



Episode 223 – Getting Teens Into Martial Arts | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey, how's it going everybody! Welcome to episode 223 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio. My name is Jeremy, I'm your host but, guess what? I'm not actually the host of this episode. This episode is a little fun, a little different, it is a rebroadcast of a martial thoughts episode that came out a few weeks ago. See, if you listen to the show you know that there are other martial arts podcast and not only am I a fan of a number of them, I have become friends with some of the host. So, on this episode, I jumped over to martial thoughts with sensei Jared Wilson and we hung out, we talked about a subject that he actually came to me about as a result of episode 200. We had a chat during episode 200 about keeping teens into martial arts and how I feel that's kind of a winch pin that if you can solve that as a martial arts school owner that a lot of good things come from that and he wanted to discuss that so, we got together, had a chat about it on his show and it went really well. And of course, I asked his permission he said by all means, share it out on your podcast. So, that's what we're doing here today, we are sharing episode I believe it was 69 of martial thoughts as episode 223 of martial arts radio because that's what happens when podcast hosts get together, they chat and they share stuff. Now if you haven't checked out other episodes of martial thoughts, you should. It's a great show, they do things differently over there, not better, not worse just different and just as there are different martial arts styles, there are different martial arts podcast and they all have value. Maybe, you'll find that you prefer martial thoughts to martial arts radio and you know what? That's fine by me, as long as you're training, as long as you're getting some entertainment and feeling solid in the martial arts community, that a



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number of us are building here on the internet, it doesn't matter to me. I'll stop talking now, I'll turn it over to sensei Wilson and here we go.

### **Jared Wilson:**

And welcome back to martial thoughts podcast, with episode 69. Make podcast great again. It's a great slogan, maybe we should make that on a hat, maybe a red one. I'm your host as always, Jared Wilson. Before we get to our actual interview here, one thing I'm going to ask for, and I don't ask very much just looking for a little bit of help with iTunes review. I know there's a bunch of people listening, if you look at the download numbers, it seems to average somewhere about five to seven hundred somewhere in that range. You know, bigger episodes with bigger stars, bigger named people I guess. People have their own martial arts following tend to have bigger downloads on my interview website here but, what I'm asking for is just put up a review. The more reviews there are, the more iTunes kind of pushes us to the front of the line, that type of thing. Not that I'm trying to get you know, martial thoughts should be the number one podcast in martial arts anything like that but the more we have it out, the more it gets into other people's ears and that could be another thing. If you have martial arts friends, because I'm kind of assuming you do when you're listening to this. I mean, I know there's one or two people have emailed me and said, I'm not a martial artist but, they listen to the show. So, first thing is, make sure people know that there are martial arts podcast. If you're listening to this and you're enjoying it, which I'm assuming you are, cause its episode 69 and you've gotten this far, share it with someone. There's a little button on the iTunes website when you go on write your review, there's a little button that says, share. And you can type in people's names, you can share it on Facebook, that type of thing. Just let people know that there are martial arts podcast. We've talked to a number of people that have their own martial arts podcast. Today were talking to Jeremy Lesniak who does the martial arts radio, we've talked to Paul Wilson from karate cafe. We talked to sensei Ando from fight for a happy life, we've talked to Jeff Westphal from the martial brain way back in episode 5 we talked to Dave jones from hiya, we talked to Craig Keesling in there somewhere. We talked to Lawrence cane and Chris wilder who have martial thought podcast. We even have Ian Abernathy on here which was a steal from getting him across the pond, so to speak. So, there's a lot of martial arts podcast. Let other martial artists know that they exist. In that way, we can make the genre bigger, because we all know except for black belt, there aren't really martial arts magazines, there isn't a good way for martial artists to communicate especially cross genre martial artist. And if you haven't figured out by now, genre is not as big a deal to me. We've talked to martial artists from just well I should say just about everyone, but from a huge cross spectrum, I'll put it that way. Even to the point of you know from one side we've got tai chi chuan people, we've got northern shaolin kung fu, we've had MMA people on here, we've got a couple of aikido people just because that's my specialty. We've had authors who write about silat, we've had authors who write about taekwondo, we've had all sorts of people who talked about all sorts of different things. So, somewhere in there, your martial arts friends are going to find something they like. So, go ahead and share that with them write a review on there, listen to other martial arts podcast because it's one big



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martial arts podcast family and that's it. That's my pitch for trying to make the world a better place through martial arts. What we've got for today isn't really an interview. I've got Jeremy Lesniak back on with us, and were going to talk about teen agers in martial arts or specifically the lack of teen agers in martial arts. They seem to disappear, they drop out of the system. And there seems to be age gulfs, I don't remember exactly what we said on the show but, I'm going to say somewhere about age 13 to about age 24-25. That age group is missing from most martial arts schools. If you're a martial artist, martial arts school owner and you have that group, let us know how to do that. Is there something specific that you do? Is it just you have a bunch of teens and they attract their teen friends, college friends or whatever happens to be? Let us know. So, Jeremy and I are going to talk about that and then at the very end here, stick around for this week in martial arts.

