



Episode 225 – Interview with Sensei Ando | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey how is it going everyone? This is episode 225 of whistlekick martial arts radio and today, we have something a little different. Those of you that have been around a little while remember episode 100 where I was on the other side of the microphone, I was interviewed by past guest, Mr. Dan hart. But here, again, I'm on the other side. This time its Sensei Ando, a past guest of this show bringing me on to his show fight for a happy life episode 51 where honestly, Sensei Ando went kind of deep. He did a whole bunch of research talking about my personal life and we got into some good stuff. Now it's no secret that I have a tremendous amount of respect for Sensei Ando for the quality of his show and frankly, the fact that it's from listening to him, watching what he does that has helped push martial arts radio along. Because I'm trying to constantly trying to elevate the caliber of the show, not just in the guest and the content but in the audio quality in my skills as an interviewer and frankly, I have found Sensei Ando to be top notch. So, for him to invite me into his show was nothing short of an honor, I had a great time doing it and it's a little bit different style it's not the structured interview in the way that you're used to here. For those of you that write in, and admittedly, may it's just because I'm a humble guy, a lot of you want to know more about me, that's weird to me but okay, here's your opportunity. We get into a lot of stuffs that frankly, has never been discussed on other episodes of martial arts radio, I hope you enjoy it. Thank you, Sensei Ando, for having me on your show, so let's do it.

Narrator:



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Today on fight for a happy life. An interview with Mr. Jeremy Lesniak.

This is fight for a happy life. And now your host, Sensei Ando.

Sensei Ando:

Welcome to episode number 51 of fight for a happy life. The show that believes even a little martial arts makes life a whole lot better. I'm your host, of course, Ando and today something different. Way back in episode number one, I promised you inter views but I realized as we approach 50 episodes, I've only delivered two. What can I say, I like to talk but that doesn't mean I'm not interested in learning how other people are fighting for a happy life. So today, a chat with Mr. Jeremy Lesniak. If you don't know Jeremy, he is the founder of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel. According to the website, whistlekick manufactures the world's best sparring gear. Jeremy's also the host of whistlekick martial arts radio, a weekly podcast devoted to the promotion of traditional martial arts. That's actually how we met. He was kind enough to invite me on his show and believe it or not, we ended up talking more off record, than on record he really seems like an interesting guy so, it only made sense invite him over here to be on our show. Of course, it's possible that I'm completely wrong and he's got nothing to say, but that's what makes interviews so much fun. Let's find out. Either way if you haven't subscribed to whistlekickMartialArtsRadio go to that it features over 200 episodes mostly interviews which makes it a great resource if you're interested in connecting with other folks making their way in the martial arts and if the quality of Jeremy's podcast is any indication of the quality of the sparring gear he makes well then, I'd say that gear is probably worth checking out to. Of course, I'll put the links to Jeremy's website and podcast in the show notes over on fightforahappylife.com. But right now, let's meet the man himself. Mr. Jeremy Lesniak welcome to the show.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey thanks for having me on this is going to be fun

Sensei Ando:

I really hope so, a lot of that's up to you so I hope you're in a good mood. I hope you're in a really good mood.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm generally in a good mood, you know to be honest and you know I'm sure the listeners might think that I'm kissing butt a little bit but I'm generally in a good mood when I listen to you.

Sensei Ando:



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Wow

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're a pretty happy guy.

Sensei Ando:

Wow that's a beautiful thing to say, are you flirting with me? This is getting awkward right off the bat.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Maybe, maybe a little bit. It's like a date like a first date.

Sensei Ando:

Oh boy alright well this just took a strange turn. I'm just really happy to have you on the show. It was an honor to be on your podcast. You do a high-quality show over there on the [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com) and I'm really hoping that some of my listeners will take a look at what you're doing over there cause you're certainly a promoting a good image for traditional martial artists everywhere and it's just nice to be part of that community in some small way so I appreciate you making sometime to be here with us.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well thank you you know I appreciate everything that you're doing. You're doing some great stuff and it was an honor to have you on our show and the listeners absolutely loved it. We got a lot of great feedback and you know for us to come together again I mean it's kind of like

Sensei Ando:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's like fusing I don't know like BJJ and Shotokan or something I don't know.

Sensei Ando:

There you go.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

You don't know what you're going to get out of it but it's probably going to be pretty good.

Sensei Ando:

Ah alright, and I like that. I know that you, right before you went on record here you still see this as a competition of some kind between podcasts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're kind of pulling my words a little differently here I think you know you're setting me up I don't know.

Sensei Ando:

Not at all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What I mean and listeners you will probably get this. Maybe I did a poor job of explaining it the first time but there are a handful of us in the traditional martial arts world that have podcasts and we're all at least I think most of us aware that we're not the only ones and so I listen to your show and martial thoughts with Jared Wilson and a handful of others because one I'm part of the target demographic. I started my show because I wanted the show that I started and now I get to talk to cool people like you and so like it's changed my life and it's a lot of fun. But by the same token, we're doing similar things so I want to watch what you're doing because you help me get. Better at certain things.

