

Episode 214 – Grandmaster David Oliver | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Good morning, or afternoon, evening. Whenever you're listening, welcome. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio and it's time for episode 214. Today I'm speaking with Grandmaster David Oliver, a tae kwon do practitioner, instructor, former national team coach and organization chairman from the United Kingdom. At whistlekick, we make the world's best sparring gear, and here on martial arts radio, we bring the best podcast on traditional martial arts twice each week. Welcome, I'm Jeremy Lesniak and I'm the founder of whistlekick's sparring gear and apparel. Thank you to the returning fans and welcome to all you, new listeners. Are you following our YouTube channel? We release very episode on YouTube, and it's a great way to setup a playlist of the episode if you want some motivating martial arts background during work or some other project. We have other videos over there of course and it looks like we'll be adding more quite soon. There are times in life where success doesn't seem possible. At a listener's suggestion, I reach out to Grandmaster David Oliver and invited him to come on the show. He accepted, but the hurdles we jumped through to make this episode happen were unlike anything I've experienced in the history of the show. From various technical issues to scheduling challenges, it seemed honestly that some greater force is trying to keep me from talking with him. Fortunately, for me, for the show, for you all, Grandmaster Oliver was incredibly accommodating and we're able to work things out. In the end, the episode came out great. This is a man with more than fifty years in tae kwon do. Someone who actually knew General Choi. He has dedicated his life to martial arts and now the



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organization he oversees has more than 25,000 members. It was an honor to speak with him and I hope you take as much wisdom from our conversation as I did. Let's welcome him.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Grandmaster Oliver, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

David Oliver:

Hi, thank you. Glad to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, thank you. Well, I'm glad to have you here I appreciate your patience with calendar schedules across time zones and technical difficulties and all that but finally we're here. I know I've had several folks from the UK reach out once they heard that we were going to be talking to you asking when it was going to happen and now it's happening and of course we're airing this as soon as we can. Share your thoughts with the world.

David Oliver:

Okay, that's fine.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We started in a pretty rudimentary way but I think it's really important so I don't want to deviate from that. How did you start as a martial artist?

David Oliver:

I started in 19... I was, well 00:56 I started in Australia in 1969. I was living over there in Perth, I had emigrated there and I was working with a guy on a building side I was a brick layer and we actually went out drinking one night and he got into a bit of a row and he, we had a confrontation with someone and he kicked this guy. And I'd never seen anybody do that kind of thing before and I asked him what it was and he said "Oh I do karate 01:31 karate" because it was at that time when we're just working together and there was nothing else to do, I started training and that's how it got started. And then when I came back to England, I looked at a couple of karate clubs but they weren't particularly that impressive and then I've seen a demonstration of Tae Kwon Do, that impressed me so I started then and that was 1970.



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Okay, so when you started karate in Australia, did you know anything about karate at the time?

David Oliver:

Nothing whatsoever, I have no knowledge of it whatsoever. I boxed quite a lot when I was still young in school boy boxing, I'd box at a local 02:16 boxing club. But I've never really heard of karate, I know absolutely nothing about it. So, I've never even seen it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you're interested in participating was because someone you knew was doing it, maybe you were impressed at what had happen with that fight if you want to call it that?

David Oliver:

Yeah, I was impressed with the fact that he could use it in self-defense wise to you know defend himself. Yeah, that what impressed me and I thought oh02:46 I'm going to be able to do that. So, we kept talking and like I said we were working together on building sites at the time and we used to go out a lot drinking and fortunately at that time because I was away from home and, so I just thought, I was bored so I said I'll take this up, I like it. And that's how it got started.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And clearly something about it resonated for you, you were interested enough that you were continuing to pursue it and then interested in pursuing something similar but different. What was it you found in martial arts?

David Oliver:

Well, I got, I started reading books about it. Mas Oyama's book and things like that and old karate books. Not Tae Kwon Do at this time, I don't know nothing about that. So, I was always reading about that and looking at it and got more and more deeply interested in it. And then when I saw Tae Kwon Do I started 03:45 jumping out, breaking boards, breaking bricks and sparring and then I got into it and I wasn't 03:54 I started training and when I did start training, I was training everyday, not missing.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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What was it about that demonstration that kind of pulled you away? Or is that a good way to describe it?

