



Episode 256 – Sensei Chuck Merriman | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everyone, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio episode 256. Today we welcome Sensei Chuck Merriman to the show. If you're new to the show, I want to thank you for tuning in. If you're coming back, thanks for coming back. I appreciate your time and as I've said on the show number of times, if you weren't here, I would just be a crazy guy talking to himself. If you're not sure who I am, my name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm the founder of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel, I'm your host on the show and I'm a very lucky guy because martial arts in various ways is my job. If you want to check out the stuff that I and the rest the whistlekick team put together, you can find that at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) if you want to show notes for this or any of the other episodes, you can find them [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) let's talk about today's show, Sensei Chuck Merriman is one of those people that I've been wanting a show since day one. He's been in the stories of so many of our past guests, he's taught past guest and he's made a tremendous impact on the martial arts not only in the united states but worldwide. We've heard a lot about him so this episode is kind of overdue. I'm excited to bring them on and I hope you'll help me welcome him to the show.

Merriman Sensei, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.



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**Chuck Merriman:**

Oh, thank you very much.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a pleasure to have you, I have been looking forward to talking to you. I remember when we started talk about this a little while ago.

Yeah, it's been a while.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, but it's happening it's happening now and I'm looking forward to talking you because of who you are but also because you've been mentioned on the show quite a number of times. We've had some of your students, some of your students' students on the show and people spoken of you so now we get to kinda fill in that gap in this martial arts family tree

**Chuck Merriman:**

I deny all his accusations and I have written proof.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well they were all good things, so I don't know, that you want to deny them.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Good, I'll take them then.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. Alright. We need some context and the best place to start with context is the start and how did you find martial arts.

**Chuck Merriman:**



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I'm not sure I found it or it found me. I was never big on team sports. You know I was too short for basketball, too slow for track, too skinny for football. So, I kinda like to do things where I'm responsible for my own actions so I was working at the general dynamics electric boat company in Connecticut and building submarines and a guy that was working with me was taking judo in the in a small dojo Norwich, Connecticut and not that intrigued me and asked him if he would take me to a class and he took me and I sat down and I watched and I fell in love with it. Ever since then, it's just been a steady progression from judo into karate. And so, I still love judo and I think it was a good foundation for my karate training. So, I think it away a kinda found me instead of me finding it.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

A number of the folks that we've spoken with on the show who started their martial arts in the you know, 50s, 60s had judo as that foundation. It seemed like judo was more prominent back then. What was it... Well first I guess is that accurate?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Oh yeah yeah. Well because, first of all what east coast was kind of a stepchild, so to speak, for the martial arts because the west coast got most of the influx of instructors coming over because that was the first stop rather than go any further that most of them stayed out there. So, it karate wasn't that well known in the 60s, not on the east coast and judo was the big thing. And I got into karate to just kind of accidentally also being that the judo instructor and for some reason just never showed up. I went to the dojo one night everybody was standing outside and I go, what's going on? I don't know, were waiting for Sensei and Sensei never showed up. To this day I don't know what happened but by that time I was so in intrigued with judo that I had to find a place to train and basically the only place to train was Boston or New York, the big cities. So, I went to New York city and I found the dojo and the judo twins on 38th St. And I explained the situation and I said I want to train but you know, I live in Connecticut, is it well, if you want or you can sleep in the dojo and you know, help clean it, keep it clean and open and close it and we won't charge for class. So, I jumped on that and I was married at the time and I went back home and I told my wife I said, I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is I found a dojo to train in judo and the bad news is you have to go back and live with you mother for a while and she said fine. She did that and I slept in that dojo for a year and took classes and at the same time, they had started karate the classes. And so, being is that, I was living in the dojo, I was started doing judo from 6 to 8 and karate from 8 to 10 almost every night and that was my introduction to karate.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now obviously at some point correct they became your first love, what was it that you found and corrected it wasn't in judo that ultimately made you choose that?

**Chuck Merriman:**

Well, judo at the time in the east coast specially New York was pretty, pretty rough training, hard competition and you know, in judo you get thrown around a lot or you throw people around a lot and the competition for judo was very, very high level and I just got so intrigued with the karate that I wanted to spend more time doing that and I couldn't train as much for the judo competition and I decided it was time that I chose one or the other and I just like karate a lot better. Again, it was the fact that I saw Sensei doing kata and that intrigued me, really intrigued me. Then I asked him if he teach me some of that and he said yes and you know but first you have to learn basics and so on and so forth. I said fine and I started my training with him and the gradually just weaned often judo pretty much altogether but I still taught judo when I started teaching karate, I taught judo, basic judo to my students also.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you think there's a there's a synergy in there or is it a compliment the karate? What was the value you saw in offering judo as well as karate?

