlin Dechelle:

That's so hard because, again, there are few amazing martial arts movies out there. I'm sure my viewers and followers by now and know where I'm going to stand in that, and I would have to say Jackie Chan has some of the best martial arts movies out there not only because he is an amazing martial artist, but just his style, just the way he comes off on screen. He's so fun and so energetic and it's so attractive to want to watch. And I've always kind of enjoyed that because it's fun. It's like an adventure when you're watching his movies. And now that of course that I've worked with him and seen the behind-the-scenes to what happens on the screen, I do see how incredibly hard he works, how long he works, the guy



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honestly does not stop and I admire him so much for that. That's why sometimes when I'm having a crazy day, I'm like, I just think about Jackie, think about seeing the days we were on set. He didn't even have time to eat and he's running, trying to do this, trying to help this person, it was incredible to watch. And then just knowing, because I have maintained a relationship with him and I am very close friends with him at this point, that he's just such an honorable and great person, that he always cares about everybody that's around him, and it really is, you know, everyone says like the JC family, and it's really a true statement, like it is a family. We are one, he does care. It's not like he's just worried about his next movie or his next paycheck, he's just such a fantastic person that when you're around him it's just like you want to learn, you want to listen, and it's just incredible. It's so hard to put it fully into words, but it's amazing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

A very diplomatic answer.

Caitlin Dechelle:

It is.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And there's nothing wrong with that.

Caitlin Dechelle:

You know, like Drunken Master for example. It's an amazing movie

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, it's fantastic.



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Caitlin Dechelle:

There's a ton. And then you get more into mainstream today and it's like for his films like Rush Hour, because I'm speaking about Jackie per se and his movies not necessarily the best martial arts movie ever out there but, you know, everyone loves Rush Hour, Every one loves clips at the end of him struggling to do all the stuff because it show's how real he is, it shows that he makes mistakes. It shows that just because you see it on a movie didn't mean it didn't take 10 tries and getting injured to do it. So for me, knowing the martial arts side of it and all my years of training and then now being in the business and seeing how incredibly hard it is and when I have to go through that now, I'm just like, "wow!" My respect level for him is just like through the roof.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So you're saying that' when you do stunts you don't pull them off the first time every time?

Caitlin Dechelle:

That's a good one. Not always. There are times when I get them on the first try and they work. But you know what, it's not even just me, like, the camera guy could've missed the angle, the director may not have liked the angle, so even if you necessarily hit the stunt, it doesn't even matter because, I mean, you got to do it again. There's a few factors that definitely go into it. So, yes, normally it is not one and done.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Will we ever get Caitlin to shell outtakes? That's what everybody wants to know.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yes. And you know what's funny is that sometimes I do like to post things like when I do get a really good fail video, I do like to post that. I've posted one and I remember getting a ton of comments just being like, "it's so nice to see that you're real, that you do mess up, and you do fall every so often." And I do get questions about that quite a bit because during my competitive years I was known as being the most consistent competitor, and if I ever did make a mistake or I stumble or a drop of a weapon which I think I have maybe done like to two or three times ever in my career, it was shocking. People were like, "what



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happened? What's wrong? Did Caitlin Dechelle just mess up?" And it's like, "yes, we're all humans, it happens," but I, of course, train to be that way. You have to be consistent in what you do and it's the same here out in the stunt world. I may only have one opportunity to do something and I have to be able to do it and martial arts has definitely helped me in that. So, it's tough, definitely. But like I say, I think it's just all the training and through everything over the years has definitely keep at that level to where I'm prepared regardless. But the outtakes are funny. I posted a video the other day actually with Nick Bateman who's a martial artist who used to compete on NBL, and I posted the serious video and he posted the funny video of us kind of joking around and kind of losing our balance at the end and just laughing because that's how it is, everything is not perfect all the time. And it's hard now especially with social media that the only thing that's ever put out there is the perfect stuff and everyone thinks that you're this perfect, not flawed human being when that's not the case at all. We all have our imperfections, we all have our insecurities, so that's something that I do like to show that to my fans, that I do have that as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think that that's an admirable stance. We're seeing more and more that younger folks are coming up, people that have only known life with social media, only being exposed to these internet-perfect individuals, whether they be male or female, whether we're looking at models or actors or musicians and not seeing that there is another side of life, a dirty, gritty, imperfect side. And I think it's crazy you're willing to share that side of who you are, because that's all of us whether we show it or not.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah, definitely it is a part of life, so to me it's funny even when I go to follow people on Instagram or whenever, I look at their pages and it all looks too fake and just kind of a persona put on to get the followers. I really have no interest in following them, like, I'd rather see someone sweating in a gym and what they eat because then, again, for me I'm learning. I'm like, "oh cool, I can incorporate that into my training," or "I could do this or that," it shows that they're real, not just edited and touched up in Photoshop and put on the internet.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Exactly. How about books, do you at all read martial arts books?



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Caitlin Dechelle:

You know, I really don't. It's sad, I don't really get to read at all. I actually have a book sitting on my table and it's about...it's more for like the acting side of things. My acting coach kind of got me into it and I have not read more than the introduction. I literally have zero time. I'm like, "oh, when I get on a plane it will be perfect." When I get on a plane I'm so tired, it's like my one moment I actually stop so I crash, I go to sleep. So as bad as it sounds, I really don't read.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No judgment. None at all. In fact, on the show I've said so many times that books are not my way of consuming content, that a friend of mine who runs another martial arts podcast put together the outline, came and did a whole episode on this show instead of his own show about martial arts books that people should read because I wasn't doing it. So, we're in good company here, you and I. Not reading the books, it's fine, quite alright. Let's talk about the future. Clearly we know your career, we know what you're working on, but let's talk about the whats. What are your goals? What are you striving for?