Sensei Ando:

Awesome.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's like training in the dojo you know you look at what the guy next to you is doing you say, ah

Sensei Ando:

Right



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I like what he's doing there, I'm going to tweak what I'm doing in that way. You know we're bringing each other up, 06:39

Sensei Ando:

I love that alright well in that spirit then I guess we can continue.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well I'm glad, my computer is about to get a virus you were going to digitally kick me at the face.

Sensei Ando:

That's right I was going to immediately stop recording, I was going to slam your show and out some lies on the internet, crush your show.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You wouldn't be the first.

Sensei Ando:

Oh no I'm sorry to hear that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh no, you know what until you're getting a hate mail, you're not pushing it hard enough.

Sensei Ando:

That's true, in fact you just inspired me to do some more offensive things and put my agenda farther to really get some hate mail death threats, until I'm shot I'm not going to be satisfied so thank you for that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Alright well I'll, I mean I know you've got some much stricter gun laws now in California than we do here in Vermont but, I'll see what I can do.



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Sensei Ando:

I'm not sure they make a difference but yeah okay. Let's go with this direction now this show is called fight for a happy life as you know so I'm curious what do you consider a happy life. What is your vision, what are you fighting for?

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's awesome, I love that you spin it in that way so to me a happy life is one where you wake up in the morning and you're looking forward to the day and when you're going to bed you're satisfied you're smiling about what happened during the day and obviously it's not going to happen everyday. But hopefully the majority of them, 5 6 days a week.

Sensei Ando:

And is that where you are now? Do you feel like you're going to bed every night with a smile on your face mostly at times? How's it going for you? How's your fight going?

Jeremy Lesniak:

The fight's going well it's still you know it's a little bit of an uphill battle. Anyone that's ever started a business knows that it's hard work being an entrepreneur is challenging. The best kind of anecdote I ever got was from a friend who had started a number of businesses he's a little bit older and he said working for yourself is great you know you get a lot of control and you can even pick when your world you only have to work half a day and you even get to pick which 12 hours it is.

Sensei Ando:

Excellent

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that's always really resonated for me you know this is not my first business that I've started but when I go to bed I won't lie I'm not always happy but I'm always satisfied. I know what it feels like to put in a good hard day's work and that's you know that really speaks well to me you know I've always been a hard worker my mother's been self-employed her whole life so I kind of come from that legacy. But generally, when I wake up in the morning I'm fired up. I'm usually at my desk by 7am at the latest and just cranking it out.

Sensei Ando:



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Awesome, I love that also. That's interesting so your mother has been self-employed. I was wondering cause I saw on your website it said that the company has taken a lot of time money and sweat to get going and that was back in like 2010 so that's about 7 years ago, 6 and a half years ago. I was, was there a pivotal moment when you decided like you didn't want to work for anyone else or you're always self-employed just like your mother was a role model for or what was the big turning point to say okay that's it I'm definitely going double down on me. I want to be independent, how did that come about?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well in hindsight it was kind of this happy accident. I came out of college and moved up to Vermont with my college girlfriend. She was coming up here to attend law school and I had a job offer at Dartmouth College to do some IT stuff and they pretty much assured me you have a job and then kind of last minute the job fell through and when I was in college I've been working at the local staple store and doing some kind of computer consulting on the side and realized I can't build the life the happy life that I want working at staples. So, what would it look like if I really pursued this consulting thing and from that decision there I was full time at staples for 6 months and I was only at that store for 18 months total and then I was full time on my own and that was 2003 sorry 2002 and I haven't looked back. You know I've had some side gigs you know I coach gymnastics for a few years you know 90 minutes a week you know I've done some other small stuff but pretty much right out of college the majority of my income is coming from my own pursuits.

Sensei Ando:

Wow that's like probably a dream for most people, right? To be able to call your own shots, make your own money, that's wow, that's pretty impressive. And now with Whistlekick you get the opportunity to talk with lots of martial artists, go to tournaments, you're a bigger and bigger part of the martial arts community, how's that going? What kind of vibe do you get out there? I mean you're coming in as a manufacturer of goods but you're also there you know sponsoring athletes and sponsoring events as well. What's your vibe on the current traditional martial arts scene?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's poised to grow right I think pretty much anybody that's spent a lot of time in martial arts especially if you've been a school owner you've seen these cycles come in and go out. You know a movie will come out and all of a sudden people will be interested and then you know that'll fade and I feel like we're coming up out of one of those lulls right now. I'm starting to see events bringing in more attendance, people talking about hey I haven't had this many people at my tournament in 10 years 20 years or even record setting events and I think that we're in a place as the world is becoming so informal so casual that for a lot of people they're looking for some structure, some formality to lean on you know that rigidity that a lot of us kind of you know I'm 38 I remember it when I was a kid maybe not so much folks younger



