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Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 266! And today, I'm joined by Master Jalyn Croft. At whistlekick, we make the world's best sparring gear. And on Martial Arts Radio, we bring you the best martial arts conversations every Monday as well as a topic show every Thursday. That's right, twice a week martial arts goodness for all of you traditional martial arts fans. Here's a throwback to the old intro that just kinda rolled out of my head. You know, you say something a few dozen hundred times and it just kinda hangs out back there, and once in a while, it pops up. And that's kinda what goes on here at the show. That's kind of a good core area of the martial arts training, isn't it? We do things over and over so they become part of who we are. And hopefully, help us become better people. If you wanna check out the show notes to this episode, to any of the other episodes, you can find those at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Sign up for the newsletter while you're there, we're always there because we are going to send you some great stuff. I haven't mentioned it in a while but if you're new to this show, if you sign up for the newsletter, you're going to get an exclusive podcast episode that we never aired. I'm not even gonna tell you what it is. It's cool! It's awesome! You should do it! If you wanna check out our products, those are at whistlekick.com. And don't forget the multitude of other sites that we offer, Martial Journal, Martial Arts Memes, Martial Arts Calendar, and there's more. Best place to find it all is at whistlekick.com; that's our digital hub for our brand, our growing efforts to help the traditional martial artists of the world. Get whatever they need, whether it's products or connections to other people or events. It's just kinda what we do.



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Let's talk about today's episode. Our guest today did not have a smooth martial arts journey when she was young. Master Jalyn Croft's school closed just before she was about to test for her black belt. Getting into a new system and testing for a black belt, that wasn't easy as anyone who has trained in multiple styles knows all too well. That experienced, she turned to become the exceptional martial artist she is today. So let's welcome her to the show. Master Croft, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Jalyn Croft:

Thank you so much for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for being here. And I gotta ask, did you get any tomb raider jokes in school?

Jalyn Croft:

All the time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

All time, alright. Well then, I won't say anything more about it. What's going on? Why don't you tell the people where are you? I don't even know if I know the answer to that question.

Jalyn Croft:

I'm right outside of Atlanta and Marietta, Georgia. So I'm about 20 minutes north of Atlanta.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. You guys are getting some ice right now, aren't you?

Jalyn Croft:

We are. It's very odd for us. But...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I thought I caught that on news. So here we are, we're having a heat-wave in Vermont based on the last couple weeks. It's 25 degrees outside the office right now.

Jalyn Croft:



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Oh my gosh.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you know, to us, that's no big thing but of course, you folks getting freezing down there. That's enough to warm our news.

Jalyn Croft:

It is. We actually are out of school today because they thought the roads might freeze over but nothing happened. So they just got a random day-off.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well that's not too bad.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good day to be a kid.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

School-off for no reason, yeah. Of course, this is not the weather channel. We're not here to discuss meteorology unless that happens to be a passion of yours, it is not of mine.

Jalyn Croft:

No.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We're here to talk about the thing that you and I have in common which is martial arts. And you know, I'll tell the listeners just as I told you before we started recording, I found you just kind of randomly, I



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believe on Instagram. And I liked what you were putting out. This goes back, this might even go back two years that you were putting out content of substance. You were being really honest about who you are and just kinda portraying your martial arts journey. And since then, I've watched you on social media, I've watched you grow as a person, as a martial artist. And I said, you know what, it's time.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. I really appreciate that because I do like to put out content that's broad and real, you know. Like stuff that is not just, oh here I'm kicking above my head, but like, to be honest, I can't hold a kick above my head. But you know, here is me trying to stretch and trying that. And that's not like everybody isn't, you know, perfect at everything and isn't, doesn't come with a great picture or anything like that. And so I want to put out something for the people who, you know, are great. Like were naturally talented with it, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, which is the majority of folks.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah, definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think the challenge of social media is that for the most part, what we get is the best of the best of the best, the one out of ten thousand photographs that's perfect, and the airbrushed abs and the high-end fashion shoots. And we start to think that this is everyday life because we're surrounding ourselves with it.

Jalyn Croft:

Right. Yeah, I do, I really enjoy the Instagram-ers and Youtube-ers that will show themselves messing up. And I think, you know, I have a couple people on mine that have started to do that and I really appreciate that. And I look up to them for that

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. We have some relationships with some absolute wonderful folks, you know, people that have been on the show, people that we kinda sponsor, some of our ambassadors and that. That's an important thing, you know. We're not gonna build a relationship with anyone who isn't authentic - it's an important word for me as we look at social media.



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Jalyn Croft:

Definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But this is not the social media conversation hour. This is Martial Arts Radio; we're gonna talk about you and your martial arts story. And in order to do that, we have to talk about the origin of that journey. SO how did you get started?