### **Jared Wilson:**

Well we're here with Jeremy Lesniak again, who's been a frequent name on our podcast. What we've got for today is a little bit different. This kind of going back to our old discussion shows on whistlekick martial arts radio's 200th episode, Jeremy made a quick reference to how there's a lack of teen agers in martial arts, and that idea kind of stuck in my 07:53 and if you haven't listened to that 200th episode, it's a nice marathon. It will take you a couple of days of driving back and forth to work so go for that if nothing else. Kind of rambling, some alcohol involved but that's okay. We can take that. So, what we are going to talk about today is a little bit about why teen agers disappear from martial arts. Because that seems to me, that seems to be for all the stuff we talk about the side benefits of martial arts, that's where they could really benefit from it is in those teen-age years. Because every adult that I know, things about their teen age years, they kind of grimace and they smile and laugh and go that's pretty dumb on me there. So, were going to talk a little bit about teen agers in the martial arts. So, how are you doing today Jeremy?

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm doing great. How are you? Thank you. Thanks for having me back sharing my voice with your listeners and hopefully, I think we talked about this, that you know, we'll give it a few weeks in your feed and we'll share this out with the martial arts radio group and you know, just kind of share what I'm hoping. Its going to be a good mouthful conversation with everybody. If nothing else, we get to chat again.

### **Jared Wilson:**

Yeah. Well in all fairness to the listener, this is a take 2. My equipment failed somehow and I got the first five minutes of our conversation, my elbow must have hit and it didn't record the rest of it so, were going to do this again.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm not a hundred percent convinced that you just thought I did poorly. Didn't have the heart to tell me. This guy is supposed to be a pro, right? You just did a 200th episode and he's awful, he just talks all the time, couldn't get word in, I'm just going to delete this file and not tell him. That's what I think happened.

**Jared Wilson:**

Which explains why I brought him back right?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Exactly. Because you are a glutton for punishment. You thought maybe another role of the dice would work out better. No uh. So, we came up on the episode 200 just the whole notion that we have this kind of inverted bell curve with martial arts attendants. You got the kids, and as they get older, they seem to drop off somewhere 10-11-12 and some of them will start to comeback in their later teen years but usually it's not until mid-twenties even later 20s that we see martial arts take a strong hold on those age groups. I've been travelling around a lot because of work and just visiting schools and seeing that it's not just the schools that I attend or the schools that I grew up in, but pretty much all of them. It's a school that has a strong teen program, tends to have a stronger youth program and a stronger adult program.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah. I think it's a pretty universal thing. It's not like you know, whatever, aikido schools where you know it disappears. I think it's a universal that all the martial arts.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And so, the question becomes why. Why is that the case? You know, we got some ideas, we talked about some ideas on the 200th episodes and we talked about some ideas when you and I talked before. But I think it's important to figure it out because a lot of people would look at this and just say, you know, teenagers are busy, teenagers are bored, teenagers are whatever else, but to me, solving the teens in martial arts problem, is actually a solution towards making martial arts, overall, bigger. Because it gives people a more, linear path through. You know, people that do let's say dance as a kid, or soccer as a kid. They've got a much further path up. Right, like they don't have to stop. But this kind of self-imposed detour that I would say 90-05 percent teen agers take, would you agree with that number?

**Jared Wilson:**



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Yeah. That's probably about right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's pretty huge. Its dramatic.

**Jared Wilson:**

One in ten stays. So that's probably about right, yeah, I would assume something like that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, if we look at that trend, if we can correct it then, overall, we fix a few things I think. I think, obviously there's more people in the martial arts and that's good I mean I know you think that, I think that, I'm going to guess pretty much anyone listening would think that. But what starts to happen when the majority of adult martial artists didn't take break or have been training since youth? All of a sudden, we have that many more excellent practitioners and passionate people and secondarily and this is the piece that I as a business person I'm most interested in, that's a demographic where people set their buying habits. Where they start to look at having disposable income, and spending it on things and if we get them spending that on martial arts related stuff, we grow the martial arts economy.

**Jared Wilson:**

Well, let me ask you one question just because I don't have any experience with any of the tournament scene. Is there that same gulf at tournaments too?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Ah. By numbers, in the tournaments that I attend. You know, there are different circuits and people do tournaments a little bit differently but, rather than the inverted bell curve, it's just a downward slope.

**Jared Wilson:**

Okay

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Most of your tournament competitor are young. You know, I would say the initial peak is probably 8-9 years old and it starts to slide there and there maybe a little bit of a bump between you know, 15-16-17





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and then once you hit adult age, but I think some of that is because of just the way age groups are bracketed. It tends to be 16 and 17 year olds in one group and then 18 to 34 or 18-39. So just you're pulling from a larger age pool so I think it looks bigger but I bet if you were to restrict it to 2-3 year groups as they do with the kids you would see it be even smaller.

**Jared Wilson:**

Well some of that I think is the adults probably just don't value the, I don't want to say value the competition, they don't, that's not their goal anymore. So, that could be a part of why the adults aren't in it too.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think the major problem and maybe this is another conversation that we have at some point, just kind of sparked my almost a rantier side of Jeremy for those of you that may have heard that before, just I think a lot of adults, especially adults that actually have reached black belt are afraid of putting themselves out there in a way where they will be evaluated and possibly criticized.

**Jared Wilson:**

Sure

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a whole separate subject. We're not going into that ball 14:51 for sure.