**Chuck Merriman:**

Well first of all, I think we we all agree I would think that in physical situations a lot of them end up on the ground. When you're protecting yourself for or defending yourself, a lot of times it winds up on the ground and I figured in order to two take cares that situation teach them some basic judo to where if they had to defend themselves in a one on the ground they wouldn't be totally lost. They'd have some idea of how to maneuver on the ground and sort of you know, take care of themselves in that situation.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think that gives us a bit about who you are enough that we can move on. I know we're gonna go back



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and plug in some more pieces as we go find out the puzzle that is you. Im wondering now what, of all the stories that you know, the things you've experienced, what's your favorite martial arts story?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

There's a few of them but when, I think it would have to be, because it was so dramatic, when Sensei Irvin left to goju kai and I was training with him at the time in Chinatown dojo in New York city and he left to goju kai and Sensei Irvin was always very dramatic about everything even during training and it was just his personality. And the famous hatchet story so they call it is when he called a meeting of some of the, some of his higher-level students san dan, third dan in dojo was the highest rank and we had maybe four or five of us that were san dan. And he called a meeting of us and he said that he was going to sever his ties with japan but he did it in a dramatic way with reaching under the table and pulling out a meat cleaver and slamming it into the table and saying I sever my ties with japan and that's gotta be one of the top stories right there.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

The energy in the room must've just been sucked out.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

There was, well, we didn't know, you know we all look kind of what's what's gonna happen next? We weren't sure you know. Then, like I say he was so dramatic in everything that, and then he said you either stay with me or you leave and I think two people got up and left and I was just young at the time, kind of young and in karate and I didn't know what to do I just sat there until he told us we could leave. And then I got up and left and I did leave him at the time. I left Sensei Irvin when he started the American goju thing when he left the goju kai and started his own style of goju so to speak.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a subject that and I am not going to poke you to focus, but I'm wondering if you might share your thoughts on the more general occurrence of the politics that pop up in martial arts. The you know, whether it's rank or it's organizations or you know any of the multitude of issues that come up. And to be blunt, you've been training a long time you've seen a lot of things, you've met a lot of people and so



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I'm wondering what your perspective is on the whole political aspect of martial arts?

**Chuck Merriman:**

Well, obviously politics plays a part in everything we do daily life one way or another. You know if you own a home and it is a homeowners' association, you got politics and had you got somebody trying to tell you how you should live. I don't, we all try to avoid that as much as possible and if we can avoid it we have to figure out a way to deal with it constructively for our own benefit but rank in kata has always been a way to control people, I feel. If you believe that a certain organization or certain person can issue you are a valid rank as opposed to anybody else then, they pretty much own you and this is the only way to do this kata and this is the only person that can teach it to you. Again, you're pretty much stuck with that and over the years we've seen hundreds of organizations come go and usually did not form for the right reason, they formed for personal reasons, personal gain or something. And I've been through a few of them myself and none of them ever really worked out for me until I joined the, when in the early 90s I went to Okinawa started training in the jundokan and when Miyazato Sensei was alive, there was no political things going on in our dojo, none whatsoever. It was just training and no no no favorites, no pets, no special treatment for anybody, just train. And so that was a good feeling that you never had to worry about the other aspect, the political aspect of it. But I don't know, I don't think, I think politics is unavoidable, you just have to learn how to deal with it to your own benefit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, and you know, you mentioned this one organization that seem to to work and I've known a few. And the common thread seems to be integrity, the people at the top have a tremendous amount of integrity.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Absolutely absolutely and that's why in most cases it doesn't work because when we sing integrity, if you start a group or an organization to benefit yourself for either position power or rank or whatever, then obviously it can't work. That'll work for very very short time until people catch on that, it is in any benefit to them personally. And you know it's just like I said it's that's never going and I don't think because people are people. And of many people are involved in martial arts for that to gain position or rank or power or whatever you want to call it and I think we're stuck with that.





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think you're right unfortunately. When it comes to your life outside of martial arts are there other hobbies or things they are passionate about?

**Chuck Merriman:**

Yeah. I know this going to sound funny, but I do a lot of crossword puzzles I love them. I buy books and books and constantly doing them crossword puzzles. One of the reasons is that it stimulates the mind, it's, it teaches me a lot, it enhances my vocabulary, it challenges my mind constantly and I think that's, especially in the later years, when people are battling dementia and Alzheimer's and things like that, it's terrible. That's you know and I think something along the lines of like me being involved in crossword puzzles that it's really good for the mind. Keeps my mind very active. I'm not big on sports, I like football. I like to watch football, even with the controversy going on today. A good friend of mine and who trained with me, specifically was a Sensei Andre tippet from the patriot. So, I got to go to a lot of games and when he was playing and the obviously when I met a lot of the people on the team on the patriots and then it comes more interesting because, I'm watching them on a personal level just rather than a detached or the spectator. Other than that, not too many interest.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've heard a number of football players and coaches even attempt to bring martial arts to their teams. You know, with the belief that it would help them with in a lateral movement and footwork and in the ability to redirect your opponent's energy you know, something like a lineman on the football team, is that why he had come to you?