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than me but anyone that grew up with that and doesn't see it in the world I think on some level we miss it. So, people are coming in to the traditional martial arts saying you know this is giving me something to balance out the rest of my life and I think if we all can push that and recognize that you know if we work together on this if we can promote the traditional martial arts versus the 9000 other things that we all kind of compete against right. I've heard so many school owners say you know their competition is not the martial arts school down the street it's soccer, sports it's baseball season. Right? We can get more people in and one of my firm beliefs and you may have heard this on the show and we may have some crossover listeners and I say this all the time, martial arts is the only thing where 6 months of experience has lifetime effects. Show me the any other sport you can put somebody in and give them 6 months to tennis, that doesn't change somebody's life but 6 months of karate or kung fu does at any age.

Sensei Ando:

That's a great message. Although if you play football for 6 months and you get a head trauma, that might change your life in a negative way, how about that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right and that is a sad life.

Sensei Ando:

Yeah that's a sad life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a sad life and I'm not fighting for a sad life.

Sensei Ando:

That's good, I would change sports if I was fighting for a sad life. Yeah, I think that's a really, a great point the traditional martial arts is like you say is a nice counter balance to the how dress codes have fallen away and people following strict codes and guidelines seem to be falling away and to find that balance I think is the secret to a happy life. You can't you don't necessarily want to have a militaristic life or everything is regimented but you also just can't be a free-floating hippie who has no goals, steps to those goals and ways to achieve things so finding that balance that there are days when you have to get things done and you know how to do that and then there are days when you can float a little and absorb some life. I think that's important balance, I'm all about that as well. So yeah well said and that's encouraging if you find that these events are growing and you getting more support boy I'd like to believe that so oh I hope that's true.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah and it's a lot of fun getting out there and you know I get to train and write it off as a business expense I mean that's fantastic. You know I've been doing weekend long camps the last 2 weeks and you know I got to 15:08 my mileage and my entry fees and all that and just hang out and be a professional martial arts something. I don't know what I am, what my title outside whistlekick is you know I'm a guy who does stuff with martial arts.

Sensei Ando:

Right and you're living a dream, sounds awesome.

Jeremy Lesniak:

The happy life.

Sensei Ando:

The happy life well good, congratulations. Don't worry there'll be more challenges to come, don't worry you're not done yet.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, I'm fully aware.

Sensei Ando:

Cause you're 38 is that what you said?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I am.

Sensei Ando:

Get ready, you've also through your podcasts I think you have over 200 episodes, now right? You're way up there.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah, we're recording this and episode 211 dropped today.

Sensei Ando:

Yeah congratulations on sticking with it. Now that you not only have your experiences of growing up in a variety of martial arts schools and been seeing people through a business interface but now also through the podcast, what do you notice about martial arts do you think there are any commonalities here or there are just certain traits you just keep running into over and over again that just keep hitting you over the head like you know what this is how you know that guy is a martial artist because this... Or do you think it's just pretty much a widely you know wildly rather diverse group, what patterns have you found?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think that martial artists overall are pretty good cross section of society but I think within martial artists we see some self-awareness with some things that the general population may not see for example: perseverance, the idea that I'm going to bang my head against this wall until it falls down or I'm going to find a way to go around it you know whatever visual metaphor you want to use martial artists are much more aware of that than I think the general population is. I think everyone has the ability to grow and achieve whatever they want. One of my favorite anecdotes is that people are like gold fish, they will grow to the size of the bowl you put them in. Whatever the expectation is, whatever they have to do you know how many stories are there of you know the cliché of the mom lifting the car to get the baby I mean there's so much of that stuff that happens everyday because it had to happen because people were called to do that and as martial artists we have a lot of those stories.

Sensei Ando:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think it's because of the way that we train and the way that we instruct the younger generations to beat them over the head to say you can do this and that and the next thing and whatever is beyond that that you really want to accomplish.

Sensei Ando:

Nice, yeah, I'm trying to reflect on that as you're speaking about that and like does that apply to me and the people I know I think that rings pretty true. Just being problem solvers in general it was the good martial artist maybe that's the easier pattern to see the good martial artists are the people who



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persevere and solve the problems and if you're in a choke or someone's hitting with a barrage of punches and kicks all it means is just a puzzle that to me it's like a nice impersonal way to look at it is just this is just a puzzle now how do I solve this puzzle where do I have to put my hands how do I breathe what am I looking at what decisions to I need to go through here and so when you apply that to the rest of your life whether it's trying to work out your finances or work out a relationship or start a business it again it's just a series of puzzles that you've got to figure out and as long as you persevere you can usually find a way to get it done. So, I think that's a pretty astute observation there good one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you and then of course you know there are other things, they are not all positive you know there's a, one of the one's that people find most interesting and I'll share this, I've shared it a couple of times there seems to be an inverse correlation between accomplishments and focus on title.