**Jared Wilson:**

Now that's a good discussion for another time though. Okay. Let's look at kind of the why first and this isn't intended to be an interview, this is more intended to be a discussion but one of the problems I think at least in America, and I can't speak for the rest of the world, is we tend to view martial arts as something kids do. Meaning that we view it as an after-school activity like you said soccer or dance, or something like that and so that when teens are starting to get out of that kid phase and decide, what was it that I really want to do? What is it that I really like? That mindset comes to play in that they think it's a kids' activity. I mean I'm sure you do the same thing you know, it comes up somehow that you're in martial arts and they go oh I used to do karate, and you know like, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah, what's up with that 'used to' right? And I think a lot of that is that we tout certain benefits of martial arts but not martial arts as a lifestyle. We have, I'm 38 so I can't say what it was like in the 50s, 60s, and 70s but I know that since we've been involved in martial arts and I joined when I was very, very young, martial arts has always been a thing that some people did and dedicated their lives too, but very rarely was it an all-encompassing pursuit for people, at least as an option and that's a whole, you know we can go pretty deep on that because it's that gap that is my biggest interest as it comes to whistlekick and trying to provide people with resources and products and things that allow them to manifest martial arts into their entire life.

**Jared Wilson:**

I think that's actually one of the reasons people come back to it later too is they, once you're out of college you start having to try to actually identify who and what you are, you start looking for something like that and martial arts happens to fit that bill really well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. And I think people do that but without a lot of conscious effort. I don't think people are looking around saying you know...

**Jared Wilson:**

No, it's not gee what do you want to base my life on?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, I think it's almost a process of elimination. Martial arts is always there, it's always been there, will always be there and if you trained hopefully you have positive memories being a kid saying you know I really did enjoy that and once you come out of college if you choose to go to college and especially once you've kind of move through your twenties and your life is work and you know, maybe you go to the gym or you hike, you have a couple of hobbies, it's hard to meet people in just a platonic-friendly, you know build-my-social-circles sense. And martial arts is one of those few places where it's, not necessarily easy, but easy in a socially acceptable way. You know I can go to pretty much any town or city in this country and go to martial arts school and instantly have a bunch of people that might become my friends.

**Jared Wilson:**

Alright the very least have the same interest as you.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. You know, we spend a few hours a week doing something together and similar and building some bonds and you know I can go home after that not feel like my entire life is either alone or at work you know we got something that I'm part of a group.

**Jared Wilson:**

Once again, getting back to our subject would make us think that that's exactly a teenager would want.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right.

**Jared Wilson:**

I was going to say and that kind of builds up to the idea of you know we said you know, martial arts as a kid's activity but I think when teenagers are starting to figure out their own independence, suddenly they want to go and shop around a little bit of activities they want to do things that are more group-oriented and for lack of a better term, martial arts is pretty solo oriented. I mean, you know, it's not a team sports so to speak.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. Now I would say it's not so much that they're looking to be part of the team but I think they're looking for an acceptance. I think and you know, I work with kids and I know you work with kids actually much more than I do, but when kids start going through those adolescent years, they're going to do anything they can to feel accepted by the people they identify as not only their peers but those they want to be their peers. And of course, that leads to all kinds of mistakes and people doing the wrong thing. I mean, we all you know most of us were teenagers or maybe we have some teenagers listening, I don't know how many people we have listening pre-teen but everyone is going to be a teenager or was a teenager and most of us remember that struggle of trying to fit in. I mean, that's really where it coalesces the most, wouldn't you that say

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, I mean, let's face it, teenage years are rough in general. I mean you know, you're physically changing, you're mentally changing, you start to get some independence but everyone still trying to fit in so, I mean it's a constant struggle being a teenager.





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Without a doubt. So, there we are you know were teenagers and were trying to do things that fit in, and we maybe have some parents which by the time we were teenager you don't want to do anything like your parents or anybody else's parents. We have a complete void because it just self-perpetuating of few teenagers involved in martial arts and if your martial arts school was like mine growing up, the people, the teenagers that were doing martial arts were some of the bigger nerds of the school and I'm raising my hand right now even though this is an audio show. And then who's left? You got little kids so, you got someone who by definition is trying to separate themselves from what little kids do, they have no peers to lean on to say this is something people my age do and further, where are the larger than life role models? With professional sports we have them, with entertainment we have them. All the things that tend to attract teenagers have those larger than life role models. And the people that we hold up as role models are older. People that were role models when you and I were teenagers somebody like you know, Bill Wallace or you know, Bruce Lee has passed on but he's still kind of the icon of martial arts.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, I have jokingly called him St. Bruce the patron saint of martial artist.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I don't even know that, that deserves half of a joke because it's true because he is still the most influential martial artist on the planet despite the fact he's been gone 40 plus years. Yeah.

**Jared Wilson:**

I think besides you know, some of the stuffs you are mentioning I think some of it almost a rebellion because they were in it as teenagers, sorry as children their parents put them in so, maybe because its mom and that and family are doing it, suddenly that can't be cool anymore?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sure there is some of that, but when I look at the kids that are playing basketball, or soccer or baseball or you know I live in Vermont, the hockey is really big here. Out of those kids that were playing hockey since they were the same age as little kids might start martial arts. And sure, there is going to be some rebellion but it's not nearly as the same numbers.