**Chuck Merriman:**

No. Sensei Andrei was a, he had trained early on in new jersey I think in Shotokan, and then he obviously he was living in the Boston area and he got to, got off into training in which you and was Sensei Steve banshek because of our proximity he was in, I was in Connecticut, he was in Boston and we'd see each other at tournaments or, because he was a competitor also. And we just got talking each other and he said you know, he'd like to come down to visit the dojo and I said sure and he came down, he trained with us and them gradually the friendship grew and eventually when I had my professional team during



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off-season, he traveled with my professional team and we just been friends ever since. But I'd noticed when I would watch you play I saw a lot of lot of his karate training come into play. Distancing and timing and things of that nature so I'm sure that it his training did help in the football situation too.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's something that seems to be a growing trend of this the realization that cross training an athlete with specific goals in mind can be really helpful and of course, anything else grow the martial arts is good in my book.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Oh, absolutely the thing is is that, too many times that I've seen and I've seen it personally up close sometimes, some of the people, celebrities who claim that they train, I don't think they actually train. I think some of its honorary rank or you know along those lines for people to say, oh that's my student and I guess that's okay too but Andre, Sensei Andre was somebody who did train. He trained a lot, had his own dojo and his wife trains and she was, became black belt and he competed in, you know, definitely he was involved was a just honorary in any way.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, it's an interesting thing that the notion of celebrity and the intersection with martial arts as it relates to rank. We see actors come in and and some of them have chops and some of them you know, very clearly or have stunt doubles and just, the controversy that comes from it. Which in my mind, it's okay because then when we see someone who has both the acting skills and the martial arts skills, someone like Wesley snipes or Michael jai white I mean, look at them, there's no doubt when they're on camera that they know what they're doing.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Yeah and again, it's like you said and I totally agree that anything that will promote karate as an art form, I'm for that but you know, you also got a call a duck a duck., you know what I'm saying. I mean, Elvis was a I mean his karate was so bad it was, I don't know I hate to say but it's, I watched a few clips on tv, on Facebook and just I'm sorry, that's terrible. And so, don't say it looks good because it is not,





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from any standpoint. But you know, Elvis's name was huge at the time and the I guess to have been of promoting karate or kempo whatever was, I guess it's okay.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Certainly, if nothing else he exposed more people to martial arts and I'm sure there are quite a few people who started training and likely found a love of training because he was.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure. Hopefully they stuck with it and they you know, they took it to a different level.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of the things I find to be universal is that we all have bad times. Martial artists have this unique toolbox of resources to go to, to make it through those bad times. I'm wondering if you might tell us about one of those times in your life and how your martial arts was helpful.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Probably the worst time was when I had a stroke. I was on my way to Okinawa in 1997 for a karate tournament, they were having their world championships and I was, myself and Dennis may we will both designated as chief referees for that event. I had taken a group of people including my son chad and the team to go there to compete and I wound up, we stopped in Alaska to refuel and I got off the plane and I was leaning against the wall talking and one of my students and I couldn't understand what I was saying, it was blurred to me, slurred and I thought I got it probably should go out and get some air and as soon as I took my hand off the wall, I collapsed my whole left side was gone. They took me, I fought, I actually fought my way to get back on the plane I could hardly walk, I was leaning against don warner and trying to get back on the plane and adamant that I was going to Okinawa and they came and got me off the plane and took me to the hospital in Alaska and I had my son chad contacted my wife Lillian and right away they admitted me to the hospital. And I think because of karate training where we trained equally on both sides, not just one side so, I think that helped may be redirect where the blockage was in my brain which is still there, I think it helped redirect to another route and therefore I didn't suffer a lot of damage due to the stroke and I think that the that was a scary time for me.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I would imagine that your rehab was shorter than average because of that.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Oh absolutely. In fact, the doctor started questioning me about my activities in so on and I explained to them about karate and how we train and everything and they kind of thought it it definitely has something to do with a recovery to where I wasn't that my speech was, came back and my mobility the came back fairly quick and but it was a full-blown stroke and they were kind of wondering too why I'm making such great progress. But I didn't I didn't go into therapy, I did my own therapy and I knew what I had to do and I knew what it was going to take me to get back to normal or as close to normal as I could get and I did so, again karate helped me because of the discipline of understanding what it takes to get to that, to that, back to normal. And the I discipline myself to do what I needed to do to do that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We've had a number of guests on the show who have been through some sort of medical condition, situation and have universally credited martial arts with, if not being the thing that saved their life, but a huge portion in a major component of of what allowed them to get through whatever that thing that physical struggle was. So, I'm not surprised that that was helpful to you and certainly you know, that the left-right balance is pretty important and so for any of you out there listening who only want to practice things on one side, the side that maybe you fight with. Here's a great reason to do both.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Also, some years ago I had a double hernia operation and in order to do to calm myself to when I was going into the operating room, while I was laying on the gurney getting ready to push me into the operating room, I started doing kata in my mind over, visualizing in my mind the different kata that I knew and also, I started breathing, inhalation, exhalation, inhalation. And by the time I got into the operating room but I was limp as a rag. I was so relaxed, it was, they were having difficulty getting me on the operating table, come on you got to stiff it up a little bit because I was so limp. But again, you know recently I just had two major operations on my legs for what you called it, aneurysms. And I did the same thing again I had one leg done, the right leg and then a few months later had the left leg done and



