



Episode 6 – Shihan Wayne Mello | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone and welcome back to episode 6 of [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com), my name's Jeremy Lesniak your host for the show and the president of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel. On today's show, we have Shihan Wayne Mello, a Shotokan karate instructor and promoter from central Massachusetts. Shihan Mello is one of my former instructors and I had a great time talking to him. Despite knowing him for more than 20 years, I learned a lot about his past and what really makes him tick. Stay tuned, I think you'll love this episode. Shihan Mello, welcome to [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com).

Wayne Mello:

Good to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well I thank you for coming on and talking to me I know it's a little early, I know you're a little under the weather there but I think we can get through this okay, you sound fine on my end so.

Wayne Mello:

Well that's good, I'm feeling good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay so why don't you start by telling us, I mean of course I know your martial arts history good portion of it, but how about you tell everybody else? How you got started, where and when and all that.

Wayne Mello:

Okay I got started in martial arts, I used to do boxing when I was a kid and then one day we had this guy come up who is a black belt and kyokushin and he just blew me away and I just knew that I had to do something like this is probably around 1968 and unfortunately I didn't come from a well to do family and everything so, I wasn't able to take a karate lessons and I was just follow this guy for a little while and I end up and stuff about 8 years and when I got out my instructor [01:46](#) and I trained with him and [01:49](#) out of Boston who just came here from japan. That's where I got my martial arts black belt, from him and I studied the same style throughout my career. Always going to [02:05](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I mean, that's kind of uncommon for someone to train that long at least these days and stick with one instructor and one style.

Wayne Mello:

Yeah, I feel fortunate that I still train with him now. I still train with him on a monthly basis and it's just been great, he's also [02:24](#) we've been best friends. And anytime I have a problem, I have been able to just go to him and we work out pretty much anything never had a problem with him at all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great that's I think a testament to doing things in a traditional way of course there's a lot of politics

Wayne Mello:

Right, and I believe that. I'm still one of those people that believe that every martial artist [02:55](#) instructor [02:57](#) you still need to have somebody to look up to in the martial arts. And I still do and my instructor [03:04](#) still has one of his instructors but he doesn't work out with him anymore but he's always there to help guide him [03:14](#) him and I are pretty close in age and you know, to both still have instructors I think it is something that most people don't have at this point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's definitely pretty, I don't know if lucky is the right word, but fortunate

Wayne Mello:

Yeah, fortunate is the right word because we could get anybody but we just have to be fortunate that we still have the same people that we started with so. [03:42](#) it shows a lot and I've been training with him for 35 or 40 years something like that and still be with him today and I'm pretty happy with that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Then it shows in you know, of course that events I interact with a lot of your students and some of their students and I've definitely seen that passed down the line and that's great.

Wayne Mello:



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I appreciate it and you know like everybody else I mean that's our goal is to make better people and it is definitely proving true to my end so. I have some great people out there of course we find the other [04:23](#) but for the most part I'm really happy with the way our people turned out so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. So why don't we switch gears and why don't you tell us your best martial arts story or one of them.

Wayne Mello:

My best martial arts story. I would have to say some of my best martial arts stories revolve around Jeff wood and the dao karate school. We attended his tournaments for years and years and I just remember one time going up there with my instructor he was doing breaking [05:07](#) cement breaking in the tournament and we've gone out the night before and we were out till the odd hours of the night and when we finally got up, I looked at him and then I said what [05:21](#) why wouldn't we? The two of us getting headaches and hangovers and honestly, I mean, I got a lot of good stories but this is one that I just thought to myself how can anybody think we could do this? You know, we went up there and everybody [05:38](#) and everything else, this was just one of those things where mind over matter and to go out there and still took first place in the breaking and everything. That's a story that [05:51](#) I've told so many people, a lot of people just find it hard to believe but it's just one of those things where you get everything out of your mind and just. [05:57](#) first place in breaking and it was just amazing that we could actually follow through with what we had originally planned and you know for all the stories that I have, I have to go on and on but this is just something [06:12](#) you know, you pretty much do anything you want and it doesn't matter how bad things got sometimes. It was just amazing that how we could actually go out and perform at that level against the people that we [06:26](#) and still do that well so I think that's one of my best stories.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's take that back a second. So, here you are, you were up there before in Augusta? So, we're in Augusta, Maine it's the night before the tournament and you've gone out and had a couple of drinks,

Wayne Mello:

Yeah, and all those people and a couple more [06:53](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:



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So, for listeners that don't recognize some of these names, Jeff wood, this was his tournament. This was a, I remember back in the 80s and the early 90s, this was a huge event. In the Augusta, civic center

Wayne Mello:

It was one of the biggest, that's why I think it's one of my best stories because it was such a big event, there were people that used to bring people in from all over the country, from Bermuda and it was just amazing, there were a lot of people there and I thought after all this, were not going to be able to perform at the level that we were hoping to and for whatever reason, rose to the level. You remember the tournament used to start at 9 o'clock and to be able to perform at that level at that time of the day, for me was just amazing that we could actually do this so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, here you are you're hung over, you're tired and do you remember what you did for a break?

Wayne Mello:

We did [08:05](#) he was a punching, it was always, my instructor always did like say, 6 cement blocks at a time, he was known as cement man. Myself, I did a lot of the, I did some cement, I did some boards and we always did the bed of nails with the cement and stuff. We just zip through it like any other day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, what would you [08:33](#) just being able to clear your head and...

Wayne Mello:

Yeah exactly, I think it was just a matter of putting yourself in the moment, and you know forget everything else that happened the day before, the week before and anything else and you just go out there and perform like you normally would and that's exactly what we did and it was just great. It was great the way we finished and you know we finished in first place but it's just that much better because most of the people that were there, they were out with us the night before, you know, Jeff would always have a huge get together before his event so they knew what we had been to and we knew those guys had been to. So, for us to you know all those people to do out there and do what we did is pretty amazing.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Almost gives a new, definition of the term drunken master.

Wayne Mello:

Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Have everybody show up the next day a little under the weather, and see that they can do with that haze in front of them.

Wayne Mello:

And I do remember you know that some of the judges that are sitting on the corner looking at us and they smile and just shaking their heads like there's no way in the world it is going to happen or no way in the world that's it was going to feel good. But you know [09:48](#) anybody sitting in the stands they wouldn't know anything else, they just [09:53](#) that we were just guys coming up there to do our best and you couldn't tell, you couldn't tell.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, that's great. So, kind of hard to follow that up but were going to try. How has the martial arts made you a better person?

Wayne Mello:

I think, just by being dedicated and realizing exactly what I wanted to do in life, do martial arts and everything else. It just made me focus so much more and everything that I've done whether be working, whether be teaching or helping people out, I just think martial arts is just you know, have put me on firm ground. You know before all this, I used to do crazy things you know like every other teenager and stuff. And then I got older, I just realize that something I need, I need some kind of direction and it just set me on that course. You know you being a martial artist you see how one out every one hundred people gets a black belt. You know, you take that amount of people and you find out how many make second degree or third degree and it becomes amazing. So, you know that the path that I stayed on, I'm happy with the way it turned out [11:17](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about a tough point in your life or a low point maybe, that the martial arts was able to help you move through.



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Wayne Mello:

I think, if there is a low point in my life it had to be in 2005 when my dad died. He was a guy I looked up to all the time. Went through a chemo and everything and unfortunately there's just nothing else they could do and when he passed, you really feel like you lose your best friend and someone that helped me my whole life and now he has gone. Then you know something, my instructor just stepped up to the plate and he filled in as best as he could and just kind of told me exactly [12:10](#) my father would have told me. And then you know something that I think once again just looking at that path that I was on, you know not just stray from it and [12:21](#) now you do something else and hope I just stay on that path you know, something I think about everyday but I also think about the way that my instructor helps me through those hard times. [12:34](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great. That's good. Something we all. You should be so lucky to be able to say. So not just your martial art training in this case but your martial arts extended family helped you through that and I think that's important and that's starting to become a theme in these interviews is, it's not just the training that we get but the people that we associate with, that we have around that make us better martial artist but maybe more importantly better people.

Wayne Mello:

Exactly. I think, I know that's the goal of the martial artist and martial arts instructor is to make the best person possible. It doesn't if you make him a fifth-degree black belt, tenth degree black belt. If [13:24](#) goes up to greenbelt, I have students that stayed with me, I don't know, one or two years and they still stay in touch with me after thirty something years of teaching. [13:33](#) and say you know one of the best things that I ever learned from you is this, the best things that I ever learned from you is that I still remember today. Those things mean a lot. Those things mean more that getting any kind of belt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool, yeah. I could see that, I haven't been as fortunate to teach in a way that you have but I can see, I see it myself just to you know, work with someone and see them take something and make it their own.