**Jared Wilson:**



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Yeah. I can see that with the other sports and I think you might be right in that. For some we have socially accepted the sports basketball, football, hockey whatever happens to be as a bigger activity that you can do than martial arts. Maybe it's right, maybe because there's just not as much exposure to it. There's not the celebrity endorsement of it, I mean we both know nobody gets rich in martial arts so, it's hard to hold up the lifestyle of martial arts of the rich and famous you know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think it's a validation issue. It goes to money, it goes to TV time, movies. You know, when we look at movies yeah, we see some great people doing some great things and some of them are paid very well for doing that but we see very little martial arts as non-fantasy. We see very little martial arts competition. We see very little martial arts instruction creep in you know. People on sitcoms play basketball, or they play soccer or they play on a softball league. If someone was a martial arts student within the context of a bitter role on a TV show, be it comedy or drama, they're making light of it. They don't feature the positive stuff on it and when was the last time we got to see martial arts on TV, we barely see the Olympic stuff. The US open is on espn2.

**Jared Wilson:**

You know, it's funny and I was just trying to watch that this Friday and it was supposed to be on at 6 or 7 like primetime and I'm like holy crap, so of course I tried to watch it and it was pre-empted and shown at 2am.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. And then, as you're saying, nobody gets rich in martial arts. So if you're a kid and you're starting to look at what seems to drive the world, not that any 11-12 year old is going to be able to articulate this, but you're looking around and seeing okay, LeBron James is famous and he makes a lot of money for playing basketball and he's great at what he does and people wear his jersey, and they put posters of him in their room and he's on TV and he's on TV not just playing and people want to hear what he has to say and he's sponsored by soft drinks and things. There's a lot of validation there and you look at other sports, you look at entertainment, that's all there. That is not there for martial arts. And until it is, teenagers wouldn't want to do it.

**Jared Wilson:**

Which maybe where the UFC actually succeeds. They have all those things I mean UFC champions essentially are household names.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, and we've seen some good stuffs there. The challenge is we've seen how fleeting those careers can be.

**Jared Wilson:**

No, I'd be curious to see and I have no idea, statistics to back this up but I wonder if them MMA gyms because I don't know what else do you want to call them, don't have that slump because they don't start as young maybe, their bell curve you know starts much steeper in teen age years. Maybe they actually solved that problem that way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There are youths and there are teens that are involved in MMA gyms and I don't have the hard numbers, but I know that there is a strong parental resistance because even if it's not full contact, even if they're not going to be competing and jumping in a cage, just saying MMA is going to make a lot parents really nervous.

**Jared Wilson:**

Which is funny because, you're talking about hockey and football I mean, those are pretty freaking dangerous sports too.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

They are and both of those sports, you know, the children that get involved in them... You know yeah, there's certainly some parental resistance and not every kid that wants to play football is going to be able to play football because their parent doesn't want them too you know, there's more and more science coming out around concussions and that's going to continue to hold that back.

**Jared Wilson:**

But, maybe the UFC actually is doing a good job of putting forth names and heroes so to speak. And I hate to say it this way but the rest of the martial arts world might just be too fractured to be able to do that to where we all agree, these guys rock, these are the awesome guys.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I don't know... They're definitely doing a better job. You know, if we consider MMA a flavor martial arts then we could also consider Olympic taekwondo a flavor, you could consider your kind of WKF your tradition Japanese karate competitions as another flavor. They all have their celebrities, the NASCA circuit in the united states has you know, has celebrities within it but, the money isn't there. People follow the money. The best people in the world end up doing things at a high level when there are high dollars.

**Jared Wilson:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you're a tremendously talented athlete and you could do martial arts, you could play basketball or you could do any number of things, and your peak as a martial arts competitor, with sponsorships and everything, might be that you make a hundred grand in a year as the best in the world. Eh, you're probably going down that route when the lowest paid player in the NFL is making, I want to say is like 200 something for being in the practice squad.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah. I think if you're on the team, its 300 and the last time I checked was like 340,000 which is about the best in the world on martial arts make.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. Of course, there are some school owners and everything that make more money and they make great money and they deserve to make that because they're wonderful business people but nobody that's 12 years old looks around and says, I want to be like that guy, running this business, working 70 hours a week. No, they want to be like these larger than life characters, they want to have personalities, they respond to that charisma and within martial arts we tend to not... We don't tend to value that strong individual passion, because were. Most of us are steeped in tradition and outside of the school maybe that's a good thing. Anybody that has been in a class with me I mean, if it's at all acceptable I mean, I'm cracking jokes specially if I'm teaching I'm cracking jokes. People are laughing while I'm training. My personality doesn't shut off when I bow into the dojo floor.

**Jared Wilson:**



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You know you're talking about that. In a lot of dojos, you're talking about the tradition, money is almost seen as a bad thing. You know it's a 30:29 thing you know, there's even a debate of should real instructors charge their student type of thing. Okay, were in America were going to charge for everything, you know that aside.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know what, then maybe there's another topic we can have maybe we make this regular thing because I called flat out bs on that. That is sour grapes right there.

### **Jared Wilson:**

That could be.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Either does not have these skills or the time or the desire, to run the school at a profitable way, and if desire that's fine but if it's skill you know, it's well you know, real martial arts instructors don't charge. Well you know what, fine. I know some pretty amazing martial arts instructors that's some have big schools, some have small schools, but the ones that set out to try to do it for little to no money, rarely do they last and how many lives are you affecting at that point.