David Oliver:

Yeah it was the, actually I think the power because although I'd seen some karate and I've read books and seen things like that but these guys were jumping over the back of six people and breaking wood and they broke bricks and then the sparring it was very powerful and it was the highest standard than at that point and then what I'd seen in karate at that point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, interesting. Here on the show we like to tell a lot of stories and anyone that has trained in multiple styles across multiple continents I'm sure has quite a few stories, would you tell us your favorite martial arts story?

David Oliver:

Yeah, I've got a lot but I'd speak of one I'd tell the most as a kind of a disastrous story. I was a national team coach and we went traveled to Naples Italy for the European championships and we've been ensured by the chief instructor and the treasurer that everything was looked after for us. So, we flew out, when we got to Naples we were supposed to be picked up by the coach and taken to the hotel but when we got off the plane there was absolutely no one there whatsoever. So luckily there was a guy who's managing the team with me he had the name of the hotel so we got to get the boys and jump into taxis and get to the hotel. When we got to the hotel we were informed, there is no room booked here for you, and we know nothing about it. So, we talked to the manager then he did get some rooms available and we had to use our credit cards and the next morning we were told again that we'd be picked up and taken to the venue but again nothing materialized. So, we had to catch a bus and a train to get to the venue, just took us about an hour. Then when we got to the venue, they wouldn't let us in because they said that the entry fees had not been paid. So, after a lot of arguing they were inside got at the chief instructor he came in and got us in to the venue. And then the competition started and when it came to the one of the finals, one of that guy's called *name 06:35 hometown favorite's Italian guy, he beat him 06:42 very emotional, threw himself on the floor. The referee at the time was a Greek big guy, 6'6 called Dmitri and some come out of the crowd 06:53 and attacked him and so obviously it all kicked off so it's like a riot in the stadium and 07:01 and calm it all down so that was the end of that bit but then *name 07:07 who was at the time he asked me to pick a European select team to fight a North Korean demonstration team it was the first time they've been out of North Korea and 5 man team so we've put 5 guys to spar against them, 5 breaks and a team pattern. We won all 5, spars and we won all 5 breaks and during one of the breaks when the technique was a 360 jumping back kick, where the guys



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did it in a chair and the North Korean guys jumped up, missed the boards, kicked the guy low not to 07:42 the chair anyway that we carried on and then we did the pattern, obviously they'd been practicing the pattern for months 07:50 and we hadn't so at the end 07:55 general choice and that the whole thing was a draw because the sparring and the breaking was not as important as the pattern and I think that was just about the of it for me after, that's ridiculous but there you go. So that's about the most thing I remember in that tournament's 08:13 I've been to many, many over the years but that one stands out more than any other.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's a lot there and certainly as one of the tenets of Tae Kwon Do perseverance comes to mind first of.

David Oliver:

I know

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm curious about what General Choi said do you think he truly... As a Tae Kwon Do practitioner currently myself this you know that statement that the forms are more important seems to be counter to what I've always been taught within Tae Kwon Do, so I'm wondering, do you think he only said that for the benefit of the team or was that something he believed?

David Oliver:

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, well that's interesting. I don't know if you've, I mean you've certainly were around for more of Tae Kwon Do's history than I have been but I've read what I can in Alex Gillis' book I don't know if that's something that you've read through.