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I did the same thing again I relax myself by doing kata in my mind and also regulating my breathing and my rehab in both of those situations was a very, very quick. Much quicker than normal and again talking to the rehab people, I did go into rehab, talking to them and I said you know I don't need to be here, I am self-discipline so you just tell me what you need me to do and I'll do it and my rehab in both cases was much, much quicker than they expected.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not surprised at all. Now, we may have some folks out there listening who have never done kata forms and in their mind. So, when you're doing that practice you know, you're lying there, and you're imagining yourself going through the form, what are you thinking about, how are you approaching it, how fast you do it, you know, someone that maybe has never done that before, how would you advise them on it?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

That's kinda hard to answer because in my mind and I do the kata the same way I'm going to perform it physically. In other words, my timing is the same, the way I visualized the timing, the way I visualized my movement, the speed it's exactly as if I was going to do it physically. And even when I was coaching and competing, I'd see people over in the corner going over the carpet doing it over and over and over and over again physically. And I didn't do that, I do it in my mind. I do my kind over and over in my mind until I was comfortable with it and regulate my breathing again and I think visualization in most cases, as far as I'm concerned, was a lot better than actually going off in the corner practicing cut the physically over and over and over again. And again, that's me, maybe doesn't work some people I don't know but when I coached a coach the same way that I would ask people visually to visualize what they were doing to and visualize it, visualize yourself doing it correctly and coming out a winner.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

I like that. You mentioned a few people that were pretty important you. But if you think back your entire martial arts career, all the people that you've trained under, or taught or trained with you know, whatever the hierarchy would lay out. If there is one that had the most impact on you, who would that be?



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**Chuck Merriman:**

That's that's easy. That's Sensei debase, Christie debase. He was my first teacher. I started karate because of him, watching him and being so impressed with what he was doing that made me wanna emulate that and he was such an influence early on not just in karate but his outlook on life, his way he approached things, the way he dealt with people, the way he conducted his classes and fortunately, I was the beneficiary of a lot of that because I emulated that. And in my early years that was my solid foundation and I have to say that more than anybody it would be Sensei debase. People don't even know his name. He would never do interviews early on, he's always refer him to somebody else. He was very low-key and he was the one that, he's had some difficulties I guess with the people on the judo dojo where we where he taught the judo twins and he quit teaching and he took me to Sensei Irvin and he asked Sensei Irvin if he would take me in as a student because he said he wasn't gonna teach anymore. So, Sensei Irvin took me in as a favor to Sensei debase and at the time Sensei Irvin had a three-month waiting list. He had two levels, two the loft floors in Chinatown and they were packed. And he had a three-month waiting list. So, due to the kindness of him doing a favor for Sensei debase, he took me in his student and that's how I got started in Chinatown dojo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What do you think would have happened if he had taken you? If he hadn't had room, hadn't made that exception?

**Chuck Merriman:**

Oh boy. I hate to think of what would happen but there was almost no karate in New York city at the time. I think there was Sensei debase, there was Henry Cho who did the, at the time that was in taekwondo, it was just Korean karate. And I think there was one other old Sensei Don Naegele in New Jersey and I couldn't, I couldn't go to New Jersey because it was bad enough that I was living in the dojo and going home in the weekends and I would make the trip to New Jersey. So that's interesting, I never even thought about that I don't know, I guess I would've went back to judo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And the world would've been a different place... now if you had the opportunity to train with



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someone that you didn't, anywhere in time, anywhere in the world, you know they can be alive or dead, who would you want to train with or who would you want to train with even now?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