### **Jared Wilson:**

You know that might actually be another reason why, I'm getting back to the subject, why teenagers don't do it is they start to have more financial burden, it's a bad way to say it, but more financial responsibility. They start having to pay more on their own schooling stuffs, they want to buy their own clothes that type of thing. When you get to college, yeah ok, college is notoriously a poor house so, suddenly something is superfluous as a martial arts class may not be the thing that makes the cut. So, I wonder if we could have a college discounts for martial arts schools.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Some have offers student discounts, I've seen that. And when I reflect back my time in college and I was part of a couple different martial arts clubs during those years, most of the people had already been training. We did have some that were like, hey I want to join in, I want to learn. But most people that were in those clubs had already been training because college is an expensive time and even if it's a students' club you know, you probably you still want to buy a uniform at some point but you're busy. I think that's it, people in college are looking for new things to do, sure. But for the most part, people are





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wrapped up with sleep, school, or maybe they work a steady job you know, there isn't a ton of free time in there. And for very few people that have never done martial arts when martial arts popped up as being hey, this is a thing that just resonates with me so strongly I have to try it now.

**Jared Wilson:**

And even if you're not in college in your 20s, you're trying to get whatever it is you're doing/going again, then time and money becomes a very high price commodity.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. So, when we look at teenagers, when we look at what motivates them, we can put, I think its three things its money, because they see the power of money for the first time really. It's sex, because they're starting to see how they relate to the rest of the world in you know, in terms of romantic relationships and how those are presented and you see people in entertainment being shown in sexualized situations and its acceptance from their peers. Whether that's you know, their guys and their guy friends, and girls and their girl friends you know something wider like the academic class at their school. And in all of those cases, were talking about people looking up to role models and were the martial arts role models.

**Jared Wilson:**

Well. You know, okay. From a small place like a school place, right? The sensei is supposed to be that person. Now, at the same time, they don't have all those qualities because that's not who is sensei is going to be. There not, no offense, that sexy of a people most of the time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No. And that's actually something that's popped up on our show a couple of times the idea that, this is not me making a judgement this is me repeating, maybe I'm hiding behind repeating what some other guest on the show have said about you know, we talk about the physical benefits of martial arts and then, some of our highest ranked most credible martial artists do not seem to have the physical prowess to implement their skill.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, there's a... You know, as the belts get darker the belly gets bigger, you know that type of thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah. So, if we look at you know, and if you're a school owner and if you're an instructor and this doesn't, if we were not describing you then great and if it does describe you, if you feel like we're poking at you, it's not personal. We're not naming names and I'm not thinking about anyone in particular but if you're 12-year-old and you're seeing movie stars, musicians, and professional athletes and those are what media and your peers are telling you your role models, the overweight 57-year-old martial arts instructor who makes it somewhat obvious that he is not successful financially, that person is not going to be the one than the 12-year-old looks too and says I want to be like this person when I grow up.

**Jared Wilson:**

No, that's not the coolest person in the world.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right, does that happen sometimes? Yeah. You know I remember looking up to my martial arts instructors even through my teen years. But it wasn't because I looked at them and said I want to look like them or I want to act like them or I want to have the financial success of them, I looked up to them because of the impact that they had on my life and the lives of others.

**Jared Wilson:**

And most of the time, they're good charactered people too.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes. But that's not enough. And we can argue whether or not it should be this way, but I think that's an irrelevant because it is. And there's a lot of money and a lot of effort from some very smart people spent on making sure that it stays this way. Because this is the heart of marketing.

**Jared Wilson:**

So, we talked a little bit about this but how would we fix this? If you're an individual school owner, or if you're looking at kind of like you are when you know martial arts as a whole, a generality, as a genre so to speak, what do we do? How do we start putting up people that can be idolized by martial artists? Because, I hate to say it this way but, martial arts are really, really fractitious. You know, someone that's a taekwondo hero means nothing to most aikidoka you know, that type of thing and that's a part of the problem I think.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I think so. I think than it's really easy to dismiss what happens in other martial arts because unfortunately. You know, I was at a weekend long seminar in upstate New York with some great friends and wonderful people, and this event is one of the best with respect to respecting other martial arts and I still ended up with a seminar with a guy who was picking on other martial arts, certain martial arts competitions because of their rules this and that, to the point where I almost walked out. You know it really irritated me.

**Jared Wilson:**

He was one of the speakers or?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He was teaching a seminar.

**Jared Wilson:**

Wow, okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I ended up in his seminar and I'm just looking at him, and I'm thinking look around. You have one of the lowest attendances of any of the seminars this session. And I think there's something to be said there, when you put out negativity, you get it back. But to answer, I mean you know, where kind of working through a lot of this together how do we fix it. I think one of the things that needs to happen is that, teenagers need to be given their own space in class. You know, teenagers shouldn't be training with young kids and teenagers shouldn't only be training with adults.

**Jared Wilson:**

I think it was on your 200th episode, you had the idea I really like that was cool, and it was for in the teenage class to have them basically like stage a fight scene, I think that was at one episode you're talking about that. That's an awesome idea.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, teenagers learn differently. They want big, they want dramatic, they want excitement. There ought a time when they still haven't quite shed the goal of immediacy that young kids want. You know, right? Anybody that's had a kid or been around kids knows kids want what they want, right now. You



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know, I want this now, I'm hungry now, I need to go to the bathroom now. And teenagers still haven't quite developed the same patience that adults are going to have and let's be honest not every adult ever develops patience. Well, what they have started to grasp is an adult view of how the world works. I was teaching a seminar just about two months ago, a weekend camp and I ended up with this low ranked young kids like 5-6-7 white and yellow belts and it was just chaos. And certain kids in the groups and the dynamics, just chaos. But what I was able to do to reign them in is I convinced them I was a ninja. I can't do that with teenagers, I can't lie to them to get their attention. I have to demonstrate something that garners their respect. And then I need to give them a path towards something, that they will respect the effort that went in to it so, helping them construct their own choreographed fight sequence and then videoing it and putting out on social media if they so choose to show people, hey not only did I do a thing but it's kind of cool and you could check it out too.