Sensei Ando:

Wow now we're going to get into some offensive territory, I like this.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, hey doing it on your show not mine.

Sensei Ando:

I love this so for instance if someone calls himself Sensei Ando you feel right off the bat I've marked myself as someone who probably won't accomplish things cause I have so much ego invested in my title.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely not because I think you know it's when you know when we break that title down you know what does Sensei mean it's generally accepted as teacher in Japanese, it's the senior GM, great GM and it's not so much the possession of the title it's the insistence on the use of the title.

Sensei Ando:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:



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For example, when you know because I'm a somewhat public person I get people friending me all the time on Facebook, people I don't know and you know I don't generally accept them unless we have a bunch of mutual friends and then you know hopefully I'll bet them one day. But some of those people are throwing their title in as their first name. You know I'm someday would it be cool for someone to refer to me as great GM such and such sure but it's never going to replace Jeremy in my Facebook name. I'm never going to introduce myself as anything other than Jeremy even in a martial arts setting I will introduce myself as Jeremy Lesniak and then if formality is part of the environment I will say you know it would be appropriate for you to refer to me as Sensei. That's the only title I've ever wanted because I enjoy being a teacher. I don't take that title because it's something I've aspired to in an ego way you know as people progress up ranks there are additional titles and I think that is great but I think some people hide behind those titles to define who they are.

Sensei Ando:

Right on yeah, I think you're right on the money there. Titles make up for maybe sometimes a lack of accomplishment or like the tradition maybe in Japan, the way it's been explained to me people will call you Sensei but you should never call yourself as Sensei. So, I think that's a nice way.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I don't want the listeners to think that I'm against titles, because when I bring guests on to the show, you know this you've been on our show I introduce everyone in some kind of respectful title. I've never introduced anybody by simply their first name, at the very least it's Mr. Or Ms. Or Mrs. If they don't have or don't want some manner of title. But the biggest names and I'm not going to name drop because there's a bit of ego in that too but if someone looks for the episodes we've had, we've had some pretty big names. Names that honestly like in the moment of interviewing I was shocked that I got to talk to this person and almost without fail when I said how would you like me to introduce you they said just call me by whatever their first name was and there are a few exceptions but when I look through the people that were really desiring for titles for their titles they hadn't done nearly as much as the other folks who just wanted to be by the first name.

Sensei Ando:

Yeah, that's probably because they are still working, they are still humbled, they still know that they don't know everything and that's a real student right, there right? We're always learning. Alright so you a couple of fun things about Mr. Jeremy Lesniak. Let's see if any of these things are true if I had to believe if I'm to believe your Instagram feed it might be interesting to some people if they don't know you. Is this true, true or false sir, do you have license plate with the word Kata on it?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I do, the license plate for my motor cycle is kata. The license plate or my summer car is katameister.

Sensei Ando:

Oh boy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk about ego, there right? So, let's roll back

Sensei Ando:

For those who don't speak German, what does that mean?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't, I don't if you google katameister you get some stuff about me and you get some random karate schools in Germany. But it used to be just me and I do own the domain katameister.com.

Sensei Ando:

Is that, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, I do. I do way way back. When I was a teenager and I was competing, kata was my thing for those that might not be Japanese practitioners that's form to hiong plum sei patterns whatever you call it. I just I love them you know I was a social outcast and I didn't relate as well to other people but form it was just me. I only had to be better than myself the day before and I loved that. So I did well in competition with that and after one probably victory, one of my instructors was really excited and said hey you're the katameister and then a couple of years later when my mother signed us up for dial up internet, we had to pick a user name and she picked katameister and it kind of became this online persona and it became as a nerdy kid living in the woods of Maine it was my ability to reinvent myself as someone who's confident and powerful and articulate because all that mattered were my words. I've always been good with words and I'm a fast typist so I would go on to chat rooms and I could completely dominate somebody would pick on someone and I could just eviscerate them in text.

Sensei Ando:

Wow



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Jeremy Lesniak:

And I took a lot of strength from that name and then when I got my first car in Maine it was like a \$15 a year fee for a vanity plate so I put katameister on it and everyone knew hey that was my car and that became fun. Ooh I've just kind of continued that.

Sensei Ando:

I love that story, that is, do you wanted to just still be referred to as the katameister or is that offensive to you now that's to old hat or?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not offensive, but kata is still something that I'm known for. I've done kata three times in competition in the last 10 years twice last year or I guess 11 years now, twice last year and then once in 2006.

