



Episode 12 – Master Joe Lenahan | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello everyone and welcome to episode 12 of [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com). I'm your host Jeremy Lesniak and I'm also the founder of whistlekick, the place for amazing sparring gear and really cool stuff for martial artists. If you're new to the show, you can learn more about our products at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and you can learn more about this show including past episodes show notes and a lot more at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). As a thank you for being an early listener to the show, we're going to give you 30% off any purchase at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) just use the coupon code `podcast1` at checkout and that code's good through the end of June. On today's show, we have Master Joe Lenahan, a taekwondo instructor from Vermont. Master Lenahan and I run in the same circles in fact I trained with him the day we recorded this but he's a great guy with some great stories to tell and I thought it will be right to bring him on to share them. Joe Lenahan welcome to [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com).

**Joe Lenahan:**



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Welcome, thank you appreciate you having me here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool, this will be fun.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Looking forward to it. So why don't you start off telling everyone a little bit about your history with the martial arts, how you got started and when and all that. Martial arts, how you got started and when and all that.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Sure. Well I lived in St. Johnsbury, Vermont and back in 1982 Mr. Rick Menard opened up a school in St. Johnsbury and watching Bruce Lee movies I was like I got to go to class and it was his first time instructing his own school so I went and trained with him for 3 or 4 years. I think I was somewhere around 10 or 11 when I started and when I got to high blue belt and then got into high school so I started working and kind of got done with martial arts for a while.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Good time we get a lot of people step away.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yes, and with college and I got married moved back to Bury or moved to Bury and it must have been 1994 that I was working at O2:20 market at the time cleaning floors and one the night stock guys was talking about Taekwondo and I was like oh hey I used to do was talking about Taekwondo and I was like oh hey I used to do Taekwondo and he told me about Master Rotta so in October of '94 I went to Master Rotta's and I've been there ever since so it's 20 years since last October.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So that was a little bit of a drive.



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**Joe Lenahan:**

From Bury yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

More than a lot of people will drive to a martial arts school you know 30minutes.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah it was worth it and I met folks that were from Bury as well, Mr. Pocket and Ms. Kelly and we carpool.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh well that's cool.

**Joe Lenahan:**

And we go to his house before and we drink a pot of coffee and go to class and work out hard come back and yeah it was fun.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool, so let's kind of jump into this to you know lead you in with some light questions and easy to answer stuff and I'm going to hit you with the hard stuff.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Just like the martial arts, so why don't you tell us your best martial arts story.

**Joe Lenahan:**

I've been thinking about that ever since you started these shows and I've been listening to everyone else I don't think I'll top any of them but I'll try. I'd have to say at least for total physicality of it at Master



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Rotta's he was going through a rough patch and we would work out insane tons of push-ups, tons of sit ups, double chest protectors.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He's taken it out on his students.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, it was awesome and you know made us really strong and just to look back the way we trained during that period was just awesome.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How long did that last?

**Joe Lenahan:**

I'd have to say 6 months and then it you know it didn't totally turned down the dial but you know he's off a little bit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay he got through that rough patch.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Well yeah, he did.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Were you thankful or?

**Joe Lenahan:**

For the work outs?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah that he got through his time...



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**Joe Lenahan:**

Ah of course yeah yeah yeah. He's awesome.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

6 months of a lot of

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know heavy calisthenics.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah it was a good time though and it was a lot of bonding a lot of hanging out after class at his house and ordering pizza and BSing and talking about, we actually have a history I didn't know him when I first started back in '92, '82 but we have the same lineage like I trained with Mr. Menard. He trained with GM Twing, GM Twing was Master Decker's student, instructor and Master Decker was Mr. Menard's student so our instructor and then Master Rotta trained with Master Twing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right so you're, all tied.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, we know the same people. It was pretty cool talking about.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So that's kind of a neat perspective of what people don't get to interact with their instructors on that level to spend time at their house and ordered pizza and really get to know them there. How would you say that's changed your relationship or maybe not changed because you didn't really have it before without that but has that given you, you think of a better relationship with your instructor?

