



Episode 130 – Sensei Fumio Demura | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello, and welcome to a very special episode of Whistlekick Martial Arts Radio. This is episode 130, and today we're speaking with Sensei Fumio Demura.

At Whistlekick, we make the world's best sparring gear, and here on Martial Arts Radio, we bring you the web's best podcast on the traditional martial arts twice a week. Welcome. My name's Jeremy Lesniak, and I'm the host and founder of Whistlekick Sparring Gear and Apparel. Thank you to the returning listeners, and welcome to those of you checking us out for the first time. If you'd like to see more about our products, you can do so at [Whistlekick.com](http://Whistlekick.com).

This episode is different from any that we've done. Demura Sensei is a private man, and his health isn't great. People that know him told me that this interview would never happen. It was only because of our profile of Sensei on episode 107 that this was even a possibility. The folks that produced *The Real Miyagi*, the documentary of Sensei's life, were kind enough to reach out to us, and ultimately introduced me to Sensei. This is the first episode we've released that's been entirely uncut. What follows is more than 30 minutes of stories and advice from Sensei, and within this episode, likely every bit of advice a martial artist could ever need. After all, who better to advise a martial artist than one of the greatest that has ever lived?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Hello?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello? Demura Sensei?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Hi.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hi, this is Jeremy Lesniak. How are you, sir?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Is now still an okay time for us to chat?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, good. How are you doing today?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Alright. I just finished the dialysis.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. How's that going?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Oh, about two, three hours every day. That's tough.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Yeah. Is it painful?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

What?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is it painful?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

No, not too much pain. Just sit there too long.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sure there are many other things you would rather do.



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**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But there are many of us that are happy that you're doing it, so you can keep doing the thing that we all appreciate ...

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

.. that you do

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah. I did two days with Black Belt Magazine. I just made a video for Kobudo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. I think it's great that they still have you doing things. I mean, that's how ...

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah, it was. I've done my best, yeah, to keep busy in my mind.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. What's the video that you're working on now? Is it on sai, or nunchaku?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

No, traditional kata for all weapons.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

For all. Okay. Wow. That's ...

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**



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Yeah. Sai, eku-bo, bo, kama, tonfa, and the nunchuck don't have any kata, so I made a kata that put them in there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, okay. How many kata in total?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

About 13.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. That's going to be ... And all on one video?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

I don't know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, okay.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

That's their business, so I have no idea.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. That's a lot of work. Well, I don't know how much time you have. I wasn't sure if now would be a good time for me to ask you some questions, or if you just wanted for us to chat for a little bit, and then we could set up another time?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah, I can do as much as I can.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. Okay. So, our show, we have on a lot of different people, a lot of martial artists. Bill Wallace has come on. Dave Kovar. I'm sure a lot of people that you've known, and certainly a lot of people that respect you and learned from you, so I think a lot of people are going to be



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interested in your answers to some of these questions. We ask all of our guests the same questions.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Okay. Just go ask me any questions.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. So, I've read a little bit about why you started martial arts, and of course I've seen The Real Miyagi, but when you started martial arts, when you were young, what did you think of getting to start martial arts? Was it something you were excited about? Was it something you were nervous about?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Well, see, I started right to after World War II, just end the war, so we don't have any, no shoes, no clothes, no food, nothing. Couldn't afford no toys.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

So, I had nothing to do. So, then one of my neighbors have a ... He's a Kendo Master, so I said I'd study in ... Actually, not Kendo. We call it Chanbara. It's like you cut wood into sword, and we have to fight. So we have to make own sword, and then we go to my neighbor's, and he showed me how to do it. That started it.

Then, after that, I went to my hometown [\[inaudible 5:19\]](#) Kendo, opened a dojo, so I went over there. They were teaching karate, and I would ... Sometimes I read it, a book about karate, so I'm interested in karate, but instructor said, "No, you're too young," so I couldn't get in there, but I was watching every night. He said, "Are you interested in karate?" I said, "Yeah." "Okay, come on in." That's why I was in there. That's the starting.

Then, I have my friend, and he started same time, and he was ahead of me, so I told him I didn't I didn't want to lose him, so I continued. If he come at 2 o'clock, I go to 1:30. He leave 10 o'clock, I leave half hour later at the latest. I never [\[inaudible 6:12\]](#) until back up with him.

Since I start doing that, in 1958, I think, I did the first karate tournament at JKA [\[inaudible 6:28\]](#). I was watching Mister Kanazawa and Mister Mikami for the final. I was watching, so excite. That's it. That's how I got to do it. I started that part.