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David Oliver:
Yeah, I've read it yeah.
Jeremy Lesniak:
A book I find fascinating, if I may ask someone who lived part of that history, what do you think of that book?
David Oliver:
Oh, I loved that book, I think it's absolutely spot on. I think you got it right, that's one of the few books I've ever read I think that really tells the truth about Tae Kwon Do and its history, because a lot of it has been changed around cause a lot of people will tell the different side of the story but I think it's a really good book. I've met Alex Gillis and I think it's such a very honest, straightforward book which a lot of people wouldn't want to write but he had the guts if you like to write it down.
Jeremy Lesniak:
Guts is a good way to put it and listeners long time listeners of this show know that that book comes up from time to time because it is such a different book, they're really, to my knowledge isn't another martial arts book that takes that same style to any other direction.
David Oliver:
Yeah, it's an outstanding book I think, something I always tell people to read, sometimes I go to meetings where people who don't understand Tae Kwon Do but involved in sports councils and things like that and to try and explain to them 2 styles of Tae Kwon Do it's very difficult when they don't understand it so I just tell them to read that book and I think that does the job.
Jeremy Lesniak:
It certainly does illustrate a lot of the differences without a doubt.
David Oliver:
Yeah, definitely.



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Outside of martial arts sir, are there things that you're passionate about, any hobbies?

David Oliver:

I'm a big soccer fan, 11:48 within Premier League football team called West Bromwich Albion. I'm a big dog lover, I've got 2 American bulldogs which I look after a lot so those are the things and it mainly, my passion is really still Tae Kwon Do and martial arts. And all styles of it I liked it. I've seen different people and I have watched people it's yeah, that's 12:20 and families really, going away with my grandchildren and things like that. Enjoying all of that is in fact coming out of Tampa Florida in 2 weeks time actually to a tournament out there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh wow, yeah let's see which one is that, I'm trying to run through the calendar in my head.

David Oliver:

It's Scott McNeil 12:43 ***I think it's on the 23rd of July.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, there's quite a few to go on that way.

David Oliver:

Yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, interesting. Now when you say you are passionate about martial arts and not just Tae Kwon Do, what do you mean by that?

David Oliver:

Well because I think sometimes people think that you know, Tae Kwon Do people at times think there is nothing else in Tae Kwon Do and I know there is some absolutely excellent karate people 13:16 as well, because I when I started, I read a lot of karate books and see karate and at that time Great Britain had a very, very big and good karate community. There was one in advanced Tae Kwon Do, 13:33 well in advance, they'd been doing it a long time here. And they had a very good team and very good



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competitors and they all used to compete every year, regardless of style in London, once a year and I would just go out and watch it and I've made some very good friends they do karate 13:50 and I just think it's the person not the style, I don't think you can take somebody out of one's style who's good at it and put it in another, he wouldn't be good in that. So, I'm not blinking about Tae Kwon Do, you know I think a lot of Tae Kwon Do people are and I find a lot of karate people 14:12 ******** The other thing I find about it is a lot of Tae Kwon Do people are very grade orientated. You know where as in this country a lot of the high-grade karate people aren't.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you think creates that culture?

David Oliver:

I don't know it just seems to have gone mad with people, well people being the masters/ Grandmasters and some of them has not really trained that long at all. But I think the culture has got worse since you know you now got 14:53 which is now I know the same thing at when I was in WTF as well. And I think the culture had to come from the top unfortunately and people now just think you know oh I'm a Grandmaster or that or whatever and then it seems that they're obsessed with it instead of thinking about training, what they can put back into it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And because if I remember correctly, you have quite a few schools that look to you am I remembering that?

David Oliver:

Yeah, in my organization. The TAGB yeah, we have got 600 schools, we got 25,000 members, it's the largest group in Europe.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is a larger organization regardless of where we're talking about it, I mean that just to oversee that much. Have you, is there an effort you've made or things that you've sent down to your school to try and combat that cause what I'm hearing in your words is that it's something that you disapprove of, so I'm wondering if it's something you've worked to change in your organization.

David Oliver:



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How'd you mean the master/Grandmaster bit?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

David Oliver:

Yeah well, we just make sure people do the proper times, you know train hard 16:17 the black belt and time periods between each belt. We don't let people jump grades or anything like that, people who've got their grade they've earned it they've done their time 16:29 You know we have a lot of professional instructors in fact I was the first professional instructor in the UK doing Tae Kwon Do so yeah it, you know we try to run a very professional organization, you know and make it a benefit for the students and the instructors.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'd like you to tell us about a time when maybe life was challenging and how you were able to use or reflect on your martial arts for that?

