



Episode 242 – Shihan Mike Sartwell | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello. This is [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com). My name's Jeremy Lesniak and thank you for tuning in to episode 242. Today we hear from Shihan Mike Sartwell, a martial arts practitioner and instructor from New Hampshire, he's the owner of NIMMA martial arts and he's a man with a powerful story. I wanna thank you for tuning as I said my name's Jeremy Lesniak, I'm the founder of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel and I'm your host on martial arts radio. Thanks for tuning in, thanks for spending some time with me, thanks for spending some time with Shihan Sartwell and I wanna thank everyone for the 241 episodes that led up to this one all the wonderful support you have shown us. If you're new to the show you might wanna check out all the great things that we've got going on and you can find all of them at whistlekick.com, for martialartscalendar.com to martialartsmemes.com all the multitude of websites that we produce as well as our wonderful award-winning sparring gear, our great apparel, some accessories just good stuff and it's all out there to benefit you, our traditional martial artist. We don't talk about it very much but we are exclusively a traditional martial arts supplier. You are never going to see MMA products coming from us, why? because there are plenty of other people making great MMA stuff and we are choosing to focus on the world that we know best, the world that I know best, the traditional martial arts. Our guest today Shihan Mike Sartwell of the National Institute of Modern Martial Arts in New Hampshire, not too far from me. To be honest, I'm excited with this interview because it's long overdue. He's a martial artist from way back, from reading books and movies to his first



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training when he was a teen. Shihan Sartwell has a very interesting story involving the choice between two things that he holds dear, so let's hear that story. Shihan Sartwell, welcome to [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com).

Mike Sartwell:

Awesome, glad to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey I'm glad to have you here you know it's I will take full responsibility you should have been on the show a while ago. I apologize for not inviting you and I think because I thought I did you know there's a whole list, listeners you may imagine there's a list of people that are on the ask list and sometimes they take a while to make it on and sometimes they say no cause they're too busy or maybe they say no for other reasons that we won't get into but it's a long list and it's hard to remember who's on the list and who's not on the list and it was just completely my fault that you weren't on the list so I'm sorry.

Mike Sartwell:

Well I certainly do appreciate that and I'm happy to talk to you today, that's for sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great I'm happy to talk to you too and you know I'm looking forward to learning more about you cause I've gotten to know you listeners you know we're not too far away from each other, I've enjoyed getting to know Shihan over the last couple of years with tournaments and everything else that we've got going on but I really don't know you that well so this is gonna be my opportunity to learn more about you just as all those listeners are gonna learn about you so I'm excited.

Mike Sartwell:

Perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, we start in a way that seems kinda boring but I think we've gotta start there, how did you become a martial artist?

Mike Sartwell:



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Well in I have to say that I always wanted to be a martial artist even when I was a kid before I took official lessons, I mean I watched the movies I mean I remember having mock fights in the back yard with my imaginary ninja foes but when I was 17 my older sister, started taking martial arts and I asked her if I could go along, I did 2 months later she quit and I never did, this is I'm really marking my 30th year doing martial arts this year

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow so you always wanna do, to do martial arts you watch the movies I mean that's kind of a similar origin story to the majority of the guests that we've had on the show I'd say especially folks of our age-ish you know it doesn't seem to be what brings in newer folks but you know certainly those that were training in the 60s to 90s definitely but why I guess that's where I wanna dig in.

Mike Sartwell:

Well I do have to say I mean my childhood I mean even though I look back on it fondly and I my head it was I mean it was I was a very happy kid but I certainly have some struggles growing up I mean my dad was an alcoholic I mean he was on the abusive side and so I mean maybe the martial arts was just a way to help me kind of power myself above that. I remember watching, I mean I read a lot of comic books when I was a kid I mean I was I'm on the smaller size frame wise especially back then before the martial arts and I think that was just a way for me to kind of empower my body and my mind to bring me up out of that, that weak dominant state.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay awesome so what was it you know you started and you must have found something cause you have a school now you know not everyone sticks with the martial arts certainly doesn't stick with the martial arts as long as you have. What was it you found, it must have been fairly early that grabbed you, what held you then?