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Then, continue, continue, in 1961, first All-Japan, combined together, they had a tournament. Shotokan, Goju-Ryu, [\[inaudible 6:58\]](#) all got together. Then in 1961, I got the first place. That changed my life. I wanted more martial art to do then.

Then I had a problem with my successor because I started to teach him. He said, no, he can't teach this way, he has to do it this way, this way. So, I decide I got to go to another county. I prove myself. Then, I meet one, at that time, my friend and my martial arts friend, and he's well-known Japan American guy, Donn Draeger.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

He introduced me to Dan Ivan, and he wanted to study, so I started teaching him. Then, end of the section, and he got to go back to America. He said, "Are you interested in coming to America?" I said, "Yes, I do." Then, few months later, end up at the Tokyo Olympics 1964, and I heard, "Come to the America," so I said, "Okay." I just put them together. I came to United States 1965.

Then I stayed in a garage. At that time, karate, nobody knows. They call it Judo Chop. Anyway, we study, study, study. Then I do the demonstration for Kobudo, but nobody understands what Kobudo is. Then I started from there, keep going, keep searching different people, a different way, and then people talking about what karate does. I just create, create, create, and then I get big name.

Then that year, I went to Ed Parker's International Tournament and meet Bruce Lee at the demonstration for One-Inch Punch. Mike Stone was at that tournament. He received first place. Then I meet Mike, and they came to my karate club, and I started teaching him, and I made a good friend. That's what keeps going, going, going, going.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

That's up to today.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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You've certainly had the opportunity to work with, I mean, so many wonderful people, and you just mentioned some of the biggest names that have ever been in martial arts.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah. Yeah. I'm real, real lucky.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. clearly, you're very humble. You say lucky, and there are so many of us that look at what you have done and see so much hard work, and so much dedication to the martial arts. It's incredible, and it's a very inspiring story that you've just told, and one that I hope all of our listeners really appreciate. When you think about ... Sorry. Go ahead.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

No, it's okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When you think about your time in the martial arts, your life as a martial artist, is there one particular memory that stands out as being the most exciting, or the best story? We ask our guests to tell stories on this show.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Uh-huh.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is there a great story from your time that you would like to share?

**Sensei Fumio Demura**

Well, I think it showed in my documental film, I was doing that Japanese Village. I did a karate demonstration, but people no react, no reaction, because they don't understand what karate is. So, I decide, if somebody punch somebody, when you're hit ... Before that years ago, you punch them, they stop one inch before they're hit, so the guy doesn't move, but this way, it look like a hit. The guy move their head, punched in the stomach, bend the body. I go to this way, hit with the elbow, he fell over the side. Like a real fighting scene. That's why I started doing that, and the Japanese Village was a top show at that time, but Japan, they hear about I was doing karate for show. So, they have different kind mind martial arts people there over, over here. I



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already am more Americanized, so that's why I want to do it, I just did it. But I got a problem with Japan. Pressure, pressure, pressure, and I told to quit.

My mother said, "If it's something you're doing wrong, you can quit, but if it doesn't do anything wrong, just do it." I said, "I don't do anything wrong. It's just a different way I teach the public." "Then, that means they are jealous of you. They don't know anything about it. Just keep doing it." So I said, "Okay, I do it," and I did that 1974, I think.

For the World Championships, all the people come down from Japan. All the top Masters came over, and that includes my Sensei. That time, I put silver gi, not white gi, silver gi, and music on, and I did demonstration, and that time, oh, I can't put the music on, I cannot wear the silver gi, but then Dan Ivan said, "Just do it. Show it to the people."

So, Japanese Senseis about 1%. Other 99% is all outside countries of the world, so they have different mind, so I did it, and I got standing ovation.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

That's why it saved my neck. Today, it doesn't matter where you go, even Japan. Every place you go, they do what I did 40, 50 years ago. Same demonstration, they do. Different than I do right now, but they can do the same way, so that's my improvement, and I'm proud I did it myself.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, and there are a lot of people that would say that if you hadn't done your demonstrations the way that you did, martial arts wouldn't be as big today. How do you feel about that?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

That's right. Well, Japan, if you going down the bottom line, Japan martial arts people's mind is a little different than normal people. They have so many good things, but they don't use that things to [inaudible 14:37](#). They think older systems run new things. Martial arts has so many good things today, but they don't use them, like we have a tonfa. We call them PR24.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right.