David Oliver:

Well, I've been divorced twice I'm married for the third time so those times were very challenging and I used to find it when I went in tour I just had to switch off and not worry about things like that I was teaching all the time I was running three schools I was teaching seven days a week and also, I had a 17:25 my father died my mother died, sister in law, brother so I had a lot of bereavement and things like that. I've always found out that I could call on this strength mainly from doing martial arts really in training and dedicating myself to that, and that's how it's helped me 17:46 When I was teaching I didn't think about anything else I was just thinking about teaching getting the best out of students and I found that it helped me a lot.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you have advised for people that maybe are struggling and they're stepping into a school as a student and they have a harder time you know leaving those troubles at the door, what might you tell them?

David Oliver:



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Well for me again, once they step into the gym they've got to just switch off and got to concentrate on what they're doing I just think it gives them strength 18:24 if they're taken out of their environment that's really bothering them and they go there into the 18:31 and then you know they can forget everything, that they could just train and dedicate themselves to that 18:37 ****** I know that, I've got a student now who's training and who 18:46 lost their husband it's a lady and since she's been doing this Tae Kwon Do it's given her a lot of strength and she's threw herself into it and she's made a lot of new friends and she's got a new 19:00 and she gets to travel and she just, it's just helped so much and I've seen a lot of people 19:07 in different ways when they had problems.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you look back over your martial arts career, who has been the most influential person for you?

David Oliver:

My instructor, without a doubt he was, his name was Bob *** and he was the first person to be graded with a black belt in the UK by the RTF and 21:19, he was the first one and I was his first black belt. And the school that I joined it was his school and he passed that over to me and that occurred because he went to work abroad. And he didn't want to teach anymore, but I'm still friends with him today. I found him a very straightforward honest person he always told he had a great integrity and he still has and I still see it to this today and he's very, very well respected and again by all martial artists not just Tae Kwon Do people.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did he ever offer you any advice or any words that really stuck with you, that you'd be willing to share?

David Oliver:

He didn't particularly advise me but he always told me that you know, you'll have to be honest with the students, be upfront be straightforward with them let them know you know, that you're not a demigod you know you're just 22:18 you trained a lot longer, you got more experience in life that they are. And mainly, to be honest with them and not to try and make out that you're someone you're not. That I think is the best thing and I've always carried out forward and I like to think that all of my students would think that of me and in fact the people in my organization.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that ties in what we were talking about earlier.



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Yeah exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you could train with anyone that you haven't, anywhere in the world, anywhere in time, who would that be?

David Oliver:

Probably **** and *** 22:59. Also a boxer who I really like because I'm still very interested in boxing it would be Roberto Duran. Because I'm a big boxing fan, I may start to mention that when ** but I'm really a big boxing fan.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And what would you hope to learn from those gentlemen?

David Oliver:

I just somewhat drive them on cause obviously they're all very competitive and what made them the way they were and pushed on and pushed on hard and I believe they still train now anyway. And I've seen lots of films and stuff of them and DVDs and things and those impressed me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We talked a little bit about competition and how it didn't go so well that time at a European tournament, and you mentioned in there that competition is something that you enjoy. Tell us about your time as a competitor.

David Oliver:

Well, when I was a competitor I won the British championships that was a time that there was no weight division and things like that and sparring equipment was just bands feet and I also represented Great Britain and for other team 24:15 which I really enjoyed and then I passed that on and then when it came to having an organization, when we split from the ITF, we then started entering into open competition to which we weren't allowed to do beforehand. That is very enlightening, very good and we established ourselves as one of the best teams around and that's start on from 24:47. When I was coach we won the



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ITF world championships in Argentina. We won the European championships in Naples and then obviously we split from the ITF in 1983 and we formed our own organization. So, competitions have always been in my blood, I've found it the thing that I enjoy the most about tae kwon do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you encourage or require your students to compete?