Jalyn Croft:

I got started pretty young. My brother, actually, dressed up as Chuck Norris for Halloween when we were kids. And I, he kept the costume and then I wore it around the house all the time. And I just wanted the uniform so bad so I kept asking my parents, put me in Karate, put me in Karate, put me in Karate. So finally they did when I was about 8. And I started out in... It was one of those, kind of like mixed styles of martial arts that they called it Karate but it wasn't traditional. It was more of like Taekwondo type thing. So I learned by basics through that and there was a lot of flowy stuff. So whereas Taekwondo, you're like sticking every move. This one wasn't that way. So if you try to go to competition with something like this, it would not, not work well. But it was a great base because I learned to like keep my hands up and, you know, I learned stances and this and that. But it actually ended up closing right before I got my black belt. And they knew some people personally who had opened another school but it wasn't Taekwondo and they sent us there. So ever since then, which was about 2005, I've been in Taekwondo. And that was a rough transition but to me, like looking back on it, I'm really glad it happened cause it worked out really well. And Taekwondo is, obviously, more well-known. And then I learned more of the technique side of martial arts with that. So, that's in a nutshell how I got started.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When you say that making the transition into Taekwondo was rough, what do you mean?

Jalyn Croft:

Well, what happened was they closed but they allowed us to get our black belts - anyone who is really close, which I was, one belt away. So I earned my black belt at 13 but then pretty much had to start over. So you can imagine a 13 year old, you've been working for your black belt for years and, you get it but then you don't know the forms. And you don't know the curriculum because you're starting in a new school. So that was super difficult just like mentally and I was upset for the longest amount of time that I was hard-headed. I didn't want to learn it because I just wanted to... you know, I wanted to be treated like a black belt. I wanted to know everything. But then once I finally came around to it, I had to learn all of their forms and everything like that. But actually, I liked these forms better now. But it was hard to



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learn to stick kicks instead of just flop them out there and stuff like that. So it kind of brought me back to the basics of deeper stances, is what they wanted. And the first martial arts was more of a boxing style so, what they would call a front stance, you would kind of bend both knees. Whereas in Taekwondo in a front stance, like your back leg needs to be locked out, you know? So just kind of stuff that I'd had with muscle memory, I had to break. So that's really hard to do for anybody but especially for a kid, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. And yeah, anybody that's cross-trained or, you know, spend a decade or two in one style and switch over to something completely different knows how hard that can be to unlearn. I've talked a little bit about my journey starting with the Karate and transitioning into Taekwondo and what that was like. Because the differences aren't huge, they're subtle. And I think, sometimes, the subtle differences are the harder one to pick up.

Jalyn Croft:

Definitely, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. Well that gives us a great place to start. As we move forward, I know we're gonna hear a lot more about you and your journey and all that. But here on Martial Arts Radio, it's about the stories. And [10:15](#) knows, I love a story, it's the reason I started this show. So I'd love for you to tell us your favorite martial arts story.

Jalyn Croft:

That actually kinda brings me back to where I was. Which I think my martial arts story would be my black belt test. Because, you know, going up through this solid ring as your tests are exciting but they're fairly common. You know, you're doing it every couple of months. And the also, you've been like after black belt, like all of my degrees have been exciting but nothing really is like your first black belt test, you know. So what happened was, as I said, my school was closing and they were trying to get anybody who could test, who was eligible, to just go ahead and test. So we were at the new school and my instructors from the old school came in to test us but the only time they could do it was on a Tuesday night. And we were all kind of in middle school age so we were testing on a Tuesday night. And of course, I was so nervous. And we came in, and this actually the last time I got to see all of those old instructors, but they were trying to make us even more nervous, you know. If you fail this test, we're gonna cut your brown belt in half and you're never gonna get it back, you know, this and that. So we go through the test and there's five of us and I happen to be the only girl. And at the end of the test, my school goes through where all the black belts kind of talk and tell you what they thought about the test and give you some advice, and this and that. And one of my instructors said that he has never seen such a standout in the test, I don't want to sound like I'm bragging or anything cause I look back on it and I cringe, but he was



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like, you know this goes to show that girls can be the standout, can outdo guys in a male-dominant sport, you know. And I think, to me, that kind of struck something in me that I was like, oh wow. You know, not that I had not already realized it but this is a male-dominant sport. And because of that, I can either shy away from it or I think I could go really far in it. Because you're gonna get more attention if you worked just as hard, you know. SO I was the only one that broke all my board on the first try and this and that. And to me it was just, it wasn't that I was much better than them but I was just so determined at that age to get that black belt. So that one kinda stood out to me just because of that and what he said. To me that has sparked something for me as to where I went from there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you could go back and you had the opportunity to talk to yourself, say an hour before that event, what would you tell yourself?

Jalyn Croft:

That's a good one. Probably just do your best, you know, calm down. But you wanna say that to yourself before any test or competition but you're never gonna be calm before that. But pretty much to enjoy it. You know, I think we go through so many things as martial artists, so many tests or competitions or anything, and you're so focused that you don't actually enjoy the moment and realize what you're doing, you know. Not many people get to black belt or beyond. So instead of just being so stressed-out about the test, actually, be proud of yourself and enjoy the fact that you got there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wonderful, wonderful advice. All too often we spend our days looking backwards at the good old days or looking forward towards things that haven't arrived. And really, if you wanna be really philosophical about it, I think all you have is the moment at hand.