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**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Policemen use it, but Japan, nobody use it. Good things keep there, but nobody know how to use it, expect for today the police department. So, I started doing this. I taught them the introduction so that every country, all the persons in there study.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What do you think it wrong with martial arts today?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

I think there's a lot of ego involvement.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How do we fix that?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

I don't know. I'm trying to find out myself right now, but I don't know. I even might have some ego, but it's not ego. I proud of it, so I don't do anything people should not do those things. I think before I do. Some people just open their mouths.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What do you think the best change, the biggest improvement, in martial arts has been in your lifetime?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Well, in the martial arts it's said, "If you know yourself, and if you know other people, you have better chance to win. But if you don't know yourself, you don't know other people, 50/50. You don't know." That's why the way I learn. Before I do, make sure I know other people. I know myself, how much I can say, how much I can do it, but I don't make ... say of myself big things. To me, I'm good guy or bad guy, I don't decide it myself. Other people decide. That's the way I learned.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What does it mean to be a martial artist?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**



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Well, martial arts is basically self-defense, but I think, last 50 years I study, self-defense, but I think more important we're called Budo. Budo, Bushido is development as better human beings. That comes first. They have a stronger mind, and strong body, then you can be a good martial artist. That's what I figure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Was there anyone, any martial artist that you wanted to work with that you didn't get the chance to?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah. If there's anybody ever been in my mind I want to go over there, I ask them, "Can you teach me?" I learned.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. Do you like martial arts movies?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Sometimes. Sometimes people overdo advertisement. Overdo. But sometimes, I see the real good one, I like to watch it, because I study.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What is the job of a martial arts instructor?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Well, I concentrate to more young people, because young people are the next generation continue from my generation. So if you don't teach them, then martial arts gone, down. We don't want to go down. We want to go up. That means I have to teach young people to bring them up more better way to do martial arts. Right now, for example, I have over 50 years with me. Lots of people over 50 years with me, still with me, they're training everyday.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

So that's important to me. Not one year, two years, then goodbye.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And how do you keep people engaged, excited about martial arts for so long?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

I'm not sure, but I want in this life direction, give the direction and keep interesting, the way I have to do that. Sometimes, it cost a lot of money for me. I got one guy said he don't have any money, but he want to buy the car, but he don't have any money to go in the bank to give it to them. So, I buy the kid's car, and I give you money, and when you have the time, just pay me back. You don't have to pay the interest, anything. Just pay me back. No contract, anything. I just give it to him, because this way, he trusts me. If he don't ever pay, he won, I lost. But I'm pretty sure most people, they don't have that kind of mind. They will pay. Doesn't matter what is.

That's what I want to teach. How to pay, then after pay, that's your car. Then next time, just sold this old car for down payment, buy a more better car. After little by little, you have to save money, you do that. So I teach them how to do it, because these people, they never learned. Parents didn't teach them. That's a real big problem in this country, management money. So, little things, even not karate, but I teach the kids life.

Other people listen to me, they learn also same time. Sometimes, older than me, [\[inaudible 21:21\]](#), "Oh, you're stupid. You should not do that." But he knows he did the mistake, so that why he never fight me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

So he learned. That's why karate instructor is not just a punching and kicking teaching man. It's all other parts you have to be, teach, and you have to discipline yourself.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Has the way you teach changed over the years?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

First time, 1965, and '68, to now, yes, I changed a little bit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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What's different?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

I make more ... Because I speak more English, so I can make a little joke about it, and then when I teach, I don't teach the mechanics. Okay, first time, exercise, same exercise. Then basics, kata, sparring, done. Finished. Not the way I teach. I teach the exercise. I do every day, I change it, make interesting the way. Other mean, students know exactly what I do next. That's no good. Make it doesn't know, so this way, students are more interested. That's how I teach.

I was in Japan, big problem. Japan, exactly teach kata, and basics, and kumite. Every day, same thing, over and over and over, which is good, but students know what comes next. Take the easy way. For example, we have to make the circle, and everybody's 10 punches, so he had to thinking, for 20 people, so 200 punches, so I got to shorten it a little bit, then can make 200. I don't do that. I do sometimes punch, harder punch, 20 times. Then, next day, I punch him harder punch 50 times. Next day, harder punch 100 times. Then people thinking, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, I got 100 times." Then next time I do 10 times. Okay, that's enough. Then they say, "That's it? I knew I should have put power." See? That keeps make interesting the instruction. That's how I teach.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Which do you love more, teaching or being a student?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Well, I like the teaching right now, because I can't move too much. Right now, only I can teach. But the teaching is very hard, but very interesting, especially teaching children.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you like teaching children more than adults?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah. Children are more pure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Are they ... Do you think they're easier to raise into good martial artists because they haven't been contaminated?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**



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Yeah, well, a lot of kids, they listen to me more than parents.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's a lot of responsibility in that. I've heard other instructors say the same.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah. Yeah, for example, one mother come and say, "My boy doesn't take shower. I don't know how to do it. I tell him so many times, he don't take shower." One day he came up here. "Hey, so-and-so-and-so, you stink. You go take shower." "Oh, okay." And he take shower. The mother happier.