Sensei Ando:

Beautiful

Jeremy Lesniak:

Just to this past year I was getting a lot of people coming up to me at events saying I've just found out that you train in martial arts, they thought I was just showing up at events selling stuff. They thought I was some opportunistic business person. So, I said alright, so I put on my gi and I competed a couple of times just to show them hey I can hang with these guys.

Sensei Ando:

So, you're an opportunistic business person and a quality martial artist, you can do both.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Exactly, well I'll let others be the judge of the quality but I am also a martial artist.

Sensei Ando:

Excellent, another fun fact I think I see on your Instagram feed you have an earring is that right?



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I have 3 I used to have 5.

Sensei Ando:

You used to have 5, you're 38 and you now still have 3 earrings, what's up with that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, each of my ear lobes is pierced and so one of my other passions and as a kid from the woods of Maine this often doesn't reason, it doesn't make sense to a lot of people but you know I grew up with some challenging childhood stuff single mom not a lot of friends and I found my solace in rap music.

Sensei Ando:

Oh wow.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, in the early 90s, if anyone out there is a rap music fan when Dr. Dre dropped his first album you know his seminal work he had earrings and in 1992 I didn't know any other man that had 2 earrings. I mean barely any man had one and I said someday I will pierce both of my ears and 5 years later as soon as I was out of Maine and I was in college I had my roommate bring me to the mall and I went to Claire's and the girl needled both of my ears and then over the next couple of years I put one in the top of each year those have since come out then in 2007 I pierced my nose.

Sensei Ando:

Oh boy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because Tupac had had pierced his nose.

Sensei Ando:

Wow

Jeremy Lesniak:



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And he was one of the strongest influences on my childhood and anyone that knows him his movies or music casually might think that's a really strange role model but anyone that has read his poetry that knows you know maybe the lesser known music knows how deep and philosophical and political he was and that was kind of my well one of my 27:29 because I also have I have a few tattoos and his first tattoo was one of mine.

Sensei Ando:

Wow I did not see this coming.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And no, no a few people do. You know the tattoos, the piercings they tell the story of my life, there are no color at any of my tattoos there's a whistlekick logo tattoo cause the logo is trademarked now that will go on my body sometime soon because I just want to be able to reflect and look at my body and say this is who I am you know. Scars tell a story tattoos earrings they tell a story and my body tells a story of who I am and where I've been.

Sensei Ando:

Fair enough wow, I did not see that coming. A young boy growing up in Maine in the woods and hip-hop and rap being your big influences and those are more of your role models maybe than even Bruce Lee. I know you've started martial arts very young like at 4 so but really you started identifying yourself when you got to be at the age with the rap scene as more than the like the Asian you know stereotype martial arts scene, is that fair or did you have both as role models or?

Jeremy Lesniak:

No no that's fair because we didn't have cable growing up so I didn't get to see much in the way of martial arts you know my mother would took me to see the karate kid and teenage mutant ninja turtles but that was really about it. So, my role models were what I saw on TV, I was a little bit you know by the time power ranges came out I was a little bit too old for it. So, I had ninja turtles but the place where I was able to escape was rap music cause the thrust of most of that music is about challenge and difficulty and overcoming obstacles and finding your place in the world and I guess you can argue that's the thrust of a lot of music at least some but that was just what spoke to me it was generally high energy it was passionate and I felt like I wasn't alone.

Sensei Ando:



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So, important, right? Human need there, yeah even from isn't that the beauty of it right that's why internet is so great. There are so many people who don't have to feel alone because no matter how nice your interests are or how unusual you think you are maybe in your home town you're one of a kind but when you look out on the internet you find that there's maybe that one person in lots of small towns and now you have a community. It seems like a miracle nowadays that there's just more and more opportunity to build bridges and connect with other people and not feel alone and so that's beautiful that's really nice. You've, you're also a pescatarian, it seems to say here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I am.

Sensei Ando:

Which means I believe, for those who don't follow food terminologies I believe that means you think you're better than everybody else, is that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely no that would-be vegan, no I'm just kidding. What's the joke a vegan, an atheist and a CrossFit are walking to a bar and everyone knows because they won't shut up a bout it right? So, I am a vegetarian, I'm not an atheist, I am a cross fitter but I'm a pescatarian for ethical reasons. I was a vegetarian for a long time, my health was suffering and I'm one of those rare people that recognize you know I'm not going to lie the body is designed to eat meat, to eat red meat, to eat chicken to eat pork whatever. But I've made a choice and for me eating fish is kind of the balance, my health came right back once I brought fish back in. But when I go out to eat you know people say well what you know what don't you eat it's like I don't eat fur and feathers. You know that's the easiest way to say it.

Sensei Ando:

You're an interesting conflict here cause on the one hand you're a pescatarian, you're cross fitting you have this very self-improvement mind lifestyle on the other hand you ride the motorcycle so which is it Jeremy Lesniak, do you want to live forever or do you have a death wish? What's going on in here?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I want to live fully, for as long as I'm here.