Jalyn Croft:

Yes. Definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is there anything that you're passionate about outside martial arts? Any hobbies?

Jalyn Croft:

I've recently gotten into a couple of different things. I've gotten into running, I actually did a half marathon this past weekend in Disney World.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Woah, okay.

Jalyn Croft:

And it was my tenth half marathon. So, I gotten into that kind of accidentally. I'm a huge Disney fan and I was in Disney World, about five years ago, and they were doing what's called Marathon Weekend, and I just noticed everybody walking around with medals on. And I'm very, like, goal-oriented - I want those trophies, I want the medals. And I was like, what is this? I want this medal. So I looked it up and I was like, okay next year I'm coming back and I'm doing half marathon. So I got my brother into it, also. And since then, that was four years ago, I've done 10 half marathons and multiple 5k's. And not to say that I'm good, I've never been great at running, but to me it's the environment; I absolutely love it. Everybody is super encouraging, it doesn't matter if you're winning or you're, you know, last place. People are gonna encourage you the entire way. So I loved that and then I also recently have gotten into bowling. So my fiance is actually, we are both in a bowling league together. And he's doing much better than me and wants to go pro. But, and I'm just over here, you know, excited to like break 150. It's been fun, you know. I like getting into different things. I've never been like, martial arts has stuck with me throughout all of life but also, I've had so many other things going on. Like I've never been able to really focus on one thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Does that manifest in your martial arts training, too?

Jalyn Croft:

It does. Oh my gosh. And to me, it's a good and bad thing. Like part of me wishes I could just have tunnel vision and focus on one thing because that's how get great at it, you know. But I just, I'm not that person. I'm like, oh I wanna do this, I wanna do this, I wanna do this. And when it comes to martial arts, there's so many types of martial arts. And I'm like, I wanna train in this and I wanna train in this and I wanna train in this. And then I realize, I'm like, I don't have the money or time to do all that, you know? I need to focus. So I have been kind of all over the place which, you know, has gotten me different experiences but also... You know, if I would have stuck with one specific thing, I could have been great at that but there's pros and cons to both of these types.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. As your time at running and just the encouragement now, I can run... I'm not fond of it, you know. I run when it shows up in a cross-fit workout or you know... I hike which is kinda slow uphill running? Not really, walking? But the way you're describing the encouragement and just kind of the vibe around it



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reminded me a little bit of martial arts and some of the schools that I've attended. Do you see a correlation there?

Jalyn Croft:

I do, I see it. Yeah, in smaller schools. I've been to a couple of different schools and I see it more so in the ones that kind of act like family, you know. Like you can walk into different schools and kinda realize, oh this is a school that they probably don't even know all of their students' names or this is a school that, you know, they probably have a cookout after every test. You know, like there's complete differences and I've been in both. And the ones that feel like family, like, they will support you through anything. And I think those are, to me, that's where I wanna be.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. I get it. One of the hallmarks of the show is kinda unpacking the toolkit that we all developed at martial artists, our ability to live life and have resources that non-martial artists just don't seem to have. I mean, sometimes they gain them but it's more of a commonality that we have as martial artists. And another commonality is going through difficult times. You know we all suffer, we all have challenges. I'd love for you to tell us about a time where you went through one of those challenges and how your martial arts helped you get through it.

Jalyn Croft:

Sure. What comes to mind, and I think this happens to most martial artists, is injury. So I competed a good bit for a couple of years and I was at one just local competition. And I was starting to warm-up and instead of stretching, I just threw a kick. And that is the point that I realized, okay I'm too old to do this. I have to warm-up. I have to stretch because my hamstring just, I have no idea what happened to it but it was just like, oh my gosh I can't walk, you know. And I'm trying to warm-up for a competition right now. So I struggled through that competition and it just so happened that I won my division so then I went on to grands, which I've never been upset to go on to grands except for that one time. Cause I was like, god I wanna do my form again. But I got through that competition and then I was like, I'm just gonna rest it, you know. I'm not one to like run off to the doctor right away. So I was like I'm just gonna rest it and see how it goes. And it was one of those things that I could rest it for a week and be okay. But then after I trained, it would come back. So I didn't want to be told to rest, you know. So I kept putting off going to the doctor and putting off going to the doctor because I was trying, that was my first year doing WKC. And I was like, I wanna go to Nationals and I wanna go to Worlds and I don't have time to not train. So I just kept training, kept training, kept training, and when I realized that I really couldn't keep doing that was actually on the flight to Detroit for Nationals. Because just sitting on that flight, which to us is about three and a half to four hours, my leg wag on fire just sitting on it. And I was like, I can't get through this. So I ended up finally giving it some time to rest and actually doctoring it up and everything. But it took about eight months for me to be able to kick again like normally without any pain. And I looked at it and