### **Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, I think that's part of the problem is... You know we've been talking about you know, they want to be accepted as a peer group, they want to be accepted as non-peer groups so, in order to have teens in the martial arts school, you kind of have to have teens in a martial arts school so, you have to have them there to have a peer group of them.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes. Now one of the other things that I would... If I was a martial arts school or one of the classes that I would host, I would have once a week probably on a weekend or depending on the time of the day maybe a little bit later, like a 7:00pm class where teenagers can come in and its done not from a perspective of this is martial arts you're coming in the world of martial, were going to give you martial arts to help make you better at the sports that you play.

### **Jared Wilson:**

Hmm, okay.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not every instructors are going to have the skill set and the desire to construct a program like that, but if we're not going to get them in the door because they're looking for their place in life and martial arts is something they think they want to do, how many athletes out there, how many young athletes are looking for an advantage. We have kids doing steroids in high school know, you can't tell me than there isn't a desire to look for a leg up but what if the things that we already know that society believes are good about martial arts, focus, discipline, flexibility, callisthenic strength. What if there's a martial arts



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program that helps make student athletes better at their other things? Are the majority of them going to stick around? No, but it's going to change the perception and some of them will. Some of them will move from that class during their off season.

**Jared Wilson:**

You know what, I can't remember than guy's name off the top of my head but there's an NFL coach who for a lack of a better term, teaches kind of like basic wing chung skills to defensive line men in the NFL.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I've seen than article. I don't remember which team or the gentleman's name.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, he skipped around a little bit from team to team but it has to do with you know as the offensive line men's hand are coming towards you, know slipping by them and getting by it which is, makes perfect sense from kind of a wing chun point of view or an aikido point of view. You know, if you want to make it a whole-body movement type of thing so, I can see where that could work really easily.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think we can agree and I'm going to guess anyone listening can agree, you can't show me any generally accepted martial art that won't have a positive impact for any external sport. If someone dedicates a little bit of time. I think we all know that. But if the only way were going to let people gain those benefits is to come in and deal with thousands of hours of basics and meditation, and other things that teenagers are never going to want to do, were never going to have teenagers as a big chunk of our student base. And if you don't want to make those changes, that's fine, you don't have to but, when your competitor across town does and all of a sudden teenagers are going there, who do kids look up to, young kids, they look up to teenagers because their more approachable, they see lees of a gap between who they are at age 7 and who they are at age 12-13-15 you know. And especially to those multi sibling families, the parents aren't going to want to bring the kids to 2-3 different martial arts schools. It's a way to get a leg up.

**Jared Wilson:**

I think that could be a great idea. The sports adjacent martial arts class. I don't know how you would call it but...





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And we do specialize classes I mean how often have you seen a six weeks self-defense course...

**Jared Wilson:**

Or even the kick boxing aerobics class, you know that type of thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. It's still primarily martial arts but were cutting out pieces to appeal to the demographic. It's marketing and we can do than for teenagers, there's a difference between the way you would teach an 11-12-year-old the way you would teach a 17-year-old. So, you could even have different classes. You can split it. There's a lot of ways you can slice this.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, I got another question for you. It kind of ties in with it. What about for, I guess for the lack of a better term the teen class that were going to talk about here. What about no gi? Just come in workout clothes, do you think that be beneficial or detrimental?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think that depends on how you market it. One of the things than I've heard, you know, I went to public schools and we didn't really have dress code not the way some public schools have dress codes know, but we certainly didn't have the dress code of a private school. And one of the things I've heard even from teenagers that attend those schools, we don't have to worry about what we wear and if people are getting picked on for it. So, there's a plus and a minus. So, the plus of letting people pick their own stuff and this is a conversation that comes up in traditional martial arts all the time you know, do I want to let my students individualize by wearing a red uniform, a blue uniform, a pink uniform you know. Do I want to let them put a patch from the competition circuit they competed on on their uniform or do I put them in, everybody's got to wear white, it's got to be this style? It could go either way.

**Jared Wilson:**

One of the things is and I'm kind of arguing both sides at the same time is a lot of teenagers, because their bodies are changing, are not comfortable with the way their bodies look. So, and there, I guess how I'm going to say it, they trying to hide their body in a lot of way so in some ways having that gi could kind of blanch that out or you know if their... We've all seen that person that has worn that gi the very



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first time straight out of the packaging. You know, the nice square 47:51 on the shoulder that type of thing and it may make them feel even more awkward just for that first or second time so, I'm not quite sure which way I would think on that one.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And one of the things I heard from school owners as they reach out and they say hey, can whistlekick's next product be this, or this, or this? Because people are always reaching out to me you know, with their ideas. One of the things that the industry really wants are uniforms cut for bigger people. Because we are at a time when 60% of our population is overweight. Not necessarily obese but 60% is overweight, I want to say the figure on obesity is 30%.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, that kind of rings true from what I remember.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. So, we can do a, you know... We can look at those numbers in certain ways but somewhere around 1 out of every 3 people that would be interested in martial arts is not going to feel terribly comfortable with a thing wrapped around their waist that kind of showcases how big their waist is. I'm not advocating the removal of belts, but I think that right there, would kind of push me into hey, if we have a teen martial arts skills rather than martial arts class, okay, yeah, let them come in street clothes or maybe you give them option. Maybe the uniform isn't a gi or a dobak, maybe it's a school shirt. Maybe its board shorts you know, there are a lot of different ways you could do that...