Sensei Ando:



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Okay boy that was good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love you know I love being on the motorcycle I love you know my summer cars 31:51 on FRS it's basically a street legal go kart, tons of fun and I may or may not obey all of street laws while driving that car. I do what works for me so long as it doesn't harm anybody else. My motorcycle I love riding that thing it's a place where I feel free, if anyone hasn't ridden a motorcycle, the greatest way I can express it is imagine you're driving around but you also get all of the smells and to be in your car and to then smell everything you know someone who just cut their grass or you know I live in Vermont you know driving by someone that's sawing lumber and you get that cut wood smell, there's nothing like it. You are so connected to the world it's almost meditative.

Sensei Ando:

Let's go all the way it is meditative good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Sensei Ando:

I'm not going to ride one but okay I like your passion for that. Let's go 32:56 you mentioned a little we don't have to go into detail about the struggles of your youth going through maybe some dark times back then. It's really clear that again you're into self-improvement, you're into being independent and I find at least for myself maybe I'm projecting people of your built are also usually pretty self-critical. Sometimes it could even just turn into like self-bullying, so how do you feel about that? Do you feel that you're are self-critical maybe too much are you a bully to yourself?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't know that I'd say I'm a bully but I set incredibly high standards for myself. It is rare that I accomplish my goals because that's how high I set the bar and that comes from the way I was raised to always do my best and if you're not failing you aren't reaching your potential. And obviously there's a strong psychological component to that because if you set yourself up to accomplish your goal and you believe you're going to accomplish that goal and then you don't, that hurts and if can continually hurts well I mean you're setting yourself up for some pretty challenging psychological stuff and I went through a lot of that in my 20s. You know I looked up one day and just my life was not what I wanted it to be and I won't go more into it than that. But as I've aged I've learned to be a little bit better, a little softer with



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myself realizing that hey, sometimes it's okay to do what's adequate so you can invest the time and energy into something else that matters more. One of my favorite sayings lately is if it's not a heck yeah, it's a no.

Sensei Ando:

Cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If it's not so compelling, that it's a no brainer, it's a no. Make time, make space for those no brainers because you only have so much time energy money you know whatever.

Sensei Ando:

I'd say your old wisdom in that, the older I get the more I believe that is absolutely right yeah. In fact, that's given me a great quote here that's a good bumper sticker. If you're not failing, you're not going to reach your potential or you're not reaching your potential. I love that. I'm curious about, since you been start, you've started martial arts back at the age of 4 usually I would ask people about how martial arts has changed your life but I'm not even sure you can remember life without martial arts in it, is that true?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can't yeah. Martial arts did not change my life, it guided my life.

Sensei Ando:

So yeah and how what was the first influence that martial arts had on you that you thought that's a good influence and I'm going to keep this going I like this.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the difficulties in having always been a martial artist is it's really have to hard context to answer that question. Right it wasn't until I was probably adolescent age that I even had a sense of what life could be without martial arts. So, to say you know what were you getting that you needed, I don't know if you've never been deprived of water, if no one's ever told you going without water is possible, would you even consider I need water and I think that's kind of where martial arts is for me. Now that I'm older and I can reflect back, I've got some assemblance of where martial arts has changed for me. It's always been a place where I feel confident, I am most confident in wearing a gi and even though Taekwondo is my primary art now I still refer to it as a gi cause that's what I was raised in and I don't wear pull overs I



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wear generally I wear wrap arounds. I can have the worst day, I can feel small, 5'7" I can feel unattractive, I can feel unloved and the moment I put on my gi and then my belt, my world changes because it's the place where I belong and whether that's training in my living room or going out to a school to teach or going to a seminar to present or just going to one of the schools that I train at, that's my home that's the place where I belong and nothing else really matters when I'm on the floor. I might have some challenges of the day and yeah you know I try to leave it all at the door and sometimes it comes through I'm not going to lie but when you've been doing something for 30 coming on 34 years next month, you have some confidence in what you're doing and you know that you can lean on that to remind yourself of who you are and what you're capable of.

Sensei Ando:

I think that's going to resonate with a lot of people listening, right, it's your temple I mean not religious necessarily but it's your happy place, it's your secure place, it's the place where you find structure in and often crazy world. So, I totally understand that feeling of tying on the belts or tying on the uniform and kind of saying okay I'm back to me now let's get to work on making me even better and kind of blocking things out. So, I think that's going to resonate with people, I like that. And I know that you just tested for your second degree in Bill Wallace's Superfoot system.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, in early June.