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like, you know, one of the Tenets of Taekwondo is perseverance. I persevered through that, through a certain point I probably shouldn't have. I probably should have stopped in let it calm down. But it's one of those things that I don't think any martial artist, when they come to an injury, they don't give up right away - and I would say even athletes in general, you know. If the typical person who doesn't have the athletic mindset. You know, rolls or ankle or whatever, most of them are like, okay I'm gonna sit down and let this heal. But most athletes, at least the ones that I had talked to and stuff, they're like oh, I don't want to sit down. Like, we don't sit down that's why you're so active, you know. Like we don't want to let it sit down, we don't want to let it heal and stuff like that. And I think that's just the mindset that comes with athletes or martial artists, like you're go, go, go, go, go, you know? And like I said before, there's pros and cons, both things. But I don't know. I really like that about it. I think you... I don't know. If I had an off-day, you know, I don't like...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm hearing you talk about, you know, kind of a reluctance to not do.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. So I'm trying to... As I'm realizing this, that's kind of a bad thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But there's good stuff that comes out of it. I don't think it paint you in a poorer light, if that's what you're concerned about.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because again, it's you being authentic, talking about... Look, you're fourth [23:30](#), right? So, you know, the fact that you've got the physical stuff, you can do the things. All the rest of your... the majority of the rest of your martial arts is gonna be around the mental stuff.

Jalyn Croft:



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Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And this is a challenge that we all deal with. Regardless of age, rank, and experience.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. So I guess the mentality of not giving up through hard times would be a good place to go with this.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. So you can jump back in whenever. Whenever you've got the senses to where you wanna go with it. We'll make sure we edit it in a way that makes sense.

Jalyn Croft:

Okay. Do you want me to start back over any certain place or just...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Whatever makes the most sense for your thought process.

Jalyn Croft:

Well, let me think about it for a second. Okay.

I would say for martial artists that mentality of not giving up or persevering through tough times, whether that'd be injury or anything else, is what I think really sets us out from non-martial artists. Because I tell my students to... I always point out the black belts and I say, who wants to be a black belt? And of course, all of them raise their hand. That's what they're there for. And I tell them how long it takes to get there and what the black belt test is like. And you're not gonna get there unless you persevere through some hard times. I mean, no black belt test is easy. It doesn't matter where you go. And an average person who hasn't gone through martial arts, who hasn't learned that perseverance is not gonna get through something like that. I've been asked by family member and friends who aren't martial artists like, why do you do that? You know you can buy a black belt. And I'm like, yeah... but that's not the point, you know? I can buy my own trophy, I can buy a black belt, you can buy whatever you want. But it's not gonna mean something unless you earn it. And I think as a martial artist, I've learned that I want to really earn everything that I get.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah. Right on, I get it. And what you're talking about here is, you know, it's that reward for what we invest. You can buy anything but we see time and again that when people earn things, whether you're talking about a child or an adult, whether it's, you know, something sort of trivial from a hobby or work-related, we value the things that we have invested more of ourselves into. And to me, that's one of the beauties of martial arts - is that we get this really, really simple external representation of that hard work. I mean there are plenty of people who, you know, don't have stripes on their belt. Their belt, that black belt, is the same for quite a long time. But they continue to invest into it.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. And it doesn't, you know... Once you get up high in rank, you realize that it really doesn't have to do with the color of the belt, you know. I'm least impressed at this point with how many stripes somebody has on their black belt and I'm more impressed with how worn-out their black belt looks. If that makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Jalyn Croft:

You know, like they can have a fist degree that's turning white because they worn it and trained so much. And maybe they just have been so focused on something else that they haven't tested, you know. So to me, the stripes pretty much mean that you were consistent in one school and you tested, you know. And it's something to be proud of but it doesn't mean everything.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the best expressions of that I think we've had on the show yet. Thank you. You've had the opportunity to train with some great people. I mean we haven't talked about any by name but behind every great martial artist is someone who taught them. And I'm assuming there is more than one but if you had to choose one person that has been the most influential, the most impactful, in your martial arts upbringing, who would that be?

Jalyn Croft:

I would say that would be the Master-Instructor that I'm learning from now. And I started with him as a black belt because, as I said earlier, my school closed and then I went to his school. So he got me as a 13 year old black belt. And for the first probably year, I didn't really stand out to him. You know, I was just another student and that was that. But then something started cooking in my head too, and I started training harder so I think he started noticing. And he's one of those people, and I think you'll find this in