**Joe Lenahan:**



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I think we're close, yeah. I think 06:15 he is a good friend.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's something that starting to come though with the discussions that I'm having with people that those that are sticking around for a long time are making the martial arts part of their life moving on passing down what they learned, opening schools. They seem to have stronger relationship with their instructor than others that don't and so what I'm going to be interested to see as time goes on is can you kind of look at instructors and predict the success of their students by how open they are personally to their students and I don't know the answer yet, there maybe something there.

**Joe Lenahan:**

There's got to be a study on that somewhere.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If not we can.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Start one.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Make in, yeah, we can use the interviews here not exactly being scientific but that's okay. When you think about your life as the martial arts has threaded itself though it and you know now I, if I'm doing the math right we can say the majority of your life is involved.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

the martial arts, think about some of the things that you've gained from it and what would you say are the major benefits for you that have come out your time in the martial arts.

**Joe Lenahan:**



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I think the biggest gain that I've had besides meeting a ton of great people and being friend with a bunch of them is calmness. Not over reacting to situations, I'm sure I still do as most people do but not initially over reacting. When either threatened or something small happens at home or at work, it's just staying calm.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Was that something that challenged you before?

**Joe Lenahan:**

It did, yes, I right out of college I worked for a floor cleaning company, you know and it wasn't what I wanted to do and I was married, I still am and young children just want to do better so I was stressed and I wasn't the most pleasant person to be around but joining Master Rotta's class and having been there for a while it really calms you down. You know just to get a different perspective on things to kind of know what your limitations are to know your strengths and it's okay to ask for help.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah absolutely.

**Joe Lenahan:**

It definitely calmed me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay now you mentioned staying calm in certain situations and I don't know if you're hinting at it, listeners might be able to tell that you know I know you pretty well so I know a little bit about who you are and you've spent some time as a bouncer? Was that the appropriate term?

**Joe Lenahan:**

It is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, it, I don't know if you were hinting at it there or if that's just what I picked up on but you know is there something to be said for that your ability to remain calm amongst drunken idiots?





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**Joe Lenahan:**

To say the least, especially when you get someone screaming at you cause you're not going to let them in the door because they either don't have an ID with them or they're intoxicated and they don't understand they can't come in to a bar if they're drunk and explaining that to them and when they're going up one side then on the other and they are trying to push you around, it's just to be calm cause you know what you can do and there's no reason for me to harm them.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

True.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Other than when they start getting really pushy and you just help them out the door but yeah to stay calm I mean it's important and a lot of times I've had people after they've yelled at me and I've walked them out thanked me for not being a jerk to them. I think it goes a long way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We don't talk about it a lot in Taekwondo but of course, core to a lot of the, in a lot of karate styles which is what I originally grew up with. The whole yin yang and so that's what I'm thinking there you know they're coming at you with extreme aggressiveness, aggression and you're just kind of turning their back around and let them get it all out and you know even they in a drunken state are recognizing the benefit there and

**Joe Lenahan:**

Not always.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sure not always. You got any stories that there are fun one maybe you could share?

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**





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Somebody doing something ridiculous.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Stupid thing, there was, I was working at a bar here in Bury and one of my best friends was working with me, he's a big muscle guy and intimidating looking but he used to tell me he's like I don't know why there are, I can see why there are threatened by me cause I'm large but they should be threatened by you. But there was one time someone was coming in, there was a group of guys and they were drunk. Two of them weren't it was a guy's bachelor party and I was like wow you know I can't let you in and so I looked at the guy's ID anyway and he's saying he was from St. Johnsbury and I was like oh I used to be from St. Johnsbury coming to find out I graduated high school with him. So, he's expecting me to let him in, and I was like ah you know that's great though good to see you again but I can't let you in because you've had too much to drink. So, he starts walking away and he calls me four eyes I was like you serious? I just thought, I just had a laugh

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's the best he could do.