That's a good question also it's obviously, because I do Okinawan goju ryu, it would be a Miyagi Sensei, Miyagi chojun Sensei. The interesting thing about that is that I was in Korea 1950 and chojun Sensei died in 1953, had I even thought about karate, have been involved in that, I could've actually taken the r&r and went to Okinawa from Korea and train with him. I think about that a lot and I don't know if they would've taken me at the time, I don't know if there was any [00:35:49.54] training with him. In the pictures that I see I don't see any if but that would've been interesting. And of course, being able to train with him at that time would go, he was developing goju ryu would've been an incredible experience.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

You mentioned having a team, a professional team and being a coach, I assume there is some competition involved there.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Oh yeah. Well interestingly, it was actually the first professional team, karate team and when I say the first because it was totally funded and it was the people on my team were all professionally taken care of moneywise. They were paid, all-expenses-paid, airfare, hotel, food allowance, prize money, incentive money. If they took first, second or third in any event or grand champion they got extra money for that also. So, it was really a professional team in the sense that the athletes were paid and they were paid salaries and expenses and that happened again, it seems like going back through my mind and in my career, everything, seems to have happened by accident being in the right place at the right time. And I had been going to Bermuda to help my friend the Sensei Skippy Ingham run his little event that he had every year and he used to really take money out of his own pocket to run the events to just to keep Bermuda on the karate map so to speak. And one year I he kept telling me about the student that he had that was very wealthy and that to, but every year that I went down the gentleman was never on the isle and he was somewhere else. One year I went and he was there he invited me in my wife and miyazaki Sensei and his wife out to his house for lunch and to talk about karate. And we went out we talk to him about it, it seemed like he was under the impression that karate was a professional sport



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already and that you know like golf or tennis or whatever and he was kind of amazed to find out it was just the opposite that it costs us money to do that. We didn't make any money and even if you want to grant championship a couple hundred dollars it still, you know it still costs you money to go to the event. He decided to fund Skippy's next event and he gave them a lot of money to run the event and skipper asked me to help him run it. So, I put it together for him and we came up with the first big, Bermuda invitational grand championship in Bermuda with big prize money, \$25,000 prize money. I invited a certain number of competitors and a certain number of officials who I paid all their expenses to come to compete and through my sponsor I paid. And it was a huge success in fact, Jeff smith came out of retirement to come down here to compete, which I thought was great. You know, and we had the top-notch people that I invited, top competitors and it went tremendous and we did it two years in a row. And then my sponsor asked, well can we make it, can we make it a little bit bigger, can we get more people to come? So, I said sure, I said probably if you, if you were offer them more money you'll get more interest. So, he said, okay we give them \$50,000 and of course you know, I'm thinking that this is a dream that does all of this is really going to happen, but it happened. And not so instead of now big instead of Bermuda invitational grain championship, we made it to Bermuda international grand championship and it was open to anybody who wanted to come. And the we did that for a couple years and then my sponsor asked me if I would like to have a professional team and I said oh, sure what do you mean by professional? He said well you put a team together, a traveling team to compete in the events, karate events around the country around the world and I'll pay for it. You make out a budget and if we agree on the budget, I'll fund it. So, my wife and I got together, we made out a budget and we thought it was like playing with monopoly money as far as we were concerned, we better put this in, oh go ahead put that in. And so, we took the budget down to Bermuda had a meeting with my sponsor and he approve the whole budget and we were off. I contacted the team, the members, the people that the competitors that I wanted on the team and our first event that I invited them to was said don Rodrigues' ocean state nationals. I sent them all plane ticket booked their rooms at the hotel's and we had a meeting and I had an attorney there for them and I had an attorney there for me. And I told him what the plans we're, I offered them a contract to sign a contract with me to compete as a competitor on my professional team. And there we're a couple guys, Evan and horn around this and so well you know, can I take the contract and have my attorney look at it I said yes sure go ahead, but I said when you come back with a contract, I might have somebody in your place so, it's either now or not. They all sign the contract so now; my professional team was intact and our first event was as I said at the don Rodrigues' ocean state grand nationals. And then from there on I booked all the major tournaments for my team on the nasca circuit and we competed in all the events, major events in the country went undefeated for





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five years. Including competition in Europe, Germany, Austria and Italy and non-we did that for about six years and then due to a number of different circumstances, I decided I didn't want to do it anymore. Some of it had to do with members of the team who were good athletically but the character wise weren't so good and I had to deal with them and I didn't want to deal with them. So, my sponsor was a little put off by me not wanting to do it anymore and I tried to explain to him why and it's funny because at that time this was you know before 9/11 and traveling was a whole lot easier then and after that I don't think it would been too much fun trying to drag 24 people around the country.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I should say not.

