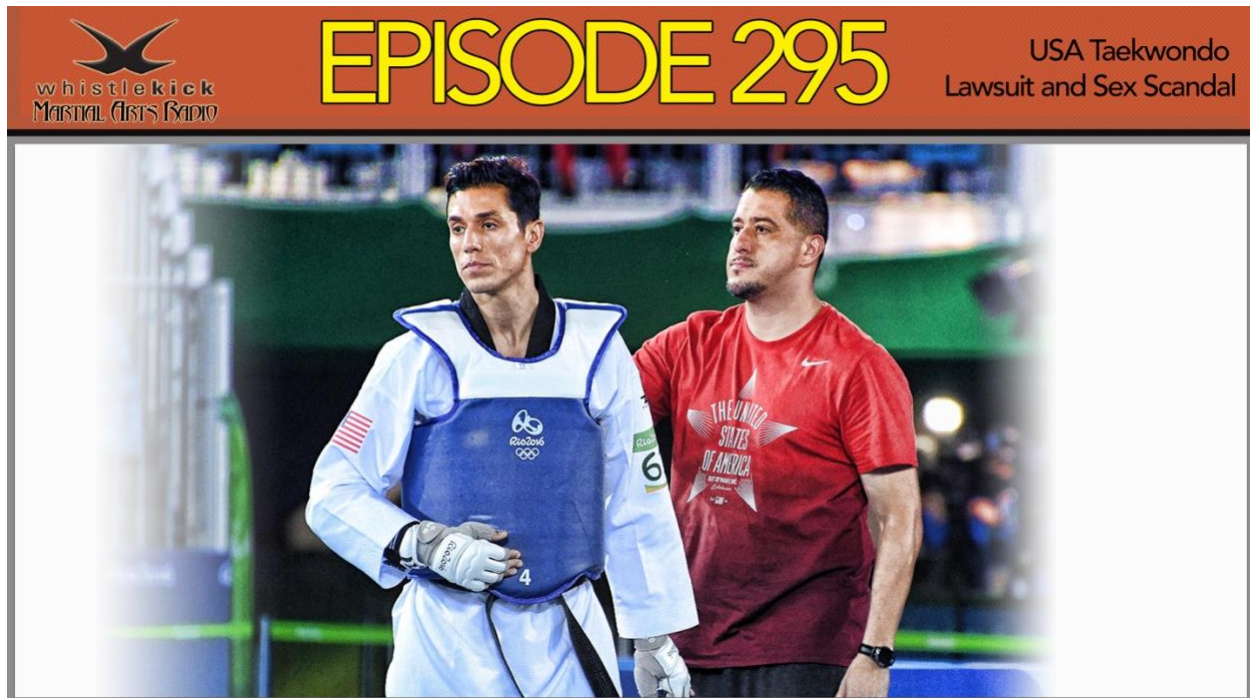




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Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everyone thanks for stopping by this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 295 and today were going to unpack the lawsuit against Jean and Stephen Lopez of USA taekwondo and what this means not only to Olympic taekwondo but to the martial arts. This is an episode I really don't want to have to do, but I do. You can check out the show notes for this or any other episode at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you can find our main site whistlekick.com where we have the products we make as well as links to all of our other online projects. If you don't know my voice my name is Jeremy Lesniak on the founder whistlekick, I'm your host on the show and I'm the man who gets to talk about martial arts or at least part of his job. It's a good job, but today it's not a good job because I have talk about some things I really don't want to talk about.

Now first before I dive into sort of the script that we've got here there are couple things I need to say first off everything that I'm going to talk about today is allegation. Nothing at least unless something is changed since we started doing the research something that I don't know about everything is accusation that has been completely denied by the defendants which might make you ask why am I doing this? I didn't want to, I wasn't going to but this has been brewing for a while. These allegations some of them go back over a decade and as you might imagine because of the show I am in touch with a number of people who are behind the scenes or at the tops of a lot of different organizations and I was having a conversation with one of these people who knows some stuff, who's been around this world for a while and this person told me unequivocally that they believe these allegations to be 100% true. We had a