**Joe Lenahan:**

That's the best he could do.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And of course, that's not going to get any kind of response

**Joe Lenahan:**

No, I laughed.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Maybe a lesser person you know, someone who wasn't as calm that didn't have that.

**Joe Lenahan:**

No, it was funny my buddy and I are sitting there and it was just like, seriously he just said that?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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It's like being in third grade all over again.

**Joe Lenahan:**

And there's others you know like where there were fights and stuff like that. There was one story when I worked at a different bar and a couple of my students are actually bouncers at this bar and I'm working there with Mr. Grout, one of my students and it was 4 or 5 guys that were drunk causing problems and we were asking them to leave and there's one guy had just bought a beer and was downing it and Mr. Grout's like you can't finish that, you got to go. We've asked you to leave which is the way it is. So, he's yelling at Mr. Grout calling him all sorts of names. Mr. Grout has he's I think he's calmer than I am and I have the guy by the arm, he gets out like out of my grip and he pushes me and it was just like a light bulb went off in Mr. Grout's eyes and he had the guy against the bar with his elbow in the guy's throat. It was just like a pit bull, it was like ah and then out the door and I was like wow, I got my own body guard.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How did that feel as his instructor? Watching those instincts kick in.

**Joe Lenahan:**

It was awesome, yeah, I felt really well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't think too many martial arts instructors get to see their students in action and then here you go in a situation where

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He's not I mean I'm sure in the moment that that guy was in discomfort but he didn't hurt him, he didn't break his arm he didn't kick him in the head.

**Joe Lenahan:**

No.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He reacted in an appropriate time with appropriate force to arguably diffuse a situation, to bring things down so everybody was okay.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, he got him into the bar and got him out and the guy was taller so the guy had picking on Mr. Grout and then when that happened the guys eyes went large and kind of shocked right up.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's got to be the if not the pinnacle of pride 14:47

**Joe Lenahan:**

And again, it's not a story about me but Mr. Grout I wasn't there I don't work at any bars anymore but one of my next-door neighbors is a police officer in town got called to the bar for a fight and he asked Mr. Grout to watch his back because there was people coming up behind him and there was just one guy real big military guy who was drunk and I guess he was causing someone of a fuss. I don't know if he charged Mr. Grout or something but Mr. Grout got him on the ground and the guy I guess the guy was 15:26 and again it was awesome you know just to hear that he has that control.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure.

**Joe Lenahan:**

To diffuse a situation.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And he's not a big guy you know Mr. Grout of course I know him, I've trained with him and he's an excellent martial artist but 5'8", 5'9"

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, yeah



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

160-70 pounds.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, it'll probably be less than that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not a large man by any means.

**Joe Lenahan:**

No but if I was to get in a fight 15:58 or something, he would be the person I'd want on my side.

He's somebody you want 16:01 for sure

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

those are great stories, see and you said you weren't going to have any stories to share. I told you. So, let's kind of switch gears, think about a low point, think about a personal challenge that you had to overcome at some point in your life that you were able to tap into all these martial arts experience in training to work through or overcome or better or however it may be.

**Joe Lenahan:**

I guess maybe I had hip, my hip replaced and it really wasn't a low point but it was just something I had to do but you know instead of stopping, listening to the doctors and then tell me you're an idiot for doing this again just to keep moving forward and having perseverance and 16:56 spirit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Taekwondo tenets.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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What was it like as a Taekwondo practitioner you know losing your kind of losing your legs for a little bit and?

**Joe Lenahan:**

Little bit? tumbling, I got faster with my hands.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I can attest to that.

**Joe Lenahan:**

You do what you got to do and move on and that's about it you can't sit there and complain about it and worry about it. You know I think of Master 17:35 here in Bury who's he's had hip replaced and you know he's at full splits again so it's definitely something I can get back to attaining.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, he's still a world class fighter.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah most definitely.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'd like you think about all the people that have had an influence in your martial arts career, life and other than your immediate instructors, other than Master Rotta and the other few that you've mentioned, who's had the biggest impact?