Kids is always, whoever trust them, they listen to you. Every place I go, one thing, I make kids and me are sitting close together. Before I start class, I make the joke. it's not a joke. I say, "Listen to me what I told you. Okay, stand up. Sit down. Stand up. You did it too slow. Sit down, fast! Get up! Sit down! Up and down! Then, up." Then, next one, people think it's sit down. I say up. Then everybody sit down. People laughing. So, this way, "Come close, listen to me. Okay, let's go start class." That's how I start. The kids love that. Not too many adult people can teach kids. Some people, no patience.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is it just patience, or is there something else that people need to teach children?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

They need it. They need it. Every kid, they're looking for direction. But, I can't give everybody, so only I know, close to me, comes to the dojo, I can help. But otherwise, I can't help them.

For example, one kid ... Kids in that first belt, from white belt to the color belt, first belt is very, very important. More than big money. So, the one father come up, and to buy the belt, it cost me \$5. He said, "No, my son don't need a belt." I said, "You got to be kidding. \$5. One drink, coffee drink, it's gone. You drink coffee. Why don't you save one cup of coffee, quit? Give it to kid. Don't be so stupid. You stupid father." He realized. He apologized to me. That kind of parents, we have too many. That's the way I teach them.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is there anything that people think about you? Are there any ... What would you like people to think about you and your contributions to the martial arts? I'll put it that way.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**



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I'm not sure. I don't do that reason. I just do my job, what I need to do as karate instructor. That's what I do, so then later, they come up, that's a different story. I don't mean that way, trying to make that kind of way I do. No. I just does natural.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. What would you hope happens with martial arts in the next 50 years?

**Sensei Fumio Demura**

I hope people have more loyalty, and study what is art. Art has no retirement. Like sai, you don't know how far you can, or nobody knows how far you can reach them. Same thing. Art, doesn't work. Only art is ... That's enough for me. That's the end of the limit, so to me, I have to go until I die. I just do, stay martial artist. Some people say I'm retired. That's end of it. I'm not retired, though. I sometimes joking about I'm retired, but I'm still working seven days a week, and I still travel different place, different people. I meet people, and I help people.

For example, I just came back from Utah. one little girl, born the wrong way. She needed medicine, but her parents don't have any money, so I did a little Miyagi. To the show, I charged money, and all that money go to her medicine. I give it to them. So, that's not for me, for all ... I told them, "This is all from martial arts people. They donate to you. That's why I want you to keep up the appreciating all of the martial arts people." So, they understand. That's why I still teaching.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you think you will ever retire?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

A lot of people say ...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm sorry.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Huh?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you think you will retire?



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**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

I don't think nobody lets me do it. If I retire, I'm dead.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think many martial artists would say the same.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Many of the older martial artists I know say the same, that they can't stop. It's who they are.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Yeah. they loe it, so.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. I have just one more question for you.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We have a lot of people listening. What advice would you give to them?

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Well, whatever you do, do your best. That's my thing. Don't think for money. Don't pay, so do a lousy job. You pay a lot of money, good job. No. Doesn't matter what pay. You have to do a good job. What I mean is my philosophy is don't follow the money. Money come with you. That's number one. Number two, don't forget the beginning. Beginning, that's very important. Number three ... Number three is ... What was it? Oh. Don't give up. If you give up, it doesn't matter what you do. Nothing is good. If you started doing that, continue to do it, and you have to taking care of parents, because one day, your turn come up. That's the things I want your people to remember and that's part of the martial arts.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. Wonderful advice. Sensei, I really, really appreciate your time. Thank you for talking to me today.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Okay. Thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Thank you. Take care.

**Sensei Fumio Demura:**

Thank you. Bye-bye

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Bye-bye.

I can honestly say that speaking with Sensei as a martial artist has changed my life, and I hope that you gained some insight, or at least some enjoyment, from listening to our conversation.

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