**Chuck Merriman:**

I had 24 people on the team including a team doctor, who was Andy Andujar, I had two assistant coaches, toki Helen and skipper Ingham. My wife was the manager, she made all the arrangements for the whole team. All the airfares, all the booking the hotel rooms, paying for the entry fees, paying for the and we had for training camps a year that they were paid to come to and truly, truly a real professional team.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's incredible and to my knowledge there's nothing else it is existed like it before or since.

**Chuck Merriman:**

No no I think you know I didn't get to, I didn't get much help from the tournament directors in nasca. In fact, my sponsor was getting mail and he had an office and I want to say Houston or Dallas or [00:45:00.35] and they would send, people would send letters to him wanting to, wanting him to give the sponsorship to them instead of me, and so on. So, he would take any letters that he got like that, he would put in a box and when I will go to see him, he would give me, here is your mail. He would say, here's your mail

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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He was loyal. How about some of the members of that team? Any names that we might recognize?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Oh. Pick one nasty and [00:45:41.25] Tokyo, Linda danley, Anthony price, Richard plowden, chip bright, Keith hirabayashi, Christine bannon Rodrigues, on and on and on. I just, if you took the rating system that the time in the magazines, if you took the top three in every division that's who I probably had on the team. And of course, I got, I got to criticized for signing up the best people, well yeah, you know, they said I get complaints about well, you can't go to the trias or royal event, they're gonna win anyway. And my question was, well on this last time he beat Billy blanks? When the last time he beat nasty Anderson or Richie? Never? So, you know, it was just an excuse, complain complain complain. Instead of embracing it and using it as an opportunity to get maybe more sponsorship involved by showing a real professional attitude toward trying to professionalize karate, it was just the opposite.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a fascinating piece of history and I know it. The names you mentioned and the ways they came on to the team and where they went after the team, just it's a an interesting intersection with so many pieces of martial arts history and I just want to encourage the folks out there listening to check it out to do some research on the Transworld oil team. You know, we'll throw some links up at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) for anybody that might be new. We have our show notes page that goes along with every episode but there is far more out there that then we can link to so check it out.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Well, I had, I had, on the team I had a lot, I had mixture of traditional competitors like Domingo llanos, he was the first American to win a silver medal and a world championships. John frenette who most people think of john frenette as musical kata which he was very famous for, but john started training with me at a very young age in goju ryu and completed in traditional tournament also and so I had people like that and I had a mixture and most of the team the majority of the team acted very professional and a few didn't. So, they, they we're a minority so to speak in the sense that they were only a very few.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Lot of fun talking about those times and and just sitting here just kinda wishing I could've toured around you know just kinda follow around with team.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Yeah, I have one guy asked me at a tournament, how come I'm not on your team? I said because I got the guy that beat you all the time. Amazing, amazing that the attitudes of... I also agreed not say personal gain, personal profit that was prevalent in response to me having that team and which to me should have been just the opposite.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It could have been an amazing opportunity for here martial arts world for legitimizing and expanding competition.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Absolutely.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What you think causes that that greed? Because it's something you know, it's kind of similar to our discussion very early on about rank and politics. It seems like they go together, where does that come from? Is it just human nature, is it inevitable?

**Chuck Merriman:**

Yeah, I think so and you know, Miyagi Sensei was asked one time about at least it is what I've heard, he was asked that isn't it true that you know karate will make you a better person, will make your character better? And he said no, that's up to you. The possibilities are there certainly the tools are there but whether you, you have to make yourself a better person and you can use karate to help you do it but I see too many times, way too many times, people involved in martial arts have a tendency to let the ego go crazy think they're something that they're not. Use it as of a power position or you know get to, because people will bow or listen to them and take our take their instruction, it puts them on on a different level and it just you know, it's just people being people I guess.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's talk about movies. Do you have a favorite martial arts film?

**Chuck Merriman:**

No, I don't watch many, I like the Japanese movies, the samurai movies. But I don't really watch your martial arts movies. You know that's it's kinda like, I like that movie the last dragon I thought that was good and I thought there was really funny and was well played. But to have a favorite, no. Just the samurai movies yeah. One of my favorites is the trilogy, the samurai trilogy of musashi, how that developed and that was, that movie, the three-part movie showed him as a young boy and then as the middle of his life and at the end of his life and how he he changed so much from that young brash boy to an older man who had developed a deep deep understanding of his art, of the sword art. I thought it was really phenomenal.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Some absolutely wonderful, wonderful movies. In that genre that, kinda get overshadowed especially with more modern movies. It's worth going back and you know, they're popping up in weird places. Older ones you can find on YouTube and some of them are on Netflix. How about books? Are you a reader?

**Chuck Merriman:**

You know I used to be. I used to read a lot and over the years I don't know. I can't, I don't seem to concentrate. Like I'll flip through stuff up. Speed-read it and get the main gist of what it is but I can't sit down and read from start to finish for some reason.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Were there any martial arts books that you found helpful or anything you'd recommend to the listeners?