David Oliver:

No. I used to be very competitive and do a lot of competition training and things like that but now I don't because much large has changed from when I was started completely. I mean, there was no women training and there was no juvies, children training but now, you have a lot of ladies training and a lot of juvies training. I do encourage the children to take part in competitions but only if that's what they want to do. There's no you know, you've got to get in a competition anything like that. We encourage them and we get quite a good response and competition is not for everyone. Some people don't like competition, they don't you know, like being there in the arena. No, I don't try to make it there, but we have squad training things like that. That they can go to and we have lots of competition so if they want to do it they could go. I'll just say to them you know, if you want to try it, try it and if you don't then you know, some people just go in and do patterns which they enjoy which is fine by me and I do still can get helps, it helps to build character when they can 26:25

Jeremy Lesniak:

When you say martial arts has changed completely, I think you're in a unique position for me to ask you this question because you've train in multiple arts across a quite a length of time and across the world. Outside of women training and children training, how else has it changed?

David Oliver:

Again, I think the training has changed and people have become more scientific now if you like. There's a lot more you know, with the stretching and things like that. People are more informed of course they got the internet and all these kinds of things so, it is different but the class is different as well especially over here where people do contracts for training so you know, there are obviously organization that understand the interest in as you would say in America, chasing the dollar. So, I think that's how it is changed where the people when I started just wanted to train and nothing else, that was it. They dedicated themselves to it. People today are not dedicated, they like to do it, class on Monday and then they're swimming on the Tuesday and play racquetball on a Wednesday so it's not the same.



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It's become part of their life and not their life in the way.

David Oliver:

Yes, exactly. Like I said I would train seven days a week and if I tell my students and then they go "seven days a week!?!" but I did train seven days a week. If I wasn't in the school training, I trained on my own or I train with the one of the other guys who was in my class at the time. And all the way through, even I get older, I was still training at least three to four times at dama gym with other people who were around me in my organization so I've always enjoyed that part of it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What part? We have people of all style...

David Oliver:

The physical part

Jeremy Lesniak:

It was... Imagine that you're talking to somebody, I can certainly empathize with that. You know I've trained pretty much my whole life and I'm very passionate about martial arts hence the show, but we have some folks I'm sure listening that are new to martial arts or maybe even considering martial arts. What is it about martial arts for you that you are so invested that you would train seven days a week?

David Oliver:

Because I said the individual thing that you can't prove all the time, you know you keep taking some other classes like aerobics classes or all other kinds of classes that kind of things, yet there's no improvement, there's no goals. With martial arts, you can always improve all the time. You can get better and it's an individual thing it's not a team game. Even if you go in the tournament as team, you still individually 29:39 for your performance, and that's what I found when I go 29:43 is the fact that I could go train on my own and still enjoy it and I've always felt good at the end of it and that for me is a goal for people that to improve themselves. Physically, mentally and emotionally I think that what give people in martial arts the edge and I don't think you see it at other sports at times.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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How about movies? Martial arts movies, do they do anything for you? Do you enjoy watching them?

David Oliver:

No. I'm not a fan, I don't watch them. I don't. Obviously, you will remember Bruce Lee in Enter the Dragon but I'm not a big fan of martial arts movies, no. And I think now in some respect become a bit pointless because they can just mimic you know, take the matrix and things like that you know, they can just do it with technology. So, I'm not 30:49 if I go to the movies, I want to see an actor. I don't want to see a martial artist being a second-rate actor.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about books? You've mentioned earlier your passion about karate books as you were training in karate.

David Oliver:

Yeah. Well I read a lot of the 31:05 karate books yet but, normal books I do like to read factual books. My favorite book is Bravo 2-0 about SAS in Iraq, I also, I like those kinds of books and my son was 22 years in the marines and I got to watch him train quite a bit and I got very interested in it so I read a lot of books about wars and things like that I find those very interesting.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are there any martial arts books that you might recommend to our listeners?