**Jared Wilson:**

But they got to be camouflaged.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I mean it's got to be fun. It's got to be close to people want to wear. You know, if the t-shirt you're going to give them is a 5-dollar box cut burlap sack with a one-color logo on the front on the chest, that's not cool. That's never going to be cool. You can boil almost everything that teenagers want down to wants cool, teenagers want to be cool.

**Jared Wilson:**



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Well it kind of brings the last part then up. We kind of talked on a couple of different pieces on it but, how do we make martial arts sexy then? That's a tall order I know and again you can kind of look at as two different ways, you can look at as the individual you know, dojo manager or you look at it overall as how do we affect the industry.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. There's bigger stuff than has to happen in the industry and you know, were not going to talk about it on air because some of this is you know, competitive info that I'm not willing to put out publicly. You and I have talked about it a little bit. There are thing that at whistlekick that I'm hell bent on doing because I this as one of the biggest pieces of the problem in growing martial arts globally and that's pretty much my single goal. I want to see more people doing martial arts. But if we look at it on a more individual level as a school owner, what can be done? You have to create the environment. If you don't have the opportunity to say, come do martial arts because this famous person does. You have to create an environment that speaks to the rest of what they want. They want to feel accepted they want to be better at the other stuff they're doing in their lives which you know maybe its martial arts skills for sports, maybe its martial arts skills in academics. Maybe those are two different classes, maybe the academics class you're pulling in the nerds, hey, I was the biggest nerd in my school I get to say that. You're pulling the. Nerds by teaching them meditation, focus and discipline and they become better students out of it. How many martial arts school owners have heard from kid's parents, my kid is a better student now because of martial arts? It happens all the time. You know, we need to look at what's going to bring them in and we need to let go a lot of our pre-conceived notions about what is and is not martial arts because it's all martial arts. And it's better to have them there with a positive attitude towards what they're learning than to have them bail because they weren't keen on doing a hundred revers punches each class.

### **Jared Wilson:**

There's a good thing, someone asks me is what's the best martial art and I answered them kind of unintentionally I said, it's the one than you go to.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes. Because it is. It's that simple.

### **Jared Wilson:**



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You know, there might be a great martial art and it might be a perfect martial art for you but if it's on the other side of town and it's going to take an hour and a half with traffic to get there you're not going to go.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. Now this is the type of thing that if whistlekick did programming and associations and things like that, we would have already turned out a here's what we think a teen programming should look like in martial arts schools. I'm not going to do that, that's just not what we do here

**Jared Wilson:**

No, you can do that and market it to all the martial arts school out there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Maybe somebody else will but I don't think it has to be that complex because most martial arts schools are going to have a couple of teenagers and you go to them and say okay, what would it take for your friends to come in.

**Jared Wilson:**

That could be a good question, just ask them.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What would it take? And maybe you've got to setup your own focus group maybe you've got find in your shoes, they were going to do some kind of Friday night event you know and again, use the best resources you have which are those few that you probably have that meet this demographic and setup something fun. Bring them in and say alright, if you come in, were going to feed you and we will all take you to the movies and will do xyz and I want 15 minutes of your time to talk about martial arts and... You can't phrase it like than they're going to tune out. But, you see what I mean? I mean, you got kind of have to hide it but you got to get a conversation going to say what would you come in here for? If maybe you have the right kind of students, maybe they are student than have been around a while, you know they really get it, they're really sharp and you say okay, if you were to build a dojo, dojang, school whatever exclusively for people your age, what would it look like? And I bet you they will comeback with some ideas that you never even thought of you know there might be a homework room, there might be a game room, there might be a couch.



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**Jared Wilson:**

Something simple like that, sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Maybe a bunch of cellphone chargers. Maybe there's a shower, maybe there's way different stuffs on the walls, maybe there were different uniforms, maybe classes are an hour maybe they're 2, maybe they're 30 minutes I don't know. I'm not a teenager anymore, I don't remember quite at that level what I would've wanted and I may not have been the best example because I have been doing martial arts for ten years at that point.

**Jared Wilson:**

So, you were one of the kids that actually kept going to it too.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, but I'm one of the first to admit I wanted out, my mother wouldn't let me and I'm glad she didn't...

**Jared Wilson:**

What age did you start to want to get out then?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Fourteen.

**Jared Wilson:**

Okay, just curious.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right about there. And it was because of the pull of other things because I was tired of... I was competing, I was succeeding in competition, I was trying to get picked on before because it was seen as not cool.





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**Jared Wilson:**

Again, it kind of seems to be that we think that martial arts is something kids do.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yup. And I think some of that is the way we market martial arts and again, that's a broader problem that's not one that you or I or even all of us, you know everyone listening if we were all to get in a room and hammer this out, we couldn't solve this. It's entrenched and its big. But you can affect what's going on in your town, in your area. Imagine what will happen if you're a martial artist and you're really skilled martial artist and you're great with footwork, go be an assistant coach on the football team. Go teach them footwork and then that football coach, hey I want you to urge your football players to come to my classes during the off season. That could work. Might be seen as a money move but oh no, all of a sudden you have more students that's terrible.