**Chuck Merriman:**



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You know when I started out in judo, I had two books that were done by the were written by Hal sharp and they were my bible. I read them from start to finish and back again and back again and back again and years later, it much years later, I got to meet Sensei sharp at don warner's office in la which I thought was great. And of course, a [00:54:02.27] like a young teenager about his development in judo and he was one of the, that was the first book that I ever bought with his first two and later when I got to the jigoro kano's book the kotokan book, that was incredible at the time for me to read that and to know that it was, came from the founder. And the other than that I don't, there's so much, the problem is with books is that we have to, we have to take them for what they are. They are written by people and people put their own slant into that writing and if we can understand that that you can't take everything for gospel that it's correct, you gotta do your own research and fortunately today we have the internet, we can do a lot of research. And balance things off, read this read that and then compare the two and eventually you get closer to the truth that way. The truth is as much as you get to it.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right yeah, I'm curious cause, I have you and we were talking about it, what is your thought on on evolution? This this is a subject it's coming up a lot of martial arts, the idea of trying to strike a balance between paying homage to what was set out by the founder of a style versus evolution. Some people take a very polarized opinion one absolute or the other, most are somewhere in the middle. I'm curious if your thoughts.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Well I know exactly what you're saying and especially with the advent of like the Brazilian jujitsu thing came on strong and the mma and all of these innovations over the years of the sort of read ahead on the on the martial arts scene. I'm really and this is a personal opinion of mine, I don't need anything. I found goju ryu, I got more in that than I could ever handle in a lifetime studying it. we only have 12 kata there is a reason for that because the kata is very deep and it's ever changing, the way you can use it is ever changing. As you grow older, as you were mature in your understanding of karate, you look at things differently over the years. And Sensei Irvin said this, he said, it's like the alphabet you don't add a word in a letter to the alphabet, you don't take a letter away, if you did it would be total chaos okay. The alphabet is our foundation for our language. He said Shakespeare used the same alphabet that I use. Why was he Shakespeare and I'm not? It's the way you use the words and in the letters and you know you have prose poetry, drama, comedy etc. And they are all expressions of the same 26 letters. And if



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people feel they need to do something else, I don't believe in cross training either. If I like uchi ryu, I love it but I would do that, I would not do goju anymore, I'd do that. I think that if you try to do too much, you can't be really good at anything. And with Miyagi Sensei was a genius in the way he created goju ryu. In the sense that there's something in there for everybody and he taught kata according to somebody's body size, their height, their weight, their special things that they were proficient at, the speed or using your body properly etc. He would teach them that the kata that fit that and I am adamant about kata is not something that the you learn and go, on to the next one. You take the kata, is a pattern that you learn. From that pattern, you develop a different understanding, the older you get the better you get, the more understanding you have in karate. You develop different understanding of that same pattern throughout your training. So, kata is what you develop from that pattern over a long period of training. You could, I taught it Aaron banks' dojo on Broadway in New York city. We used to get Broadway dance is coming just for the exercise and they could pick up a kata in about half hour, that's what they do for a living. Put your foot here, move here, turn here, or go back and so if it's just the pattern, then you learn 12 of them real quick and what you do after that if there's no meaning to it and I guess you're pretty much done.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You're never done.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Yeah never done it's a journey, right?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's what they tell me. I'm still walking I haven't found the end.

**Chuck Merriman:**

There's a lot more questions than there are answers and Miyazato Sensei told me when I first met him and started training in Okinawa, he said there's no secrets in karate, secrets are just things that you haven't discovered for yourself yet by training. There's no secrets. You know, like this lightning bolts going to come down all the sudden you're enlightened, no doesn't happen. I was fortunate enough to





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train when Miyazato Sensei while he was still alive and with iya Sensei who was also a student of Miyagi Sensei. When after Miyagi Sensei passed away, a year later a meeting was held and at that meeting it was decided by this seniors, Miyagi Sensei seniors who would lead them now because Miyagi Sensei they had not designated a successor, and it was decided at that meeting that miyazato Sensei would lead, and I have all the minutes of that meeting that iya Sensei was present at the meeting and took the notes and who was there, what they what was said and how it was, how it was, decided that Miyazato Sensei would be Miyagi Sensei's successor. And interestingly enough Miyagi Sensei being the genius that he was knew that even if he's designated a successor, that once he was gone, people are gonna do whatever they wanted to do, because he said so-and-so doesn't mean that's who they follow. People follow a natural leader, after Miyagi Sensei passed away, Miyazato Sensei opened up the jundokan, and all of the seniors went to the jundokan to train, all of the equipment the training equipment that was in the garden dojo was transferred to the jundokan, the statute, the bust of Miyagi Sensei was brought to the jundokan, so people followed a natural leader they didn't need to be told where to go.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