David Oliver:

I think the Art of War probably but also Five Rings, which is a samurai book quite good I think. But I mean there are so many books 32:04 you said to me earlier to list these books I like to recommend if they do tae kwon do but I mean there's lots of good karate books out there that they can read.

Jeremy Lesniak:

For sure. And of course, Art of War and book of Five Rings those come up on the show all the time, they're classics.

David Oliver:



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Yeah because you know, I think it gives you more thing on the philosophy side of it so if you want to 32:33 that's what, you know, look at those books, they're very good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk about the future. You're still training, you're teaching, obviously you have the admiration of quite a few people, which is why we ended up speaking, what keeps you motivated? Because I'm sure overseeing twenty-five thousand students is not simple.

David Oliver:

Actually, the fact that the organization, we built it up to be what it is today, myself and the other 33:06 guys who run the TAGB with me and that motivates me and competitions that we still put on. Next year we are putting on the world championships in Birmingham in July. So, there's a lot of work has to go in that. But I'm also chairman of the British Tae Kwon Do Council which is the national governing body for tae kwon do in the UK. So, I do a lot of work. The with me is I like to keep busy that kind of person, I'd be bored if I wasn't working and doing stuff all the time and getting the challenges, new things coming up and going in to it, that's what I like. I don't like to be just sitting on my laurels, I want to stay there and do as much as I can to improve the organization and help people how to get to open up new schools and help my own instructors as well who are a lot of them still come to train with me which I really like and because it shows how over the years there's people that stuck with me. And I think if there was a fifth tenet or sixth tenet rather, I think it would be loyalty. And I'm a very loyal person and somewhere 34:21 martial arts magazine they said if you cut Dave Oliver's head off, you got TAGB running right through his neck. I think I thought that was the best compliment anyone could pay me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fairly, you love what you do, you love martial arts, you love the impact that you've been able to have and sharing it with others. That's wonderful.

David Oliver:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think that's the goal for so many of us, is to be able to share what we love whether its martial arts or not.



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David Oliver:

34:56 I want to see little children learning and some of really high standard and I think it's amazing, three of my own children are black belts, my wife's a black belt. I've got grand children now, they're coming 35:11 yeah, it's just passed on. It's in my blood really, as simple as that and anybody who knows me will tell you I'm passionate about tae kwon do and all martial arts you know, and that I've met some great people over the years, martial artists and some really good people, straightforward people.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If people want to get hold of you or learn more about you, or your organization, maybe they're in the UK and they want to find one of your member schools. How do they do that?

David Oliver:

Yeah. The organization's website which we are running is TAGB.biz and obviously we have a Facebook page, I have my own website which is tagbgmoliver.co.uk and to reach me directly I have an email which people can go straight to which is orders@Tae Kwon Dopromotions.co.uk and that comes direct to me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great. And listeners, no worries if you're driving or something you don't have the opportunity to take notes, we'll have those over on the website whistlekickmartialartsradio.com under Grandmaster Oliver's episode. I really appreciate you being here, thank you so much for your time. Might you offer us some last words, some final advice for the people listening.

David Oliver:

Okay. Well. My final advise is you know; a black belt is only a white belt if you stop training and that's the main thing. Sometimes people just pack up to early, you know, they stop training, Jeremy, when could've carried on. I think that's the goal, that people should still train keep going and because as you get older, I think it is even better when you do martial arts because it's better for your health that if you mentally, physically I could recommend it to you highly. And that's what made, I owe everything to tae kwon do, not the other way around.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When I think of the qualities that define leadership, for me Grandmaster Oliver has them, all of them. The students in his organization are fortunate to have his guidance and experience, that's for sure.



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Thank you, Grandmaster Oliver, for coming on the show today. Over at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you can find the show notes with photos and links to our guest and his organization. Find whistlekick on social media, we're @whistlekick on twitter, Facebook, Instagram and everywhere else you can pretty much think of. Also check out the show's Facebook group, whistlekickmartialartsradio behind the scenes. Find the newsletter sign up at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and of course our YouTube page, youtube.com/whistlekick. That's it for now, until next time. Train hard, smile and have a great day.