**Joe Lenahan:**

Besides my family, definitely my wife and my kids for letting me do this and you know let me be out at night 'til late and you know and helping out at tournaments on weekends and things like that. I'd say friends that I've met along the way like there was a time period with Mr. Pocket that was instrumental and helping me get through a bunch of my testings. Master Bringham in Florida when he was up here in Bury, helped out a bunch and was a role model.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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What did you look up to in him?

**Joe Lenahan:**

He's got a good, he's really good at instructing, his forms are phenomenal and then he will come up every so often and he'll teach a class and I'm always learning something new about whether it'd be a form or something someone else that he's training with, he'll bring to class. He's just like a lot of people that I know in the martial arts the more than willing to share what he knows.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, he is a phenomenal instructor, I've had the pleasure of working with him only one time

**Joe Lenahan:**

And I have locked out a couple of trips I had to do at work for training so I had been down 19:50 and I got to go down 19:53 and train with him a few times.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh great.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah it was fun.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool

**Joe Lenahan:**

And I'd say most recently besides my students he always learning whether it be boxing skills or student that did kung fu in the past. A lot of the students bring things with them in, that they've done prior. Daniel Hearts who works at 20:24 with me comes a couple of times a month to train with stick fighting and jujitsu and small circle jujitsu which is a blast and his instructor sensei smith is a phenomenal instructor as well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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You're pretty about that bringing another people in.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Oh sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know in a way that I think is wonderful and it's one of the reasons I love coming to your classes but it's certainly you're more open than the majority of people that teach martial arts and you know is that part of your philosophy is there something you can speak to about that?

**Joe Lenahan:**

I just think it's good to let people experience something else and to bring in. I mean we do self-defense and a lot of the self-defense we do is probably from aikido some from jujitsu for the ground defense we do, what was that aikido and why not learn it from the people that actually teach it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure.

**Joe Lenahan:**

I don't know I just think it helps people grow.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I would agree. I think it's great, it's something that I wish more schools were open to doing. Have you participated in martial arts competition?

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah when I was a kid I was with Blue wave so there was requirements to go to you know I'm not like going to, it wasn't like I had to go but I like going to them. So, we would compete, Keene State College and up in Magog Canada, Newport Vermont and all around New England and then one Master Rotta headed tournaments I'd compete there and I think once or twice I may have competed at Master Yordin's but generally speaking I'll go help and just recently I've had a lot of my students like to compete so that's been fun.





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What do you think some of the benefits of competition are?

**Joe Lenahan:**

Public speaking for one, you have to get up in front of people that they all have black belts and they can be very intimidating but to get up there and you know say your name, say your form and to go do your form and to gi up and fight people you don't know and break boards you know I think it's just a confidence booster. Especially I see it in the young kids that go I have 2 students that didn't want anything to do at tournaments and then GM Dun Lavey told me about the 23:08 he throws every year and how it's really good for first time competitors and he has games and stuff.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

For listeners that an event that we have here in Vermont that's children only.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Right

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And it's definitely a lot more low key instead of sitting in the bleacher waiting for their name to be called, there are games going on all day it's a much more engaging experience for kids.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah and the kids had a ball and they were all excited for his next tournament which was the normal type of tournament

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure

**Joe Lenahan:**

And they all competed in all events and they all did well, brought medals back and they just had a blast and the adults you know same thing they like the competition of it.



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**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah great. If you could train with any martial artist living or dead, someone you haven't trained with before who might that be and why?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know this is one of those questions too that listening to all of the other people you've spoken with already I really like the one about training with GM Dun Lavey in the younger years. I don't have anything like that, I was going to say my students. You know I like training with my students you know Sensei Smith and Daniel Hearts.

**Joe Lenahan:**

You've already done that

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've already done that.