Sensei Ando:

After all of these years, what are the goals you have I mean you're still earning ranks, you're still out there doing katas in tournaments and what are you hoping to get out of your training now at this point?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I just want to keep putting one foot in front of the other. You know I'm at a point where fortunately and because of CrossFit this is why CrossFit is important to me I'm I can still say at 38 I'm in the best shape of my life and I've got a few more years of being able to say that and that's really cool because I get to bring that in the martial arts you know whereas in June at the Superfoot testing in you know if anybody out there has ever even taking, taken a seminar with Bill Wallace you know how difficult that can be cardiovascular. I was fortunate, I am fortunate cause I don't have to spend the time working on my endurance to go into those tests. I can spend that same time training on skill because I'm handling the cardio stuff elsewhere. I just want to keep learning, I want to, I believe that the best martial artist is a well-rounded martial artist. If you consider all of the things the world can throw at you whether those are physical altercations or emotional challenges or whatever it is. The more experience you have and



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the more different ways the better able you'll be able to handle and adapt to that situation. So that's part of what I'm doing now is wear the holes in my quote unquote game you know I'm never going into the UFC but if we think of it in that way in some kind of full contact, no holds barred kind of sense, wear what I stink and right now it's my hands needs some work, my jujitsu's kind of poor and I'm decent with weapons but the Filipino stuff intrigues me well there's a school near my house that is kempo jujitsu 40:26.

Sensei Ando:

Perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, I'm training there because I'm plugging in holes. It's not that. I care so much about rank, I mean I'm wearing an orange belt in that school and that's so fun like I haven't worn an orange belt since my freshman year of college at this one school I was training at. I just love to train and I love to learn. I'm a perpetual student so I think where am I heading I just trying to put as much stuff in my head as possible.

Sensei Ando:

I love that, perpetual student. I would say that's one of the secrets to a happy life right cause there's always the excitements of the unknown. There's always a sense of discovery when you wake up in the morning like who knows what someone's going to say to change your perspective on things and who knows what new information you find out about yourself or there's just so much to explore and even with the age of. YouTube and being able to look out on the internet and see so much information so rapidly but it's still endless even as fast as all these information's coming in it's still endless that you never get to the point where you're just saying I've seen it all, I know it all, I've done it all, I'm bored I want to die. It's constantly invigorating and I've learned more I keep telling people I've learned more about martial arts and myself in the last 5 years let's say then every, the decades that preceded that is just it's the momentum just keeps going and going it's quite the opposite of thinking like well the older you get and the higher in rank you get the more you do it, it just gets less and less interesting or boring or less fulfilling it's totally the opposite to me it's like there's something about that just depth of experience that just is incredibly rewarding and even in my worst day, wow you could still look at something that you thought you knew and then find a new angle on it and now the whole day is beautiful because like wow I never kicked quite like that before. It's a new little thought, I just find it endlessly inspiring so clearly, you're on the same path. Perpetual student.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I am, I vowed, we all know people whose best days are behind them and sometimes those best days happen way too early in life you know I'm getting ready for my 20-year high school reunion and there are some folks that may or may not be there but graduated with me and their best days were in high school. I vowed that that would never be me, my best days are always in front of me cause I'm going to make sure that's the case. There's so much as you said, there's so much more to learn. The more I learn the more I realize I will never learn all of it because there's so much more. I have this epiphanies and this is one of the fun things about training in different styles with different instructors that one of them will teach me something that completely blows up other stuff that I thought I knew and it allows me to go back and look at all the other stuff I've done and say okay. How does this fit in now with what I understand and that's fun?

Sensei Ando:

I'd like that, your best days are ahead of you and now your job is just to make sure that that's what happens. I think that is a challenge to anyone who's listening to this podcast, make that happen for you too. Make sure that your glory days are ahead of you or at least that's what you're working towards as opposed to just looking at old photos or thinking back to when you were happier with your life. Every day is brand new, you have a chance to start something new and to engage with the world from a different angle. So, make that vow to yourself to anyone who's listening that your best day if not today is going to be tomorrow and now just set up that plan and make that happen. I think that's a really powerful message right there from the katameister. He knows what he's doing the life meister.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no, that one I'm not taking. That implies I haven't figured out. I do not, I 'm still trying to figure me out.

Sensei Ando:

Right on. I noticed on your website you had an article on your blog, advice that you would give yourself as a white belt and it wasn't actually your advice it was a guest post from someone else. So, I'm wondering if you actually have your own answer to that question of the advice that you would give yourself or to any of our listeners who are still new into martial arts or are looking for a new approach to martial arts. What advice do you give to people commonly or would you give to yourself as a younger martial artist?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah and this actually is something I've thought about a lot it's crept into a number of episodes that we've done on our show and it's about comparing yourself to others. You know one of the things that I