**Jared Wilson:**

That's horrible.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, we hate that.

**Jared Wilson:**

Well, I think we covered a lot on that one.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We did. And I honestly, I think this one is better than the last time. I think we got better stuff.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, take two definitely was better.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right. Probably will not be a take three.



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**Jared Wilson:**

Hopefully not.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But maybe we'll revisit if people have some ideas if they want to ride in.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, if they want to ride in, something we forgot to say or something you do in your school and it seems to work, hey we don't have that gulf of you know teenagers disappearing, let us know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's get that shared out there because I think hopefully everyone can agree that if we can solve this, it lead to a lot of good stuff in a generation.

**Jared Wilson:**

Yeah, it'll take a generation too. This is not the immediate switch that you know, you want as a teenager. Well, thanks for coming on and talking about this and...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Always.

**Jared Wilson:**

You know, maybe you're right, maybe we should have occasional conversations because I think we came up with three different topics just talking today.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We did. Man, this is what happens when podcasters get together. They come up with podcasts and ideas for future podcasts.

**Jared Wilson:**



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So how was that? Did that give you some ideas for how to keep that age group in your martial arts classes? Did it make you realize that you didn't have them in your martial arts classes? Do you have something that you do to try and keep them in there? Is there something motivational that you think we forgot? Let us know. You can email me at [martialthoughts@gmail.com](mailto:martialthoughts@gmail.com) or you can email Jeremy at [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). For this week in martial arts, we're going to go with August 15th 1945 where the martial arts of "defendo" was named. Defendo kind of has a weird history. Looking at some website and I'll say I didn't even remember where it was and they had a list of martial arts by countries and one of them was, Canada. So, I looked at it and went, alright, clicked on it. Defendo was developed by an interesting gentleman named Bill Underwood who actually created a system that he had before called "combato". Combato was a system that he developed from a mixture of a couple of different things, boxing, kind of a western wrestling and jiu-jitsu. And he taught it as a, 1:00:08 self-defense as a bad term for it, he taught it as a combat system to soldiers in World War 2 to American and Canadian soldiers. After World War 2 he is asked to keep teaching that at the US Army Ranger School, as the FBI and he decided that the system itself was too violent for a non-war time situation. So, he changed it and kind of like they did with the Japanese, they took the lethal techniques out and went from jiu-jitsu to judo or from aikijitsu to aikido and he did that and realized he couldn't call it combato anymore, it was a different art. So, his daughter actually came up with the name of defendo. So instead of combat, you're defending it. Kind of made sense. Sounds funny but you know it was 1945 so, we'll give them a little bit of a break for the naming. If you look at it and because I was curious about it I went on YouTube and looked at it, it's a system that reminds me, my first thought, is that it reminds me of Krav Maga but then you can see the jiu-jitsu influence in there. And if you know the history of Krav Maga that kind of made sense that it will kind of end up looking similar. He initially published a book on it in 1950 called defendo. Police systems of self-defense. Which is interesting because he kind of developed it to be used for law enforcement officers which again for 1945-1950, that's a very unusual thing and by 1969 there was enough I guess kind of martial arts knowledge. He published a book called defendo occidental systems of self-protection. Again, which is an interesting idea, I've never read either of these books but I'm curious to see what they would look like. He seemed to be playing off the idea of Asian martial arts because that made enough of an impact, people kind of at least people in more combat situations ex-military and the police or whatever it happened you've been knew kind of what some of the martial arts from Asia looked like. So, he created, or should I say he develops his own system of how to teach it to law enforcement officers. Like I said, it is still being taught today and you can find videos on YouTube, today and you can find videos on YouTube, I'll probably have it on my show notes which you can get from [thinkingmartial.blogspot.com](http://thinkingmartial.blogspot.com) if you want to let me know about something, I already gave the email but it's [martialthoughts@gmail.com](mailto:martialthoughts@gmail.com). Leave an iTunes review for us go on to Facebook. Facebook has a pretty good way, everything Facebook. Facebook has a pretty good way, everything I kind of put out I genuinely put out on Facebook. If you want to get episode updates, if you're not subscribed to this show, if you want to get the updates for it, you can do that. That's [facebook.com/martialthoughts](https://facebook.com/martialthoughts) and then there's Twitter as well which is just [@martialthoughts](https://twitter.com/martialthoughts) so until next time, keep thinking those martial thoughts.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I hoped you enjoyed that. I really enjoyed the episode, in fact I enjoyed doing it so much that I listen to it again. I don't generally listen to episodes because I was there to start with. But I thought that sensei Wilson and I really came up with some great stuff and I'm curious for those of you out there that have schools or you know, are just observant, which of these things that we've talked about that you see being implemented? Which ones are working, which ones aren't? More importantly what did we miss? I would love to get some commentary on the show notes page at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) episode 223 or you can email me [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com) you can find us on social media, @whistlekick whatever works for you because this is one of the subjects that I feel strongly if we can share knowledge, we all benefit. Rising tide lifts all ships, and here we are let's raise some ships. No more punching holes and submarine-ing. Alright, that's all for today until next time, train hard smile and have a great day.