Mike Sartwell:

I have to say I think I mean it felt to me like I was a natural, I mean I didn't play basketball or football or soccer I mean I wasn't in the athletics as a kid, I didn't do any athletics in high school at all, but the first time walking out on the floor I mean it just felt natural for me I remember being in my first school I mean at the yellow belt level beating the brown belts in sparring and I'm just feeling like it was super good fit for me and I mean I had an instructor well more I mean I go to his seminars I like him a lot 06:31 he's from California and he talked about that the students who stick with it finds success in the beginning and that's one of the I mean that's one of the secrets of having retention is making sure that



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your kids find success in the very beginning of their training because they 06:51 to be successful and then that's how they fell in love with it. If you're kind of too harsh on them in the beginning and they don't have that success, that's the perfect way to lose a student.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That makes a lot of sense and how have you worked to make sure they see those early successes is it similar to what you experienced when you started or have you gone off and developed some different techniques?

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah well, I mean it is 100% different from when I when I started I mean I came back from I mean my first instructor was 07:25 in New London was Shaolin Kempo and I did 3 years with him and it was pretty hard training and then I went then my second school I started in 89 was the National Institute of Modern Martial Arts whom I'm heading now. Yeah and I have to say it was a small school with a hard core militaristic type instruction where you're at attention a lot and it was very, very stressful and I have to say that our school was pretty small at that time cause only 1 or 2 % of the population can handle that type of training. So, one of the things one of my other mentors Tony Fornier in Maine he talks about do you want an excellent white belt or an excellent black belt so if you're pushing the white belts too soon and you're expecting them to be at black belt level at white belt that is a great way to lose that student. So, the trick is not to bash your confidence in the beginning and allow them to be successful within their own pace cause every student is different. So, if you can allow your students to be successful at white belt and nurture them up to black belt and make sure they're excellent at black belt cause they don't have to be black belt level at white belt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That makes sense and it's certainly something that's it could be difficult that you know, I know you.

Mike Sartwell:

Teach and I know that a lot of the folks that we have listening have instructed whether it's their own school or just assisting. It can be really hard to let people be where they're at and remember that they've gotta get to where you're trying to get them. They're not gonna just instantly get there and that's why I'm so firmly encouraging of people to always remain a student because if you reach a point where you're only an instructor it's easy to forget what it's like to be a student and I don't know if you fell the same way but I think students make better teachers.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, you mean I definitely mean I always have somebody that I'm going to continue my education through both as a martial artist and as a business owner because both of those takes you know a lot of skill really and you can't expect to do it on your own even if you've been doing it for 30 years. You should always have an instructor or a mentor to help you along. You can never get anywhere you wanna go on your own.

Mike Sartwell:

I agree, completely agree. Cool. We're getting starting to build a picture of who you are and what makes you tick but now it's story time. I love stories.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Alright. Stories are the foundation of this show as everyone knows and I'd love to know what is your favorite martial arts story?

Mike Sartwell:

My favorite martial arts story, so I mean I have some 10:41 martial arts stories like I remember being and doing a school talk with my instructor, it must have been maybe 1990 I think. I mean I was a brown belt at the time we're in the class and we're standing 10:56 and he's lecturing the class on how martial arts can I mean makes us even block out pain and you can be focused and you can carry through and he turned around and he elbowed me so hard in the chest that knocked me back into the desk and I remember and I jumped back up and I snapped back out into attention thinking holy cow man that really hurt so in my head I was like thinking, well maybe it didn't block out the physical pain but it certainly has enabled me to control my body despite of the pain and which is a good lesson to learn as we become an older martial artist cause if you're still training, something always hurts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hard to get away from that pain, what was the students' reaction?

Mike Sartwell:

I mean their like wow, they were they thought it was the coolest thing they ever saw well I'm like going 11:58 and he got me pretty good.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I think a lot of us can

Mike Sartwell:

But 12:03 he was my instructor from 1989 to 1998 so I spent a lot of time a time with him in he certainly became one of my role models, father figure I mean he spent a lot a lot of time kind of molding me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You used the term father figure and that's not something that everyone uses in describing their instructor that parental or pseudo parental relationship. It sounds like maybe there's a little more there than just teaching?