Wayne Mello:



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Yup and I [14:06](#) all the time, no matter what you train with me for one day or for, I have students that was with me for thirty years, they always take something with them forever. You know, whether be something I said, something I taught them, they will always have that with them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great. So, we've made reference to your instructor, Hanshi Almeida, a few times in here. Now, other than him, is someone you could say that's been pivotal you know, in your martial arts upbringing?

Wayne Mello:

Well you know I think, his instructor [14:41](#) Jack Leonardo, aikido instructor. We trained with him many times. That's where we got a lot of our self-defense from, he was just a great mentor, he's just an awesome guy. He was elderly and even when I first met him he was getting older but we would sit around tables and when he talked, the place was just dead silence because he made you feel like you belong. Wherever you are going whether martial arts or anything else, he just made you feel like you are on the right path. He never had anything negative to say ever that I can remember. I remember training with him many times and just one of the best martial artist I've ever met and he was a guy that did not care about rank and it sometime I believe in the late 80s or the early 90s somebody actually [15:37](#) something to Japan and say look, this guy has been doing this for 50 years, he's only first degree black belt. He was able to get all kinds of recognition for what he's done and they brought him up to you know the appropriate level to where ever it was I honestly don't remember it was but the people over there could not believe that after all these years he was still first degree. But he was a guy that didn't care about rank. Rank mean nothing to him you know, it really didn't. That's living proof that you don't get too many people say I've been training for forty years I'm a first-degree black belt. He had a great school that still goes on today. You know he died 10 years ago but his school still goes on today.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. That's quite a legacy. So, we talked about some time that you spent in competition, is that something that's been core to your martial arts training?

Wayne Mello:

You know [16:41](#) I mean I actually begin to start competing until I was a brown belt. Before that, my instructor was on the US national team and we were out just to support him we never competed at tournaments. [16:57](#) way back in the 70s and early 80s, there were very few tournaments and he was lucky enough to be on a team with some really quality people so we were almost sparring



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partners at that time for him. And I don't want to get my brown belt you know, he said look I want you to just start competing [17:14](#) just something I just liked, I loved doing it. I mean, you fight in the same school all the time, you fight the same people all the time, when you go to a tournament you're fighting people of different styles, different levels, different builds, and it just became fun you know, win or lose I just had a great time and I've met absolutely the best people in my life through martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Would you say that was your favorite part of the competition was sparring? I've seen you do [17:46](#) in competition.

Wayne Mello:

Not at first. I don't think the first time was my favorite part because when I went for my first three black belt, I failed the first time and I thought it was because of my fighting [18:03](#) oh no, no you fight good but your kata lacks this and lacks that. From that they on, I just devoted so much time to kata whether be reading, whether be watching videos just to get everything I could out of it. And it just became great that was I start to get older then I start going back to fighting and right now I think I'd rather fight than do kata but I know the true meaning of any style of karate, kata and I still love it don't get me wrong I still love kata but at this point I just like going out there and still being able to fight a little.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you still compete?

Wayne Mello:

I haven't in the last year and a half because I tore my rotator cuff. Am I getting ready? Yes, I am. I still [19:02](#) left in me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I look forward to watching that. If you could train with any martial artist living or dead, who would it be and why?

Wayne Mello:



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Tough question. Tough question. I would love to train with Master Funakoshi only because of all these stories I've read about him and the way they used to train when it was frowned upon to train anyway. But I would love to see how he taught way back when he had different ideas than the way it is today. I know things are a lot different today but I would love to [19:42](#) way back when

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I'm sure he's in a short list for a lot of people.

Wayne Mello:

Yeah, he is and that's a, I also trained with a couple of people that have actually trained him like Sensei Kanazawa and Sensei Ozawa. I've actually get to train with those guys and they tell me some stories that pretty much what you read and I think you know, still if I could go back and train with him, it would be pretty awesome to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, here's to hoping that in the next life, we still have martial arts.

Wayne Mello:

I hope so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We can hang out and train with all those people that we weren't lucky enough to be born in the same time as. How about martial arts films? Do you have a favorite flick?

Wayne Mello:

You know, I don't really have a favorite flick but you know what? I tell all my kids, if you've never seen karate kid, go see it because it's so much in that first karate kid that every martial artist, I don't care who you are, and you know some martial artist would probably say, oh that film was this and that film was that. There's so much in that film that anyone can learn from whether it's a kid or an adult. I just think that there's a lot of good stuff in that film and even now I will still watch it if it comes on TV or something, also flip it on, the movie is in the 1980s I believe. But it still, I still enjoy I mean there's a lot of good movies, a lot of good actors out there right now, but it's still movie that I, I know the acting wasn't all that great but it was just a lot of good stuff in there



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, it's a great movie and it's a great movie despite the fact that it's not really a great movie.