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a lot of martial arts instructors, that the more they liked you, the harder they are on you. So I started realizing that he was... you know, if we had an uneven number in class and somebody had to be his partner, it was me. And he was pushing my partner off and it was me so that I had to do double the kicks and this and that. And as a kid, at first I wasn't understanding this. I was like, oh my gosh, why. And then I looked back on it and I was like oh, you know. And I really appreciate that at this point. But not only as a martial artist but as a person. He really teaches you how to have the mindset of a martial artist and how to be a martial artist outside of the school. He's very, very old school. He doesn't go by a planner or, you know, anything like that. He goes off the top of his head and if he gets stuck on one form and one technique, he'll do that for an hour. So I've learned definitely perseverance through him. And then, also, just respect. A lot of schools now, I don't think they have as much respect for their instructors, you know? The students will like correct the instructors if they think they're wrong. And I don't care if I know 100% that my instructor is wrong. I'm not gonna say anything, you know. There's that much, just like, respect between it. And then I was like became an adult and a black belt, I started to getting to know him as more of a person than an instructor. It just... It's become more and more of as of a mentor, you know. He's getting older and he can't necessarily show me as creative technique as he once could. But now, it's just more of a talking and you know, what do you think about this and what do you think about this. And it's just kind of grown into more of a mentor-ship than martial arts instructor. So I think he's probably the biggest influence. Because to me, martial arts is, yes it's a lot about technique and punching and kicking but what I love about it is the mentality and the mindset. And actually, like, becoming a martial artist, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes. Do you find it you're having similar, kinda mentor-mentee relationship with some younger student?

Jalyn Croft:

I would hope so. Right now, I'm teaching Little Dragons. So they're four to seven, and they're not gonna understand if I try to give them life advice at that age. But I really hope that I'm gonna be one of those instructors that they'll look back on and remember, you know. But I try to give them a little bit of advice. We talk about, you know, goal setting. I try to teach them a little bit about becoming a martial artist and make sure you shake their hand and this and this, bow to the flags, and whatever. So just the basics at this point but I would really hope so that somebody would one day look back on me that way, also.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. And I gotta ask, Little Dragons. Is that a class that you enjoy teaching? Or is that one that you kinda got leverage into? I find that it's very... There's no middle ground when it comes to teaching the little ones.

Jalyn Croft:



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I actually really love it. I love that age. Not to say that there aren't bad days. Like they sometimes check-in the clock every five minutes, like when am I done with this? But most of the time, they're great. And to me, it's like, it's so fresh. They're all white belts or yellow belts. And I just love that. I love being the first one to teach them and the first one to explain stuff. And I actually kind of... I'm trying to start this program in the school that I'm training in right now. So I did asked for it and sometimes I regret is. But I do really like them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you can teach a two or four year old, you can teach it to anyone.

Jalyn Croft:

Yes. Right, yeah. I mean most of it is... I mean I'm excited if they stand still. So it's a struggle but it also, I think it keeps you young.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely agree. Now if you could train with someone you haven't, anywhere in the world, alive, dead, doesn't matter, who would you want to train with?

Jalyn Croft:

So many people come into mind. Like I said, like we talked about before, I'm so interested in so many different martial arts that people come to mind for the sport Karate side of it but people also come into mind for like just training. So if it was like hardcore training, I know right now it's like you either love her or hate her, but I would say Ronda Rousey. Because no matter, you know... yes, she's lost the last couple fights and kinda falling off the face to the earth but I'm still, I don't know. I'm a huge fan. And so I think that'd be fun and I'm also really interested in MMA training. I would never, never want to fight it but the training side of it, I think it's be fun. But it came to like sport Karate and competition there, there's so many. But the ones that stick out or you know, like Caitlin Dechelle and all of those, Tyler Weaver, you know the whole Palmetto Team is amazing. So all of those kind of stick out for that side of martial arts, also.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, it's funny cause we used to talk about Ronda Rousey on the show of fair amount. And obviously this is a traditional martial arts show, we don't really get into MMA. But I think now that it's been a little while since she fought, we start to see the legacy that she's leaving. And I think it's an important one even for those of us in traditional martial arts. In that, we saw four, maybe the first time ever, a woman in a professional sport being the largest straw.



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Jalyn Croft:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Any card that she was in, she was the draw. And I thought that was so wonderful and so amazing and it proves. All the people that have said anything counter to that being possible, well here's a perfect example of it. And even now, the folks that she fought and lost to. I mean, even later Mishia Tate became a bigger draw because of her tie to Ronda Rousey. And we see that Women's MMA is kind of a big deal.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. And I think no matter where Ronda Rousey goes from here, whether she ever fights again or what, she's always gonna be the one who put Women's MMA on the map. You know if it wasn't for her, I don't know that they would have ever gotten into the UFC or ever done that. Like maybe somebody else would have come along but she was the one who really did it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. And let's not forget, she's got quite the solid traditional background.

Jalyn Croft:

Yes. Judo.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So I'm just, you know... We can still claim her a little bit. Cool. Let's talk about competition. We've heard a bit about competition and I know you're passionate about competing. But I'd like to know why. What is it about getting out there? Cause let's take a step back, let's break it down. Competing - you give up your free time, you travel around, you pay money, and at the end, you either win and, you know, maybe you receive an award, you know a medal or trophy that cost far less than your entrance fee, or you lose and you feel badly about yourself. Obviously there's more to it than that because no one would do it if that's all it was. But there are people that look at it that way so what are the missing pieces for you? What makes it so compelling?