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, we really mean, we spent 10 years being together almost every single day cause I mean when I tell my kids if you wanna get good at martial arts there's 3 secrets, come to class, work as hard as you can in class and practice at home. I mean that's the secrets to success, there's no shortcut to that. So, I went to class twice a day every day for I mean for my whole life I've always trained more than once a day everyday for my whole entire life and he was there and he was I mean he was on top of me all the time and he put me on some tough situations. I remember when I just got my black belt, it is probably 1991 1992 and he 13:33 gym in Manchester I'm not, I don't really think I'm not sure if, if it's even still open I am I don't think so and he called up and they were looking for some people that do some kickboxing and he hung up the phone and he came out and he said alright grab your gear, we're going to Manchester tonight and you're gonna do your first kickboxing match and luckily I won but I have to say that was an experience for being a tournament fighter who's never even walked into a kickboxing ring or trained kickboxing, that was quite the experience but I think I mean in his mind if he was challenging me I was growing. So if you let me kinda say where I'm comfortable I mean that's not the place where you wanna be and again I tell my students that if you wanna grow, you gotta go out of your comfort zone, you can't do what you do every single day and expect different results so I'm always telling them challenge yourself do a tournament do something you haven't done and I mean I've and done that my whole life is try to pick something new all the time that I haven't done before cause if you're not going forward you're moving backwards.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I like that, I can imagine what it must have been like to hear you're competing in a kickboxing match this evening what sounds like zero kickboxing preparation.

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, he said nothing I was just I mean I was a tournament fighter and I like tournament fighting and I competed quite a bit in that realm but it's a whole different game cause you didn't know the rules. I remember just doing stupid things like I was like lean on the rope put my hands up just lean away and I would just kick the guy that they came in and I guess that's illegal. So, I mean I'm sure it didn't look like the most polished kickboxing even though I did win that match.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Was that you're only kickboxing match?

Mike Sartwell:

No, I did one other so I have a record of one and one and winning is way more fun. Remember fighting the guy I mean I was winning I 15:34 his nose up in the first round and then blood everywhere and I was feeling pretty confident until for the next 2 rounds he just covered up and stepped inside of me and you know he didn't knock me out but I mean I think it was a pretty close fight, that he ended up winning that match so I have a one and one so I did 2 matches and that was enough cause I mean I wanna protect my head.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right as you said winning is a lot more fun and the moment you take that first loss it kinda changes your perspective.

Mike Sartwell:

Sure yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It doesn't sound like you have a lot of time for it but outside of martial arts are there things that you're passionate about?

Mike Sartwell:



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16:14 You know I have really, really dedicated every spare moment to the martial arts my whole entire life I mean when I was younger I used to do a lot of triathlons which I thought was when that was fun and I've done marathon running I mean I don't do that anymore because if I'm not, I'm running the school and training I'm I mean I'm hanging out with my 2 beautiful girls and my wife.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Doesn't sound like a bad life, training, teaching and family

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, I have the best life ever I mean I teach martial arts and I'm healthy, my family is beautiful and my little girls adore me and you'll never hear me complain about anything cause my life is perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When did you know you wanted to be a martial arts instructor.

Mike Sartwell:

I mean my I remember the first few months in martial arts I was standing in front of the mirror trying to make, working on all the techniques that we work in class or in punches, making sure my alignment was ready and I remember saying no matter what I'm gonna get my black belt I mean just from the very first day on the floor I remember doing that and then and of course my instructor, I was running my own class at purple belt I mean just I mean a year and a half and my instructor gave me my own class to teach and that class became one of the most popular on at that time in the school. So, I mean I just really love sharing and if I could do martial arts with anybody I was just 18:00 happy with that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I wanna talk about that for a second because the idea of having someone you know purple belt in your system is a middle rank, right would 18:11

Mike Sartwell:

Right intermediate level yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Okay that's not something that's going to happen in a lot of schools I mean I think most of us 18:18