Wayne Mello:

Right exactly. And I know a lot of people feel that way, but I think a lot of people will also look at it and say you know he's actually teaching kids discipline, teaching him about bullying, everything that we teach today is in that movie, you know in some form.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you ever see the chance to see the new one with Jackie Chan?

Wayne Mello:

I did and I thought it was great. I thought it was great, again you know Jackie Chan brings a whole different light to the karate kid movie but I just, I liked it. I really did. It showed a little bit of everything in that movie especially having the references back to the early ones so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I enjoyed it too I was a little surprised how much I liked it and that it seems to do a pretty good job of capturing the spirit of the first one.

Wayne Mello:

Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about a favorite martial arts actor? Anybody that you like watching on the screen?

Wayne Mello:

You know something, there's a lot of good ones but I have to say not really a favorite actor. I mean, I love watching Jason Statham in there, I know his martial arts are limited but I enjoy watching him. I thought he is a pretty talented guy and he's probably one of my favorites right now.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I watched the new fast and furious movie over the weekend and he has some fight scenes in there and it was good. Not my favorite in the series but

Wayne Mello:

I'm not even sure if he's trained in martial arts but so many things that he does really impressed me and actually right now he's one of the best actors out there you know, action.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Based on what I saw this weekend I would be shocked if he doesn't have some martial arts training.

Wayne Mello:

Yeah, I think of the same thing but you know something, he's again, he's a quiet guy I just happen to see an interview the other day and he was very quiet about that kind of stuff so, I'm sure you can find it out online or something but, I will be surprised too if he didn't have some kind of martial arts back then.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'll see what I can find out of course, you know some of the things that you're mentioning, links to the movies and everything will be in the show notes that we post online and let's see what I can find out about Jason Statham's background.

Wayne Mello:

Sounds good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about books? Any martial arts books that you

Wayne Mello:

My favorite martial arts book is the [karate-do](#) kyohan, my favorite book. It's a what we refer to as the bible of Shotokan karate and always been my favorite book I have one sitting right here as a matter of fact.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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And tell us a little bit about what in there.

Wayne Mello:

You know it has everything from proper way to balance a class, to forms, to basics, proper foot movement, it's got everything in there and I tell all my students, if you're going to be serious this is the book that you want to get right here and most martial artists, they know the book. This book is written years ago, one of my favorite books

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah it is a great book and I'm playing dumb because it's an interview.

Wayne Mello:

So, you know it?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have it on my book shelf absolutely.

Wayne Mello:

It's actually my favorite, I mean I have a whole bunch of them [25:11](#) I have books by Sensei Kanazawa who explains in depth a lot of things but nothing, any book that I have is in depth as [25:23](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

Any martial arts related goals you might have coming up for the future?

Wayne Mello:

You probably know that right now, I just recently sold my school to one of my student and so were making some moves. So, my goal right now is to be able to expand the AIKA family, so my goal right now is to be able to go to all the schools we have right now and continue teaching without having the responsibilities of owning the school, worrying about rent and dues and all that other stuff. It's going to be one of my younger guys that would take care of all that stuff. And so, it's going to give me more time to go out and just teach on a more personal level. I'm hoping to do that in other schools, not just my own school but to schools that people that I know, I'll just be



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able to go there. You know, I teach a lot in Maine and I just want to be able to go to other school and just passed them what I know. So

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, that's great. So, you sound really happy with this

Wayne Mello:

You know, I am. And this was supposed to happen a few years ago unfortunately something happened where one of my students wasn't able to do what he was going to do so, I got put on hold and now you guys know PJ26:48 he's a guy that would be taking over my school and two of my other students will be taking over the 26:55 school. So, it's going to free up all my, you know, a lot of my time right now so I'll just be able to devote most of my time just teaching at the other schools as well as 27:08 so. And you know we have seven schools right now, and you know hopefully in the next couple of years we'll be able to expand on that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great. From what I've heard, many instructors say it and honestly I've heard you say this in the past that, you know, the dream is really all about the teaching. It's not the logistics, it's not as you said keeping up on the business side it's just to be able to share.