Jalyn Croft:



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To me, I grew up in a non-competitive school. I had never heard of competition before. And when I was about 12 or 13, I was on the internet just like searching out martial arts stuff cause I was such a nerd, like I was just always googling martial arts stuff. And I ran across the Battle of Atlanta which is, you know, about 20 minutes away from me. So I was like, oh my gosh I wanna do this; I had no idea what it was. So I showed it to my parent and they were like, let's go watch it. And I was like, okay. So at that time I was a brown belt and I went to go watch it and was absolutely amazed. I was like, first of all, I'm glad I didn't enter this because it would have been so scary, but I just couldn't get enough of it. I was amazed. So then I was on YouTube and I was watching it all the time and then... But I was so scared to do it because I didn't have somebody to train me to do competition. And I went to my instructors and I was like, oh I went to the Battle of Atlanta and I saw the competition and I wanna do that. And they were like, okay, cool. Good luck. And like that was it because they didn't know how to compete and so they couldn't really tell me. And I was like, I can't do this by myself, you know. Like that was intense. So for the next, I don't know, like six, seven, years, I pretty much just watched it on YouTube. And I went to Battle of Atlanta every time it came but I just watched it. Until finally I was like, you know what I'm gonna regret it if I don't ever try this. So at that point, I was like you know what, a traditional form. So I can enter a traditional division. So I found a local competition around Georgia and entered it. And it just so happened that I was the only person in the division. So I was excited that I came away with the trophy but I was also like, well that didn't do anything for me. You know, well at least I got out there but I really didn't compete, you know? So then I tried it again and again until eventually there were people on my division. And it was... Every time I went, I was the last one. So like if there were three on my division, I would get third place. Or if there was seven, I would get seventh place like I was just the last one for couple of years. And I was like, man, what am I doing wrong? And I realized that in spar Karate, you can't just head out there and do your traditional form the way you trained it in school. So I started really, really breaking it down. And I would spend hours just breaking down my form section by section by section. And that was the year that I first-ed WKC and I actually, that was I think 2015, went to Ireland and I won Korean Forms. And I was like, okay, I can do this now. So then I actually started working for another school around here and I left my school that I was training in at that time to go work as an instructor. And somebody was there who had competed in ATA and he was like, I can help you out. And at that point, I figured I've probably gotten as far as I can go by myself. So I trained with him and my technique kept getting better and better and better. But things just kept getting in the way that I couldn't consistently train. So I went to WKC again that year and it was in Orlando. And the thing that got in the way was, I did the Disney College Program which is an internship in Disney World. And I was there for four months but I happened to be working in Disney World that WKC was in Orlando. So I was like, oh I can do this. Like I'd already qualified. But I was training in like a random park i Orlando by myself with like a bow stuff in the middle of a soccer field, you know, trying to get ready for it. So that year, I went to WKC and I got third which I was actually pretty excited for for the circumstances. But that was pretty much my competition career. The next year I tried NBL and it was something about it I just wasn't humongous fan of, and I can't pinpoint it. But it just wasn't for me. But I did, you know, I've made some friends. And you know, I had a good time and I definitely learned some stuff. But I don't know, when it comes to competition for me, all of that to say, you know, you can't do it for the trophy. If you're trying to do it for the trophy, eventually you're gonna realize that they're just dust collectors and that's not what it is for. It's for the experiences and the people that you meet. Like some of my best



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friends in martial arts, I've met through competition. And they're so inspiring to me and I just love the meeting. But also the training side of it, that's when I started getting so much better in martial arts because I was training for something. Those couple of years that I was getting in last place every single time, I had that determination that I was like, I'm not gonna end like this, you know. That I wanted to compete so bad but I didn't wanna just go out there and compete, I wanted to win. So I had the determination to figure out what can I do with my form? What do I need to do with my technique to get the little, tiny things like, you know, kicking with the blade of your foot and making sure your kick faces the judges and making sure your knees always locked out in your stance, and this and that to where...looking back on it now, had I not competed, I don't think I would have the technique that I had now because I would have no reason to do it. So I think, to me, it gives you something to work for. And some people, it's not for them, it won't push them to work. Like they'll just be like, oh I don't like this, and be over it; Like it's definitely not for everybody. But to me, it was what I needed to push myself, to be able to become a better martial artist.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. The, sort of cliché, the saying that comes to mind is, if you look around the room and you're the best person in the room, you need a bigger room.

Jalyn Croft:

Yes, definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And for me, and it sounds like for you, and many others that I know, some who've been on the show, that's what competition has done - has extended the size of the room. Because, you know, human beings tend to rise to the occasion. I mean not all, I mean you certainly expressed that, and that no, competition isn't for everyone. But to find a way to be around people better than you so you can continue to absorb and learn and watch what they do, is so important.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. And to see people who are so determined and driven, I think that's what you need, and in life in general, you know. I mean, look around at your friends and they... really determined kind of the person that you are, too. Like if you're hanging out with friends who aren't determined and driven to do anything then it's gonna be hard for you to be, also. So I think, you know, putting yourself in competition, you find these people. Because they're not gonna be there unless they're determined to work hard.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Exactly. Do you watch martial arts movies?