Mike Sartwell:

Well and I have to say what would happen in my school now but so we have to think when I was taking lessons back in my school we might have had 30 to 40 students training at that time so the bench rank wasn't very, very big. there was no other, there was no other really instructor to teach a class.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, right but I

Mike Sartwell:

So, it was kind of out of necessity

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure

Mike Sartwell:

But now that NIMMAs been around for the I mean the same school that I'm running now has been around since 98. I have, let me see 1, 2 ,3, 4, 5, 6, 7 I mean I have 40 black belts, inactive black belts in a given time of training,

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow

Mike Sartwell:

So, I have so I wouldn't realize I would not do that now but back then there wasn't a whole lot of extra black belts so it was out of necessity I think at that time

Jeremy Lesniak:

And where I'm gonna go with this is certainly not a critical place, just bear with me for a moment, I think a lot of us as you said you know sometimes it's out of necessity you if you're teaching a class and there's



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a very clear distinction in what needs to be taught sometimes there is a benefit in taking someone who maybe isn't ready in the traditional sense to lead but I'm going to guess that you rose to the occasion number 1 and number 2 that was pretty formative in your desire to teach and move on. When I asked you when did you know that's when you're expressing that you knew earlier than you know probably most people don't get the opportunity to teach at that level at that rank and there's a lot of benefit, anybody that's trying to teach

Mike Sartwell:

Yes, and I agree so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really basic stuff for the first time knows holy cow teaching and knowing are two very different things.

Mike Sartwell:

Right yeah teaching certainly 20:17 right I mean nothing really comes together until you're a teacher I mean every little minor detail if you know it or not you know immediately if you need nif you have that technique or not. So, the difference is that I was thrown into the class he gave me the key I opened the door and I taught the class. I mean so do I let my younger my lower brown belts in higher intermediate to teach yes I do I actually encourage it and if they really want to progress quicker it's kind of required but what I would never do is give them the floor and leave the floor and go do something else which what happened to me I mean if you're gonna be a good teacher and if you wanna keep the quality of your school up, you gotta teach them to teach, you gotta give them small parts of your class then give them feedback and give them some like direction on how you want them to teach the class. If you're not doing that you're letting them flounder maybe they're developing bad techniques that's like teaching your students a move and leaving the floor and never checking on them if they've improved or not. So, it's a process just like anything else if you want good instructors, you gotta train them to be good instructors.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. Martial arts is the only pursuit I'm aware of where we just kind of wholesale assume, once you know something you know how to teach it.

Mike Sartwell:

That's right and it's not the case.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

It is the exact opposite.

Mike Sartwell:

I mean and luckily martial arts for me has been I mean I must have some sort of natural ability but I got another martial arts story. My first class ever teaching as purple belt I mean I have the class and we're doing you know Ippon kumite which is one step sparring and I remember my like person in front of me wasn't doing as well as I want him to so every time they miss I would block and I would 22:18 him in the ribs a little bit that kinda so they know that they weren't in right position and I remember that then after was there was a complain that I was being hard on the student in my head I was just teaching them where the opening was but obviously there was if I had an instructor with me they might have been able to hurt me for making that mistake in the beginning where which I would never do now cause that's just doesn't make sense, that's just not the best way to teach. So, there were some errors I made along the way not having maybe that direction, this is how you teach skills with me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah I'm gonna guess everybody out there that's taught before for more than a little while at least has had that experience of maybe going a little hard, expecting a little bit too much because we've all been the subject of the instructor you know expecting more from us rising to that occasion and realizing in hindsight hey I am capable of more than I thought, especially at lower ranks but then you know sometimes we overshoot on our expectation of lower students and maybe drill them a little bit harder than we needed to.

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah 23:33 because I mean that's how I was taught.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah

Mike Sartwell:

I mean I'm not even saying that my instructor probably wouldn't have done the same thing at that time but I think I have a better way now and just through going out and making sure that my skills were constantly improving.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

How has your teaching changed over the years?