**Joe Lenahan:**

So, if a genie has popped up and has given you a very narrow wish.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'd have to probably if it's specific to Taekwondo General Chae. I've watched a lot of YouTube videos on him and how he does forms and teaches and I think it'd be pretty cool to learn it straight from the person.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Sure, I mean how often do you get to do that? You know very few people have.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Very few.

**Joe Lenahan:**



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That would be cool, step back. Awesome. Do you have a favorite martial arts movie? That too I was thinking oh god what people have already taken a lot of them the best of the best is a great movie.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

They're not really taking them it's

**Joe Lenahan:**

Or saying them, I don't want to repeat. There's one movie that I remember watching years ago I think it's called angel town and it's with Olivier Gruner. He's I think he's from France, I think it's 25:39 that he does.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay I haven't heard of this.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah but a lot of action, it's good takes place in Los Angeles

25:51

And its about honor and doing the right thing and taking the right path.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh cool

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, it's good fun,

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How about a favorite actor?

**Joe Lenahan:**

Jason Statham how current, he's awesome.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, he's incredible. He's phenomenal.

**Joe Lenahan:**

And like you know the other person you spoke to about it, I have no idea what his background 26:16 but he's just great to watch. I'll sit down with my son and you know we'll watch movies of him.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Ahh that was episode 6 with Shihan Wayne Mellow who mentioned Jason Statham and so in the you know to flash out the show notes I always go and I do the research you know there's very little on the web about his martial arts background but anybody that's watched his movies, it's clear that he's got some and at the very least a tremendous amount of skill being able to adapt and work with choreographers and everything it's pretty incredible.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But he's an amazing athlete just very fit and clearly very aware of his body.

**Joe Lenahan:**

And there's one person, I think he might have acted in some movies but he's a fight choreographer Jean Frenette.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I know that name.

**Joe Lenahan:**

And he the only reason I bring that up is when I was a kid I had his stretching books he does a lot of forms, musical forms and he's phenomenal at them but I was at this training for work in Ontario a few months ago and this guy that I'm in class with we got to talking one night and he's from Montreal, his



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next-door neighbor is Jean Frenette. He's moved in a few months ago and he was telling me all about him and I was like oh yeah, I know all about him.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh neat.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah that's pretty cool.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And then sneak over to his house and say hi.

**Joe Lenahan:**

Over at Ontario, it's like 5, 6 hours away but I still have the guy's cards so I'm like maybe I'll give him a shout when I'm up there for work next time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How about books any martial arts books you'd recommend?

**Joe Lenahan:**

I remember reading the book of 5 rings, I think it's called.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did you like about that?



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**Joe Lenahan:**

It's a lot like the, I can't remember the actual name of the book war really really

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The Sun Tzu art of war

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah, it's somewhat like that, just having to think about what they're saying you know the whole thing about nothingness and a lot really metaphysical.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a really kind of pulling in the philosophical roots for the martial arts. Cool

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Any martial arts related goals for the future?

**Joe Lenahan:**

As we were talking about tonight, the class I want to test for my 5th degree at some point and really the only reason is 1 it's a goal and something to attain but so I can test my students. I have a third-degree class so in order to test her for fourth I need to be a fifth.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeap

**Joe Lenahan:**

And other than that to get my flexibility back, I got to work, work on it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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It's a good goal to have

**Joe Lenahan:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool, so what do you got going on right now anything you want to share?

**Joe Lenahan:**

I don't know just keep plugging away if you're everyone has a plateau in their martial arts career or their regular career or their life or boyfriends girlfriends husbands wives and then just keep plugging away it's worth 29:53

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely I agree. And the people who want to reach you?

**Joe Lenahan:**

I have a Facebook page called Lenahan's black belt academy

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay so of course we'll link that in the show notes so people can check that out. Okay cool anything else.

**Joe Lenahan:**

No thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Alright thank you appreciate having you here on [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com).

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