Jalyn Croft:

Yes, I do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you have any favorites?

Jalyn Croft:

The Karate Kid.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Which one?

Jalyn Croft:

The original.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, the original one. Alright.

Jalyn Croft:

Not the Kung Fu kid. But that is... As soon as I got into martial arts, my dad rented that movie from Blockbuster on VHS and he was like, you have to watch this. So I watched it and I was obsessed and I watched that and Karate Kid 2, Karate Kid 3, The Next Karate Kid, you know. All of them. And then I was super excited the new Karate Kid came out fairly recently and I was like, oh I wanna go watch this. And I mean as a martial artist, I loved that martial arts was on the big screen. But I was like, this is Kung Fu, like what are you doing? But, I don't know. I think it was a great stand-alone movie but the original Karate Kid still has it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. It's an exceptional movie.

Jalyn Croft:



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Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not great in any way, like the acting's not great, the martial arts isn't great, the story's not great, the music is absolutely not great. But it's somehow a great movie. It's one of those rare movies that became greater than the some other parts. And if you talk to any martial arts instructor who is teaching back then and, they can tell you the impact to that movie.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah. I absolutely loved it and still can watch it to this day. Probably like, I can watch it all the time and it just never gets old. I don't know. It's -

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about martial arts a-

Jalyn Croft:

It's -

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, go ahead.

Jalyn Croft:

Oh, no. I was just gonna talk about how cheesy it was but go ahead.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You can talk about that all day.

Jalyn Croft:

I know, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It's a popular topic. How about martial arts actors?

Jalyn Croft:

I don't have any that really stand out. I mean, obviously Jackie Chan is huge and I love watching his movies because on top of his exceptional martial arts, he's hilarious, you know? So all of his martial arts movies have great fight scenes but also make you laugh, you know? So I really like that. But on top of that, I can't really pinpoint any specific person.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He's one of my favorites. For sure.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about books? Sometimes on the show we talk about martial arts books and it... People either tend to have a whole library of martial arts-related books and they love them, or none. Where are you?

Jalyn Croft:

I have some.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, so you're in the middle.

Jalyn Croft:

Yes. My favorite martial arts book is Zen in the Martial Arts and I like for multiple reasons. It was just very interesting but also, it's one of those once you can just sit down and read the whole in one sitting.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes.

Jalyn Croft:



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It's just... It's got a lot of great stories in it and a lot of good take-aways. But it's not, you know, 700 pages and makes you fall asleep. So, I appreciate that. And then, over that, I also have... I'm actually looking at my library right now. I have the book that was written by the Lopez Family and it's called Family Power. It's their story, I mean it's kind of older, but I really like that cause I like reading about people's lives. And then I have one, kind of funny one, and it is like the little picture book and it's called The Wind Warrior. Have you ever heard of it?

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no. Tell us about it.

Jalyn Croft:

So when I was a kid, I used to go to the library a lot and I would always check out this book and it was called The Wing Warrior and it's a children's book. And it's about training for a competition and this was when I was so interested in competition but I was too scared to do it. So it's this boy who's training for this competition in this whole book, and then he goes to the competition and wins it. And it's a true story, I think somebody wrote it about it. But for some reason, I just always checked it out in the library and always read it. And then, as an adult, I was at like a book sale one time and it was there. And I was like, I have to buy this. Like this just, this is my childhood at this point, you know I have to buy this. So I still have it and still, every now and then, just sit down to read it. But that's just kind of a funny one off to the side. But...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. Yeah. As you're talking about buying a book as an adult that you read as a kid, it just reminded me I have several books in my library that I probably checked out 20, 30 times as a kid and then later on, when the library sold them off, my mother bought them and sent them to me.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's like, I've read this book. Not martial arts related, we didn't have anything fun like that in the library. Now of course, we've mentioned at the beginning, you're on social media, you know, people might wanna check out what you're doing, get a hold of you. You know, I'm sure some of the folks listening have been to the same events that you've been at and they might wanna say, oh Master Croft, I'm



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gonna say hi or something. You know, if people wanna get a hold of you, if they wanna find you online, where do they do that?

Jalyn Croft:

Sure. I have a Instagram and it's Jalyn_kicks and I, my goal actually this year is to try to post one picture a day. So, that's actually, I'm realizing, harder than it seems and we're only eight days into the year. But I post on it fairly often. And I also have a YouTube channel and it's just my full name, Jalyn Croft. And I'm posting on it fairly often, like I said. It's probably like one video a week, I'm trying to but I definitely don't want to like specifically say that. But I do a lot of training videos, just kind of set-up the camera while I'm training. And then I'm starting to get in to some tutorials. And I actually really enjoy that. I started seeing some martial artists on YouTube and I was like, oh I wanna try that. And I actually realized that I really enjoy editing and everything so that's kind of something that I'm focusing on this year - social media in general.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. You might wanna check out, if you're having trouble managing the postings, you might wanna check out something like Buffer? We have the website, bufferapp.com, you could load in a bunch of photos at ahead of time.