Mike Sartwell:

Well I have to say that I'm actually probably more patient than I used to be. I'm less critical, I mean I 24:12 a little bit more making sure that I'm not busting my students' morale and confidence.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you mean by that, I get the metaphor but I just want everybody to understand.

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah so what you don't wanna do is just bash on your student all the time and keep telling them you know that's wrong, that's wrong, that's wrong what are you doing keep 24:33 diverge your power I mean you're really not doing well, man your guys are sucking out pretty much than I so if you do that then you're breaking their confidence and I can't tell my parents like martial arts instills confidence in your students if I'm busting their confidence. So, what I try to tend to do if they're making a mistake I try to frame it with man that's wrong your hands are up. that's really, really good maybe you should rotate your shoulder a little bit more and extend the arm to increase your power and man you really been coming across a lot good job just keep it up just make sure you're kind of I mean hitting that technique a little bit better. So that way is a they're hearing oh 25:16 I'm doing okay I just need to work on this one thing and then I can improve, instead of just saying man. where's your power or how come you're not throwing at harder today because yelling at your students that hit harder is not teaching. that's wrong you kinda have you kinda give them a little more than that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I had a great example of that last night, I was working with my instructor he handed off some lower ranks to me and we're going over some pretty fundamental stuff and what it was doesn't really matter so much, but instruction that I was giving, that just seems so clear that would have been completely apparent to anybody from a middle rank on up was completely lost on these novice children and I had to get in there and actually manipulate their body for them to be able to tie my verbal instruction to what I wanted their body to do and once I did that to each of them it was a whole different story.

Mike Sartwell:



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Yeah, I mean right part of the whole teaching mechanism is you gotta figure out I mean you know the verbal visual 26:24 I mean there's and you kinda if one way is not working you gotta be able to switch it up quickly to kinda hit more of the group with their learning style and that's challenging and that takes some skill and some practice.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah absolutely. One of the things that's kind of universal to life even though you said you have a perfect life, I'm sure it wasn't always. I'm sure there were times that things didn't go so well you know.

Mike Sartwell:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But as a martial artist you have a few more tools in your toolbox to pull from to move through those difficult times, tell us about one of them and how your martial arts helped.

Mike Sartwell:

So, you're talking about a low point in my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yes, some kinda challenge, I'll let you define that however.

Mike Sartwell:

So, I'm gonna okay I'm gonna blend that with one of the high points of my life so my high point and my low point of my life was the same day so 2000, July 31st 2010, I had been in the hospital with my wife for about 2 weeks. She was just at 25 almost 25 pregnant and the baby was coming every one of the 2 or not. So, I'm at the hospital and my daughter was born, 1 pound 10 ounces, she was little little little. So if I get emotional I apologize, I still have a hard time with that so we're in the hospital and she was sick I mean she had an infection she was on incubator she was on she was I mean in her incubator you know warm and monitored and their drawing blood and then stuff down her throat it was a scary day, it was a scary day and so at that time I was doing physical therapy and I had to decide right there cause I didn't know what was gonna happen she could have had physical, mental deficit and I didn't know what to do. So, I either had to quit my physical therapy job or I had to quit karate and at that time I mean I taught



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for free 28:56 free for 20 years I never made a dime on my training. I love teaching I love the school I love my students, so I just taught for free cause I was making money as a physical, doing physical therapy. So, I had to quit either physical therapy or my or karate and I have to say, I'll never quit karate so I quit my physical therapy job and I gave my notice I told them I mean I have to take care of my daughter. She's sick she's gonna be in the hospital for months so I did that. So, I was with my daughter she was in the hospital for 3 months and so we brought her home. she was on oxygen so I had I mean she needed constant constant care, so but she started to get better and so at that time I had 5 other people kinda running the school. We had bought a building together, no one was really, no one was making any money and I and they knew that I need to do something so they all stepped away I mean amazing people including Ramona Hastings, Scott Savage who are still associated with the school today, they stepped away they said here's the school and I have to say I don't think they thought I was gonna be able to make a living of the school pretty sure I might have heard that from them. So, I took over the school, I brought my daughter home and then she started getting better, she started getting better. So, today's she's 7 years old, she's absolutely beautiful she's smart, she's healthy and if for my indomitable spirit through the martial arts and my and just the effort and the sincerity that it took to make all these happen it could have turned out differently and my wife, she's awesome, I mean she's a strong-willed person and she was on those doctors and making sure that they are doing what they need to do. Oh, my wife is a nurse practitioner by the way so she certainly has training and she kept those doctors and nurses honest and 31:21 so I'm I mean I have lots of things for her too for doing that. So that was certainly one of the lowest parts of my life and just the community of martial artists that were surrounding me they just made it all happen for me and I'm forever grateful to them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a pretty powerful story and certainly anybody that's been through that can relate and not just that specific story but you know the love of a child that is maybe not on the easiest path especially at a young age but when did you, you were willing to step into martial arts, you were willing to step in and make a career out of something that had never made you money...