Wayne Mello:

Right, exactly. And you have to, you have to be able to pass on what you've learned because you don't want to take it with you. You don't want to be the only person that knows this move and knows that move and they would pass it to on to somebody that's going to be around longer than you. Let's face it none of us will be around forever. So, by making this move, you know, giving the school to somebody else, and you know 27:57 been with now for 22-23 years now so. 28:03 now it's time for the younger guys to step up and take over the reins.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great, great. Yeah, cool. Congratulations!

Wayne Mello:

Yeah thanks. I appreciate it. And all that happens in September 1st so I heard last night that there's a whole bunch of different stories at the last tournament about what's going on, they heard you



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were sick, they heard you were moving, they heard you sold the house, no. None of that is true. What's happening is that we're just turning it over to the younger guys and let them start doing that, so I'm still teaching, I have no plans to stop teaching. That's something that I would do forever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good. I hope so, as someone who has trained with you it would be a shame if you ever stop teaching

Wayne Mello:

I have no plans of stopping teaching

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good. So, our final real question, a little bit more open-ended. Any parting advice for the people listening?

Wayne Mello:

Parting advice. I would say you know, just be honest in your training. That's my biggest thing, be honest in your training. I tell my students every night, if you practice weak, you will definitely be a weak kata person, a fighter, whatever it is. So, however you train, you're there for a reason, get the most out of it. Absolutely the most out of it. Don't go in there you know on a bad day thinking that I'm just going to go easy today, no you got to practice a hundred percent all the time. I think you know, by doing that, it opens your eyes to do everything else that you do, whether it's in a job, or whether it is in martial arts. [29:48](#) honest with yourself and give it a hundred percent all the time and help those people that are around you. There's a lot of people out there that started out just like you and me did and you got to get that person on a right path and hopefully they turn out like you and me, you've been doing this for a long time also and obviously something that you're going to stick with for a long time too. And you know, just like you're doing right now with me, I'm doing with somebody else. And we just keep passing this along and hopefully everything just continues and never gets old.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, it definitely doesn't get old and I think that's because there are enough people like you that have this attitude and that drive to give a hundred percent to everything all the time and I thank you for that. I'm sure



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Wayne Mello:

You are a great student and I'd love to have you in class. I'm glad we stayed friends throughout the years so and I know your instructor and everything, it should be a great job [30:56](#) well they did a great job with you so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, thank you.

Wayne Mello:

I hope you'll get successful in all this also. Sounds like you're going to be

Jeremy Lesniak:

Trying, I'm trying. So just a couple more things, we'll flip it up a little bit, now this is my chance to try and help you. Of course, you run a tournament every year outside of wister, the wister classic and that's coming up. Tell us a little bit about that.

Wayne Mello:

So, the wister classic is coming up May 2nd, it's in [31:31](#) it's about not even ten minutes out of wister. It's an event, event that we normally have 400 competitors that will compete in weapons, forms and fighting. It's a great day, I mean people that I've known forever, they always show up. People like mike [31:49](#) Jeff wood, tony [31:49](#) people that I don't see all the time, they always come to my event which is great. And I love seeing those guys and their guys that has so much to pass on to everybody, they're out there watching all the new people that come up and they're impressed, I know that someone might not say it but I know they're impressed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a great event, I've been competed at it, I've exhibited at it, and looking forward to coming back again this year.

Wayne Mello:

I appreciate it, thanks.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Thank you. So, if anyone wants to get a hold of you, what's the best way they could

Wayne Mello:

They can reach me through the website at mellosmartialartscenter.com you can reach us on Facebook under the same Mello's martial arts and you want a phone number?

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, I think that's okay unless you really want to publicly give out your number. Alright, I'll make sure that those links are in the show notes as well.

Wayne Mello:

It's great, I appreciate it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. Well, I thank you for being here on whistlekick martial arts radio. I had a good time.

Wayne Mello:

Thank you, Jeremy. I wish you luck to everything you do over here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thanks for listening to this episode of whistlekick martial arts radio. Thank you for Shihan Mello for appearing on the show. Please be sure to subscribe to the show so you never miss one of our weekly episodes. If you like the show, we'd appreciate a 5-star review on iTunes, stitcher or where ever you get your podcasts. You can check out the show notes at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and while you're over there, if you want to be a guest on the show or know someone that would be a great addition, please fill out the guest form. And of course, if like to know more about what we offer at whistlekick sparring gear and apparel, please check us out on the web at whistlekick.com. Train hard and have a great day.