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difficult conversation after that and I knew that this episode just going to have to happen. Way way back, I did an episode, I didn't remember what was it was so early, talking about why we're failing in the way we market martial arts. If you look at, you know if just pull up Google News and you do a search for karate or taekwondo or any martial art, you're going to get a few things on the plus side you're going to get some warm fuzzy kinda local articles about you know what a martial arts school did in raising funds for you know, homeless shelter or a competition where you know someone achieved a title. And then on the negative side, unfortunately grossly outweighing that, you're going to see quite a few articles about martial arts school owners and instructors accused of sexual abuse of people that supposedly they're looking after. And if you were to evaluate the martial arts purely based on those articles, you're probably going to come away thinking ha, there's a lot of risk here. Now any of us who have been in martial arts for a long time know that the risk is small and there's risk everywhere unfortunately, and I'm not going into details I know far more about sexual abuse than I would like to but we fall down as a martial arts community when it comes to being unified in presenting what we do and the benefits of what we do for the greater world and this is one of whistlekick's prime directives for any Robocop fans out there. Now imagine that we were going to give a score to each of these news articles, the reader plus a few points or negative a few points and maybe were holding somewhere even if we're looking at the grand production of martial arts news. And then the articles about Jean and Stephen Lopez come out and there are no longer just in local papers. They're at the highest level, it's in USA Today, it's everywhere and you're looking at that and thinking ha. Two of the biggest names to ever exist in taekwondo in the United States, two of the biggest names to exist in the martial arts in the United States have been accused for over 10 years by multiple people of doing some absolutely heinous things. That's a pretty big negative and that's going to dramatically affect how you feel about enrolling your child or yourself in martial arts classes and unfortunately that's going to extend beyond taekwondo because people like to make generalities. People like to see patterns and people like to be cautious. The media bombards us with all the horrible things going on and frankly a lot of people just cut a hole up in their house and a lot of the people that need martial arts the most are the ones that are going to be the most likely to get taken advantage of and it doesn't take a genius to see that 'hey this kid lacking confidence, lacking understanding of the world who really needs the benefits of martial arts' I don't know that they're going to get the benefit before their taken advantage of. And so, the parent doesn't enroll them or the guidance counselor doesn't suggest it and a kid that deserves that needs martial arts loses out.

Let's talk about the lawsuit specifically I'm going to do my best to stay level through this. When this draft was given to me just as a sidebar here, some of these topics shows coming up on Thursdays we wanted to do more than I had time to do personally so, we got some that someone helping doing some of the research. So, shout out to Lester for the great work that he's been doing. But when I went through his draft there were parts I had to take out because I just couldn't say those words on this show. Cause there's some bad stuff going on... Alright I'm just gonna jump into this and I'll talk more after, four women in several Jane goes, unidentified names, filed a lawsuit against the United States Olympic



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committee, the USOC, USA taekwondo, that's USA TKD and the two Lopez Brothers on May 4 the lawsuit states numerous allegations of sexual abuse and trafficking that have been going on for more than two decades. I do need to reiterate here, I am not stating the truth or the false, falseness, I'm not speaking to the validity of these allegations of anything I'm saying here. Everything that we are presenting is based on the research that we have done via publicly available information. I do not certify the accuracy of this nor do I certify, I don't certify anything were presenting what we understand at this time I'm recording this on May 14, 2018 so don't sue me. Alright back into it. The defendant Steven Lopez and his brother Jean Lopez who are known to be part of the "first family of taekwondo" were alleged to have committed sexual acts to female athletes including minors. The lawsuit states that the USOC has been ignoring and obstructing all complaints of sexual abuse to earn money from the success of the Lopez brothers in the Olympics. It is stated that the committee earned hundreds of millions of dollars which could be the strong reason to allow Stephen and Jean to continue their illegal acts. The executive's officials and the staff were also paid exorbitant salaries for example the former USOC CEO Scott Blackman received \$1 million in salary and bonuses in 2016 alone. Alan Ashley the chief of sport performance of the USOC received almost half a million in 2016. The Lopez brothers received hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. This could be an evident reason why the Lopez brothers weren't stopped even though they were already numerous complaints and reports. Steven and Jean have been identified to be sexual predators for several years but USA taekwondo gave no protection to the women who are abused. One of the victim said that she overheard the USA taekwondo official saying that it was their top priority to obtain "medals and money" and that Jean's reputation as a coach "should not be tarnished by allegations raised by a victim." the lawsuit also states that nearly all Olympic sports have the same problem in culture and I want to reiterate that. The lawsuit also states that the near, that nearly all Olympic sports have the same problem in culture, this is not a taekwondo problem. According to a Washington Post review, over 290 coaches and officials were accused of sexual misconduct since 1982 with an average of eight adults being accused every year. Sadly, the number of victims is unknown as they were believed to be threatened to keep silent. According to the lawsuit the victims are young female athletes and some are even minors. Most of the time the reports of sexual abuse are ignored and it was instilled in the victims minds that their complaints are of a trivial matter because they are mere "fungible commodities that bring huge financial benefit for the coaches employees and executives of team USA." this toxic culture in the Olympic sports became widespread because the perpetrators are protected as long as they bring money and metals to the team. Moreover, anyone who can become a threat to this culture is silenced slandered or kicked out of the team. As an example, Mandy Meloon, one of the four main plaintiffs in the lawsuit filed a complaint against Lopez brothers way back in 2007 but she was discredited by the USA taekwondo then CEO David Askinas us saying their allegations "weren't credible" Askinas is also labeled Manny's accusations of rape by Jean Lopez who was her coach back in 1997 as "a misrepresentation" Mandy was only 16 that year. In the case of plaintiff Heidi Gilbert, the incident of sexual abuse happened in 2002 when Jean Lopez allegedly drugged her and engaged in sexual acts. Similar to the case of Meloon, Askinas us also threatened Gilbert to keep quiet according to the report of USA Today in 2006. Plaintiff Gabriela Gabby Joslin also suffered from both Steven and Jean.