Mike Sartwell:

Right, which is scary by the way

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a tremendous leap of faith and I'm wondering if you can tell us about your mindset in doing that cause you must have had faith, you must have believed that it was going to work out and people don't make that jump believing it's not going to work out, so what was it that made you feel it would?



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Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, I knew it was gonna work out, it's so at that time when this was happening, the CBS we owned a building in town right next to where they put the CBS so they bought that building from us. So, we just got a little bit of money and so the other five people they took their share and they left. So, they made a little extra money there and I took all of that money and I refitted out a new space for the school. But still it wasn't enough so I guess I'm gonna do some promoting for some consultant so at that time I joined MAIA which is I'm not sure if people know what MAIA it's Martial Arts Industry Association and they helped business owners run their business. So, I started out with them and I talked to them so I joined their most basic program it's like 79 dollars a month so they kinda helped with some a little bit of marketing and I did that and that was really successful. So my 33:52 my business was starting to grow a little bit so the next year I went up to their next level which is their edge program and so they really help you with on the computer on their site with marketing in how to get new students and then on the third year I joined their MAIA leap which is their one of their top consulting agency and I started travelling to Las Vegas and they do couple other events in a year and from doing that my business just kind of got bigger and bigger and bigger and it is still growing it still hasn't stopped. So I mean I had other program such as my before and after school program and I actually joined another consulting group for that, the martial arts success team 34:42 to who are specializes in before and after school so I have them consulting me and that program is getting bigger and bigger so it's just like so I kinda figured my business is the same as my training that I need to find some good instructors to kinda help me move forward so that's what I did I guess that the my story on how the business grow using consultants which I still belong to those groups cause I mean they still help me I mean every month.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great, you've named quite a few people in the course of our conversation that have been influential on not just your martial arts but your life, your school and you know it's actually it's the complement of people you've had in your circles to help you move forward and I would argue that most successful people have quite a few around them that have helped, that they've learned from. If you had to pick one of those people who has been the most influential, and let's take out the instructor that you started teaching for the that unfortunately passed away, let's take him out of the mix cause we've already heard quite a bit about him. From the folks that are left, who would you say has been the most influential?

Mike Sartwell:

Well I mean people would influence you in different ways so Ramona Hastings who's you know she's one of the founders of NIMMA, she's influenced me on just giving me the ability to have the school and to kinda run from it so she was very influential. 36:24 Jones he was very influential in my martial arts



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training he did the Filipino martial arts piece with me and I really enjoy still practicing the Filipino piece of my training. Then there I mean a whole pile I can just give you a list cause I can't just pick one

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah go for it, yeah that's fine.

Mike Sartwell:

Okay, so Sensei 36:49 I've been with him for 15 years, he's an amazing Brazilian jujitsu judo practitioner so he actually brought Brazilian jujitsu and judo to my school and he's been hugely influential in my physical training cause I couldn't picture now not having a grappling base as my striking base cause if you're not doing both you're missing a piece so I really feel way more confident in my martial arts still having the grappling piece with my striking piece so he is hugely influential in my training. Scott Savage he's my top student he's been with me I mean over 20 years. He has my back I mean if I need anything he has never said no to me in his entire life, he is if he can help me he would give me anything so if anybody can have a student like that they are super super lucky. He actually, he's run my adult program for me now and he's just awesome. So, I mean that's in my inner circle of people who's influenced me the most for sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well great folks and it's clear how much respect and reverence you have for not just them but some of the other folks that you've mentioned today and it's just something that has really struck me, you know we have a lot of people on the show of course and everyone pays homage to someone at some point along the show but there just seems to be a bit more I don't know if humility's the right word but just appreciation I guess that's where I'm going more understanding of where you are because of these other folks that have come before you and just listening to you talk about them and nodding my head and saying yeah I had folks like that in my life that did this too or whatever else so it's great to know that I'm not alone that you're in there too with a long line of folks that have helped you get to where you are.

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, it's and if we have all day I mean I have a list of people who has influenced my martial arts cause I've always had an instructor outside of my immediate NIMMA circle I mean always I always had an instructor that I can depend on and get new information to bring back on to the students I you know I just got some stuff from Tony Fornier who's my consultant actually and he's amazing he did a really, I mean he's helped my school out tremendously.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice, if you could train with someone that you haven't, if you could add one person to that list that mix of folks that have helped you get where you are, they could be alive they could be dead, who would that be?

Mike Sartwell:

Let's see, who would I like to train with I mean it's certainly would be fun to train with some of the old Okinawan masters I know 40:04 from the shorin ryu system I would have liked to spend some time with him I hear that he was a really down to earth amazing instructor. I mean I think that's the one I would pick cause that was kind of where my lineage basically started with shorin ryu karate.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, let's talk about competition. You mentioned earlier that you'd been a tournament fighter, that you've done a couple of kickboxing matches. Where does competition fit in your life?

Mike Sartwell:

I started my, oh I'm sorry go ahead.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's alright. Where does competition fit in your life?

Mike Sartwell:

Well I have to say I started my competition training in 1987. I remember winning forms and fightings as a white belt at that tournament and I've I mean I was hooked I mean I have to say I think that I'm not a really active competitor until I hang out with people who are really active competitors so I mean I've always trained did maybe 4 to 8 tournaments a year even though some people blow out of the water with that so I consider that I was active for me I'm doing 4-8 tournaments a year I mean I loved it. I have to say some of my best friends that I have I've made through competing yeah so, I mean I certainly have won lots of trophies, lots of grands, I mean I fought I mean I fought a lot of different people but what I've gained out of the 30 years of competing is I've just made some of my best friends that I can ever think 41:46 to the tournament.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I think that's one of the aspects of competition that a lot of people underestimate. They forget about that when you go to competition routinely, you're going to see some of the same people. Not only are you going to end up with some kind of hopefully friendly nemesis. Someone to help push you to train harder to get better so you can you know hopefully best them the next time but you know remember the things that we do while we are training within our schools, the sweat, the blood, the effort all of that comes through in competition too so it's just another group of people that you can become friends with and I've said it on the show before, if it wasn't for my competitive career back when I was a teenager I would not have had the contacts to make whistlekick a reality. It would not have happened this show would not exist, none of the products that we make would be a reality. It's only because of the friendships and the relationships that I've founded in competition that this has happened so great to hear that again I'm not the only one.

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah sure it means and that's just a good I mean that's just a good example of presenting yourself well, treat people well, be respectful do your best and people will support you around you that's true.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Agree. Do you watch movies at all? Are you a fan of martial arts films, you said that they helped you get in to martial arts but do you still watch?

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, I mean I have to say I used to watch a lot of martial arts movies until I have a family. So, if you want me to talk about new movies forget it, I have no idea what's happening out there. But I think my favorite movie when I was coming up as a martial artist was the best of the best. I used to watch that film every before every tournament so I would watch that several times a year and I would watch the training sequence and just get myself pumped and then they're out there competing and even if it was hard they did it they may not have won but they gave their all and I just I mean I just really wanted to live that experience every single time. So, I really like the best of the best.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a great film absolutely. If movies aren't something that really make that find time in your life now how about books is there are there any books maybe related to your involvement with MAIA or you know something that's more style based?