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love about martial arts that's so many people love is that it's a very individualized thing. In most martial arts schools that I'm familiar with, the standards for progressing in rank are not exactly the same across the board. It's showing a level of competency and demonstrating knowledge but especially as you get better different people are going to find things that resonate more with them. Some people are better fighters than others, some people are better at forms, some people have better endurance that doesn't mean that when someone puts in their time they haven't gotten better and to sit there and to compare this person after this amount of time to this person after this amount of time and say that one is a better martial artist than another I mean roll back we talked about all the mental, the psychological aspects that excuse me, anybody that's been around martial arts for more than a few minutes knows are so critical. It's that personal development, that journey that I think means so much and it's easy to not realize that as a beginner. When you're in a beginner, you're generally standing in the back of the room and you're watching everyone else do all these things better than you and you don't know what's going on and maybe you don't even have a belt yet and when you get a belt, you don't know how to tie it and you just you're floundering you're feeling like everything you do is wrong because you see all these people doing so many things right and it's easy to forget that those people have put in hundreds thousands, tens of thousands of hours to get to where they are and the greatest progress comes when you stop looking at what everyone else is doing and you look at you as a martial artist you're own martial arts brand flavor and focus on making that the best for you. I'm 5'7", I am on everyday 160 pounds the way I approach martial arts in training in competition the way I would use it in a heaven forbid a real-life situation is very different than someone who's 6'3" and 220 so to say that we're the same and we should be expected to do things the same at the same level is silly.

Sensei Ando:

Amen, yeah, it's an art after all that's the part people often forget right. It's martial arts so we wouldn't paint the same, we wouldn't cook the same, we don't sing the same so why anyone be would be expected to be like a robot or a duplicate of your teacher, makes no sense. It's interesting to me how you have a balance between like we all do as a young man between looking up to certain people as mentors to kind of guide your way in life whether it's through Tupac's poetry or a way to stand up for yourself and to take control of things on your own like the rap music and or for me like looking at Bruce Lee and his control of his body and we looked to these things as young people but then to be able to grow through that period and then start expressing your own life, finding that art in and now you're a guy with you know your own company, independent, you can make your own hours, you're doing your CrossFit, you're doing your thing, you're doing it all right and I just love having you in the community and knowing that you're out there. So, I really do hope that your story here that you've been sharing and your example will inspire others to be themselves and to get out of the house and if that can get them into a martial arts studio and you can find some other people just like you or just looking to fight of happy life and find their own way I really think this has been valuable so I appreciate all of your time here sir.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, thanks for having me it's been an honor, pleasure to talk to you as always, you know I hope it happens again soon. It doesn't have to be recorded but, maybe I'll do that anyway and I'll tell you.

Sensei Ando:

Now of course I do have to take your confession about running amuck on our road ways I do have to submit this podcast to the authorities in your local area to make sure they're on the watch out for you in your motor cycle and your sports car there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's fine they won't catch me.

Sensei Ando:

Oh wow, a challenge as well to the law enforcement community. You heard him folks, if people would like to continue to follow your journey please let us know where can we find you?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, the hub for everything we do is whistlekick.com, there's no punctuation in there it's the word whistle and the word kick. Anybody from New England area or might be a fan of American whisky, we are not whistlepig which is also based in Vermont. I have a lot of friends trying to urge some co marketing on that and if I can find the hook I will. And from whistlekick.com you can get to our podcast which is whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. All the social media which is @whistlekick everywhere I'm not hard to find, there are only a few Jeremy Lesniaks in the world, we're all friends on Facebook and if you see stuff related to goats although there's a decent high school football player named Jeremy Lesniak right now that's not me. So.

Sensei Ando:

Alright, perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Start at whistlekick.com and the rest is pretty easy.

Sensei Ando:



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I love it well, I thank you again for being a great role model out there and for all the work you're doing and I hope your journey continues and you keep fighting for a happy life sir.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thanks for having me you too.

Sensei Ando:

I don't know about you but I feel better everytime I meet another person making the same journey as I am. A different path maybe, I don't have earrings but the same journey. Like I said you'll find links to both Jeremy's company whistlekick and his podcast whistlekickmartialartsradio.com in the show notes for the episode over on fightforahapptlife.com. Until next time smiles up my friend, let that smile be your shield and your sword, keep fighting for a happy life.

For more podcasts, videos and articles, visit SenseiAndo.com or fightforahappyliife.com.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As I listened back through to this interview it reminded me how comfortable I was with Sensei Ando. He's a good guy and the conversations that we've had both within and outside of interviews, our emails or social media commentary to each other I just like him. He's a likeable guy and I don't get any sense at anything he's putting on as contrived. I hope that if you haven't you will check out his show fight for a happy life when I say I listened to and I listen to every episode I mean that, I do. I listen to every episode. I don't listen to every episode of every podcast I listen but his is one that I always make sure to check out because it is so well done and because I know a tremendous amount of thought and insight is going to be behind and inside every episode so check that out. If you want to check out what we've got going on its whistlekick.com it's whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, that's all for today. Until next time, train hard, smile maybe smile twice in honor of Sensei Ando and have a great day.