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According to the lawsuit Gabby was forced to allow Stephen to have quote sexual intercourse with her for the remainder of her career in taekwondo because she felt she could "not say no to him." Jean also raped Gabby in 2011 which resulted in an ectopic pregnancy which she had to abort. Plaintiff Amber means despite having the knowledge of Jean and Stephen to be sexual predators, was not spared by the Lopez Brothers. According to the lawsuit Stephen raped her at a party after he drugged her through her drink. Amber lost her virginity to Stephen at the age of 17. Therefore, it can be said that the USOC and USA TKD has been protecting Jean Lopez since 2007 or maybe even earlier as well as his brother Stephen Lopez. This continuous trendy female athletes the belief that the culture of sexual abuse in team USA was normal and acceptable. Because of this hundreds of young female athletes have been exposed to these two sexual predators for more than a decade who are supposed to protect these young athletes. The USOC and the USA TKD is believed to approve of Jean's immoral behavior because he was hired repeatedly as the head coach of team USA for the Olympics from 2004 to 2016. Moreover, the USOC in the USA TKD only allow the investigation to continue after the 2016 Olympics that is after the "medals and money" had been obtained. According to the report of USA Today in 2007, the Lopez brothers denied all the allegations of the four plaintiffs.

I don't think I have to talk about why this is significant I don't know that I have to talk about why these accusations are credible but in a nutshell these women these women have nothing to gain in coming forward. There's no mention of financial also maybe, maybe there will be. Maybe that could be the motivation I don't know. But when we put this in context and this is why we're doing this. This was why I'm recording this right now. When we put this in context with what happened in the last year with some of our most treasured celebrities in Hollywood, musicians, and actors, and people behind movies, the me-too movement. When we look at what I've just talked about here in the grander scheme, we see that martial artists are people, were all just people. I still believe and I will hold onto this as long as I I'm able I still believe that martial artists are overall better people than the general population. But this this hurts. It doesn't hurt because I know either of the Lopez gentlemen, it doesn't hurt because I know these young women, it doesn't hurt because I've gone through what they've gone through, because I haven't. But it hurts because martial arts are being deprecated in the process. Anything that gives martial arts a bad light hurts because I love martial arts. Anyone that spends any time involved in martial arts nose how special this is and further as someone who is made their business model about protecting and growing martial arts, this is a slap in the face. Because now I have to work harder we have to work harder because of the actions of these two gentlemen and that angers me. What do we do? How do we move forward? I always try to leave episodes on a note of action, the things that we can do to combat the negativity in this case or whatever it is that I'm talk about. What is the thing that is the problem, how do we address the problem? How do we address the problem here? One, we make sure that if we believe someone to be acting immorally in the name of martial arts, we do something about it and two we make sure to talk about the good stuff. We make sure that we are 10 times more likely to complement someone on their martial arts than we are to tear them down. And that when someone is not holding to that rule, that we explained to them why it's so important because let's be real, if the only



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things that were doing as martial artists are serving up articles, warranting a USA Today profile or a New York Times investigation or tearing each other apart because that's not how you do that move or that wouldn't work, then all were doing is diluting martial arts until it's not going to be available. We all have the ability and we all have the responsibility. We are all guardians of this thing that we love and we need to understand that. We need to take that seriously. That's all I've got and I can even bring myself to sign off in the way that I normally do.