What's keeping you going? You're still, you're still going. Martial arts is still an important part of your life, you're still so passionate about it. And after a number of years a lifetime of martial arts, the question I have is why? Where's the motivation for you in continuing that?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

I'm like the energizer bunny I guess, you know? It's fascinating because it's always something new to me the more I dig, the more I get involved in it, the more I teach, right now I'm physically unable to do karate, I get on I have to use a walker and a wheelchair but that has nothing to do with whether I can still train and I trained differently, I train mentally and I still teach seminars and I still travel and the more I do that, the more I see things that I missed it and I should've thought of that all you know in the kata, oh yeah, we could do that sure. So, the bunkai, which is now becoming very popular by the way, which was never mentioned when I started karate and all of a sudden is become the fad. But bunkai, means to analyze it doesn't mean to apply. You analyze it, from the [01:03:27.16] you apply. Bunkai is a constantly changing thing, why because of different circumstances change. You learn by understanding bunkai, ohara analyze kata, you've come up with a lot of different situations at work and depending on my physical ability depending on the other person's ability or lack of ability, it's just doesn't end. And that was the genius of Miyagi Sensei also with the devising this method of goju ryu that if you, if you



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understand it and know how to use it properly, it's a never-ending source of information.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

If people want to reach you know, websites or social media or you know, whatever you're comfortable giving out or you mentioned seminars, I don't know of those seminars are you know, if anyone can schedule you to come in, you know, tell us about that stuff.

### **Chuck Merriman:**

Yeah, basically what I teach is not really stylized, in a sense, other than if I get invited to a goju ryu dojo, of course you know we'll talk about and practice kata and kiyobunkai, oyobunkai etc. But otherwise a teacher very general karate, so to speak. In competition, the three elements to scoring a point is real simple, timing, distance and target. So, when I was coaching I develop different drills to enhance timing distance and target. And when I would coach the us team, I would have people from all over the country on the team and from different styles. So, my thought was in a short period of time the couple weeks I'm gonna have them at the world championships, I'm not gonna make a punch any quicker and stronger, the kicks any faster or develop any new technique for them in that short period of time. So, what I could do is develop these drills for timing, distance and target awareness that you can enhance in a short period of time and so we do a lot of those when I do seminars, different drills. And the what what really solidified my thoughts on that about how important drills are, I go and watch Sensei Andre tippet practice with the patriots and they do drills all week, they don't play they only play football on Sunday, they don't play football every day, they do drills every day. And so, they play football on Sunday. So, I thought why can't the same thing apply to karate competition? Develop the drills then look at look at analyze my players, my competitors and enhance, try to enhance what they already do well which is play on their strengths and the work the drills for their timing distance and target awareness.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's fascinating stuff. How would someone reach you? If they, if they want to book you the best way?

### **Chuck Merriman:**

I'm on Facebook and other than that I don't have a website probably Facebook or, I live in phoenix



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Arizona and I guess Facebook probably.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. Well, we'll put the link to your personal Facebook page on the show notes so people can find it easily enough. I have just one more question, I really appreciate your time today. Parting advice, words of wisdom if you will for the folks listening.

**Chuck Merriman:**

Never quit. Always one more step forward, one more step forward. If you, karate has so much to offer and depending on what you want get out of karate, if competition is for a short period of time, karate training is, can be forever and it doesn't have to be physical at some point, maybe your physical abilities like mine are hampered, if you're training properly and you understand the karate experience, you can still train and you can practice karate all your life.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I want to thank you Merriman Sensei for being on this episode. Your story is inspiring and it's one I'm sure will resonate with so many of the listeners. You've shown us that your contributions to the arts are much more than simply coaching or competition, it is the life you've spent. Thank you, Sensei Chuck Merriman. Of course, you can find the show notes for this episode, for any of the other episodes at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and over there we have some photos we have some links, other stuff that you might want to check out, for this as all the other episodes. You can find us on social media we are @whistlekick Facebook, twitter, Instagram, YouTube we get some videos up on YouTube now and again, you might want to check those out. And of course, you can check out all the products and the other things we do at our digital home, [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). If you want to put forth yourself or someone else is a potential guest for the show, there is a form at [whistlekick martial arts radio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) for you to do that or you can just email in [info@whistlekick.com](mailto:info@whistlekick.com), whatever is easier for you, we love to hear from you, we love that feedback that comes in, even the criticism songs it's kind. It's a reference episode 249. Regardless, I thank you for your time today. I hope all is well in your world, and until next time. Train hard, smile and have a great day.



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