Mike Sartwell:



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I mean I have to say if you look at my library of martial arts books which I have a shelf of them, they're all technical books. How to do jujitsu, judo box and I have it all separated out some karate books, kung fu books, weapon books so I have a pretty good library of how to do martial art books cause I've always liked to be, I never wanted to be in a box where I was only good at doing one thing, I really wanted to kinda have a more well-rounded martial arts space. So, one of my favorite books is the way of the warrior what is that Chris 45:12 he which is a book on great pictures of all the martial arts of the world. That's one of my favorite books I have 2 copies and one of them I think 45:24

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a book that's come up on the show before and folks just a reminder in case you're new to the show whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, that's where we have the show notes. You'll be able to get links and photos and check out other episodes and of course you know get the names of the books and anything else that we talked about so if you're driving or running on a treadmill or something you don't have to jot on your arm or risk a vehicle injury. What's keeping you going? You've accomplished a lot I mean you went from training to your own school a growing school I mean I think we can even say a flourishing school, you've got a great life.

Mike Sartwell:

Yeah, I just I mean I hit over 200 students I what I'm really looking for is to do exactly what I'm doing, teaching teaching if I can keep being the successful I might even try to hire out some of the administrative piece so I can just focus on teaching and maybe try to step away a little bit to spend more time with my family that's growing. So, I mean just a little bit cause I mean even if I take a week off I miss being on the dojo floor I just love it I still love it. Every time I walk through the door I still get that white belt feeling like oh I can't wait to do this technique with the group today.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How have you kept that feeling?

Mike Sartwell:

Well I think I've kept that feeling by not doing is branching out of the set curriculum of my school. If I have only done the set curriculum of my school for 30 years I may not be as excited I think. So, when I step out and I do and I learn a new judo or jujitsu technique I do a kempo seminar I do a weapons seminar and I can bring back that, that material. I think that keeps me fresh, I mean like I mean maybe I feel like a white belt because I'm only trying to do something new. I don't wanna keep doing the same



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thing everyday, I need to kinda challenge myself and my martial arts career. So, if I can learn something new I just love it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Alright now if anybody wants to get a hold of you and they're swinging through the New Hampshire area and they're interested in dropping by and maybe I don't know if you take dropping guests or anything, how would people find out what you've got going on, what's going on at your dojo and how would they reach you?

Mike Sartwell:

So, you can check out my school website which is NIMMA, N I M M A dojo.com, my website is there so if you wanna learn a little bit about the school, the instructor or what we do, you certainly can get all that information on my website and you can always give me a call 603 542 1733 and if I'm not there I would definitely give you a call back as soon as I can.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's awesome, I wanna thank you for your time here today and all the wonderful things that you've shared and if you could leave us with just one more thought some parting words, what would those be?

Mike Sartwell:

If you treat everybody with respect and consideration, wherever you go, that will come back to you a hundred times and you just surround yourself with positive people cause I mean that's what it's all about.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Shihan Sartwell is a dedicated and caring martial arts instructor. Over the last few years, I've gotten to know him and many of his students and every one of them including him, as a quality person, His love for teaching knows no bounds and maybe more importantly Shihan Sartwell is a devoted and caring family man. He never ceases to spend time with that family and make it a priority. His story is one we can all take inspiration from and I'm happy to call him my friend, thank you shihan Sartwell for coming on the show today. If you wanna check out the links to everything that we talked about today you can find them at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You should sign up for the newsletter while you're there and if you wanna check out everything that we do, you can find links, posts, products all of it at whistlekick.com. You can find us on social media we are @whistlekick everywhere you can imagine,



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from Facebook to twitter, to Pinterest, YouTube, tumbler, did I say Instagram, Instagram if I didn't say it and you can join us in our sort of not quite secret Facebook group [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](https://www.facebook.com/whistlekickMartialArtsRadio) behind the scenes it is the only place that we have sort of off topic podcast discussion. It's the only place that you can contribute to what is happening with the show and upcoming episodes. I wanna thank you for your time today I'm honored to be here with you in your ears wherever you may be. Until next time train hard, smile and have a great day.