Caitlin Dechelle:

I'm always striving for something, whether it in the stunt career, my acting career. And I'm always striving to do something, to try to push forward, that's just how I am. I can't just sit and just be content with what I have which I know may sound bad or wrong. Not that I'm not thankful or blessed but to me there has to be something you're pushing for next. So in my stunt career, of course, right now I just finished...I guess I didn't just finish, but now it's finally going to come out, I doubled *Wonder Woman* and I would be honored to double her again. As much as I am trying to act, push that career forward, being a female and being a martial artist and being a part of this film, with this group of women, being Gal as *Wonder Woman*, Patty Jenkins as our director, and it's just being such a feminist type film, it's amazing because I push for that all the time, especially in martial arts. There were so many times when I was told like, "you can't win," or "you can't do that as good as the boys," and I was like, "that's funny. Watch me." And that kind of a mentality I started getting like I have to be just as good as the guys. So that made me train harder, and even now when I see some of my girl students, something like "I can't do that, I can't. How am I going to beat the boys?" I'm like, "never say can't." first of all, because I've beaten the boys, I've beaten the men and I have titles that a lot of them don't have and will never have. And I love to use that



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to inspire girls to get to that level and to be at their highest potential because there's some incredible talent out there and to ever hear that I'm just like, "no. Stop. That's the last time I want to hear those words come out of your mouth because you can do it." So back to the industry and my career, I do want to take what I've done even further, like I said, be an action actress and do my own stunts and show that I can get to that level. And it's a challenge for me. It's a huge talent and it really gave me something to work for on all levels, my martial arts, my stunts have to be at such a high level and then I have to get my acting to as high of a level. So it's always given something to work on and progress which I love 'coz it keeps me busy and I love to be busy. When my mom listens to this she'll know because she's like, "you need to relax." And of course she's always trying to encourage me to do more, like I say, they're fantastic but at some point they're like, "you need to stop for a minute." And I'm just...I don't. I'm non-stop, constantly going, doing something. So I would say mostly, I love the acting side of the world, I love the stunt side of the world and I still teach quite a bit. Like I said, I do have some students who still compete so I teach privately most of the time. I have actually actors that I train out here now who are in the business and maybe doing another film that requires them to be active, to have a fight scene and they're like, "hey Caitlin, I need your help. Can you help me? Can you train me?" So, I still love doing that. I will always give back to the martial arts and to the people who have taught me to be like this because I know somewhere out there someone's looking up to me saying "oh, I want to do what she does." And I know that's hard when I was a kid, there are people that I look up to, watching my instructor's son. You know, there's always someone that kind of moves you forward, or pushes you, or gives you the little bit of extra confidence, so if I ever can be I always try to be that whether it's for a girl, a boy, a woman, a man, I try to be as inspirational and as helpful and giving as I can be. That's just truly what I enjoy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

All of that sounds great, and it's really cool to see how you're charging forward, you're not sitting back on your laurels, as people say, and that's what served you all the way up through now for sure, all the way up through competition. So, you're doing what's worked and that makes sense, and I know how exhausting it can be, because that's how I've always done things as well so I get it and I hope that if you do want to slow down, if you do want to take a break that you give yourself permission to do that because that's something so few of us do.

Caitlin Dechelle:

Oh definitely. I definitely know it's healthy to relax, so just going home this past week and seeing my family and just kind of... you know, obviously of course I'm still working now and I'm still doing things



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because it's always a part of me and my life and my career, but I do definitely slow down, put my phone down, just kind of check out, and relax because I do know that that's healthy, and I know that that's definitely needed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If the people listening want to get a hold of you or find you on social media or on the web, you know, I know you're in a bunch of places but let us have it. Where can people find you?

Caitlin Dechelle:

Yeah of course. So, I have my Facebook which is just 'Caitlin Dechelle'. I have Instagram and Twitter which is @caitlindechelle, all one word. And pretty much I want to say I use Instagram mostly. I love pictures and I love videos and I love what it captures. And I love the memories so you'll find a lot of stuff on there. Not just like I say me going to a tournament, or me going to a set, you'll see everything. You'll see my family, you'll see my dog, you'll see me and you'll see my life which is what I really love about it, too. And then I have my website, caitlindechell.com which we keep pretty up to date of pictures, and updates of where I'm going, where you could find me, stuff like that. So, yeah, pretty much those four outlets would be great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. And of course folks, we will link all of those over on the show notes. If you're new to the show, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com is where we drop all of those. I want to thank you for your time today, and maybe you could indulge us with one last little bit. How about some parting advice to everyone listening today?

Caitlin Dechelle:

The best parting advice, of course I bring the setting back to my martial arts to just never give up on what you're trying to do, that's in everything in life. I don't want to say just your career, but family, relationships, friends, it can be with your career. Just never give up just always keep striving for your goals because as unobtainable as they may seem sometimes, they're just in reach, you just have to take



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a second, sit back, see what you can do to get there and then just go after it full force and you can definitely do it. So, just honestly, never give up.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love seeing passionate people succeed, especially when they're martial artists. I have no doubt that we're only scratching the surface of what her career will become. thank you Ms. Dechelle for coming on the show. Over at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you can find the show notes with a number of great photos, some video, links to all of her social media and more. If you're not already a Caitlin Dechelle fan, you will be. Find us on social media, we're everywhere, including the show's Facebook group, whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Behind the scenes. If you're not wearing a noSweat tee right now, your life is incomplete. I'm just kidding, but you really should check them out. whistlekick.com is the place to go for those. Thanks for joining me today, until next time. Train hard, smile and have a great day.