Jalyn Croft:

Oh, nice.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then it will all just kinda [52:12](#) out for you.

Jalyn Croft:

Yeah, that is good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. For any of you out there listening and think that whenever a whistlekick photo gets posted it's because at the computer, no. Because there is way too much going on for me to... Oh, it's 12:30, I gotta put out a photo. Does not work that way.

Jalyn Croft:



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Definitely. I'm realizing that social media can become a job in itself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is a job in itself. Well, if you're doing it right, anyway.

Jalyn Croft:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you have any goals for the future? Like if you look out 5, 10, whatever years, what do you wanna be doing?

Jalyn Croft:

I would say I wanna be teaching. I don't know exactly where, you know. The school that I'm at right now is great because I'm back to the school that I grew up in. So they kind of know me, I know them, they let me try what I want to try. So that's fun but I wanna kind of branch out of just the Little Dragon and also get to talk with an adult every now and then. So I definitely wanna be teaching. I mean, I just got my fourth degree, not even a month ago. So I'm not necessarily thinking about my fifth yet cause that's a really, really long way off. So pretty much, I guess, my goals right now and what I'm looking is becoming a better instructor. Because I think that's something that's looked over. A lot of people think that once they are black belt, they can instruct. And I've realized that's not necessarily it like that's a whole different learning process in itself. You know, to learn how to get what you've learned and get what's on your mind to actually come out and get somebody else to understand it, and to also let them have fun at the same time, and get motivated and this and that. And realizing that different people respond to different things, you know. So you have to kind of get to know every one of your students and realized what you have to say to them to make them do what you want them to do and stuff like that. And that's just, it's something that's an on-going journey. And my instructor told me when I got my fourth degree, he was like, at this point, it's really what you give back to martial arts that matters. Like you're at the point that you've trained, you've done what you need to do and obviously continued to train but you really need to start focusing on giving back. And all of that knowledge that you've been given, now you need to give it to somebody else and return. So I think that's really my focus for the next couple of years - it's how to do that in the best way possible. And like what you said earlier, try to become that instructor that maybe one day somebody will look back on and say, oh yeah. Like she was my inspiration and she is, you know, the biggest part of my journey.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Everything today has been great. I really appreciate you coming on the show and sharing with us, and being so honest and open. But if I could trouble you for one more thing, if you could send us out with just the best advice you've ever given anyone, no pressure. But truly, you know, some final words for the folks listening would be great.

Jalyn Croft:

Sure. As any martial artist, I would say, just don't... never give up. I mean, like I've talked about perseverance before and that's the one I always go back to because out of the Tenets of Taekwondo, that one is my absolute favorite. And with martial arts, with your journey, I call it a journey cause it's so long, it's never ending, there are gonna be so many time that you wanna quit on yourself and you wanna go find something to do or something gets in the way. But just, I would say, never give up on what you're trying to do. And never forget why you started. You know, everybody starts martial arts for a reason and everybody's reasoning is different. But you need to keep that reason in mind the whole way. And a lot of the times, you're gonna get distracted but you do come back to that. And my favorite saying is that, a black belt is just a white belt that never give up. And I think that's one of the best things that just... I think any black belt will completely agree with that. Everybody is white but on the inside. And I went back to how each black belt wears out. And my third degree is actually the first belt that ever wore down to the white. And I made an Instagram post about it when it wore down to it and said, this goes to show that there is a white belt underneath every single black belt. And you never get to stop training, it doesn't matter how many stripes on your belt, how many black belts you have, you never get to stop training. And never stop training like a white belt. Never stop training like your basics. You're gonna have the absolute perfect sidekick. There's always gonna be something that you can change and something you can make better. So never get an ego, never think that you're the best, always know that there is something else to work for. There is never an end to the martial arts journey.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It was during the conversation with Master Croft that I realized that it really was me watching her for the last few years over social media that led to our conversation. This is the first time that I've watched a guest from afar before inviting them on the show. I've personally seen her growth and her progress last few years, and she's inspiring me. Hopefully, she's also inspired you. Thank you, Master Croft for coming on the show.

If you want the show notes, you can find those at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, photos, links, social media, sometimes we drop in a video. All in all, it is a great behind the scenes supplement to what we do in audio here on the show twice a week. You should check it out. If you want to get a hold of us, you can find us on social media, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are our primary accounts. We are @whistlekick. You can leave comments on the show notes page at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You can email me directly, jeremy@whistlekick.com. And, we don't talk about it often, it's not a secret but we don't push it, but we have a private Facebook group just for listeners of the show. whistlekick Martial Arts Radio behind the scenes. As you can see, I'm not creative one, I name things. We just kinda tell you



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what it is in the title. Make it simple. I wanna thank you for stopping by, listening to my voice, giving me a bit of purpose in my life, honestly. That's all I've got for now. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.