



Episode 296 – Mr. John English | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello and welcome to whistlekickMartialArtsRadio episode 296 and today joined by Mr. John English. If you're new to the show you might want to head out over the whistlekickmartialartsradio.com check out all of her episodes including show notes, like for this one where we hope you find the social media, the websites, show you photos and videos of our guests of the topic shows that we do on Thursday and really just give you a lot more context for the episodes that you're listening to. For most episodes we even have a transcript, were going back we're transcribing all the older ones from before we started transcribing, really, it's just all about helping you relate to the episodes and get as much possible value out of them, and for all this we charge a whopping nothing. But if you would like to support us and thank you for everyone who has you could head on over to whistlekick.com, you can sign up for the newsletter you can check out the products that were making, were always rolling out new stuff and if you have any questions of course you can reach out to me Jeremy@whistlekick.com you can email, you can find is on social media there we go @whistlekick and really were just, were all over the place to help you the traditional martial artist. Today's guest comes from not too far away, from the state to my east, New Hampshire and Mr. John English is an owner at karate International and he is the instructor, the mentor to a guy who's become a different mind shout out to Craig who connected us. So, with that connection you know, I knew that this gentleman would probably have some good stories, you can usually tell the quality of an instructor by his students and this particular school I've been to a couple times, they got some great students but I wasn't prepared for how good these stories were. Mr. English has amazing stories and tells them in a compelling way that I know you all are going to love. We talk



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about everything from his time in the ring, to his time in the ring as a referee to starting a martial arts school, really taking over martial arts school really early. Earlier than I'm gonna guess, nearly anyone else listening has ever done or even heard of. So, it's kinda cool. I'm not gonna tell you anymore though, because I'd rather it come from him in his own words so it's welcome into the show. Mr. English it's Jeremy Lesniak.

Hey Jeremy, how are you?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm doing great sir how about you?

John English:

I'm great. Thanks for calling.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah thanks for doing this.

John English:

No sweat, I'm looking forward to it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are you having that the beautiful sunny morning they were having a couple hours north of you?

John English:

Yeah, we actually are. Which is nice with the winter we've had seems like its gonna go right from winter to summer. So, it's kinda same as last year but, can't complain.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There was that 48-hour period, what a couple weeks ago that we went from snow to 80's I think we hit 86 up here.

John English:

Yeah, yeah. It was I know it's crazy, [00:03:26.38] new England.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

It is that is because you know you can get bored. You can't bored with the weather, you always have to shovel something.

John English:

Yeah absolutely, dirt or snow.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sometimes both.

John English:

Yeah exactly at the same time, tell me about it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are you a native New Englander?

John English:

Yeah, yeah, I think yeah, we grew up in Mass. Moved around a lot as a kid and then you know, it's actually one of the reasons it got me in the martial arts so yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell me more. How did that does [00:04:13.23]

John English:

Are we taping right now or?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well so I always give people the option you know, and this is you know, for some of the conversations I have we kinda start when the call picks up so the listeners would hear that and if you listen to episodes especially more recent ones, sometimes we do this and we've actually had a lot of really positive feedback. People you know like that just kind of starts that organically from moment one, but at the



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same time if you want to you note chat quote unquote off air you know and we can start over more formally, that's fine. Whichever's gonna make you more comfortable.

John English:

No. I'm a little more organic to be honest with you, not much of a canned guy so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well then, we can just let it roll in and see where we go.

John English:

Perfect, perfect. But yeah, yeah, I grew up in New England, started at Massachusetts and parents moved us around a lot so between the time I was born and let's see here, probably sixth grade I think I was in four, five different school systems. So, I was always a new kid and that kinda did a number on my psyche you know, as a kid. So I was kinda the overweight kid, didn't have a lot of self-esteem, I was always a new kid so I had an identity no problem and so finally come six grade my dad decide he want to build his first house and they bought a piece of property in 1985 up in Hampton Falls and he built his first house I was part of that process and then again going in the six grade, I was a new kid in a new town and about a year after that just really you know, kinda made the decision I wanted to start martial arts training and it was funny my mother actually said why do you want to do that? I didn't tell her the real reason; the real reason was me. Everyone was telling me I was gonna get beat up in high school and so unbeknownst to my mom, you know I really love it, watching the movies and seeing all those moves, you know I never really told her the truth and so that year I think it was in 87, February 1987, I started my first, took my first class and it was a school in Exeter and there was, it's just, I was hooked right away, I was hooked was great and just that's kind of the back story how I got involved in martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm curious here you are traveling around different schools, you're the new kid and you said you know you had low self-esteem, you said you were overweight. For a kid in that position want to take on something new, to try something new something physical even you must had a pretty solid idea of what or at least a solid belief of what martial arts would be and how it would be beneficial to you and I'm curious where that belief came from?

John English:

Well and that its funny you say that because it's you know, when you have a kid or you have someone and doing self-reflection here and thinking about this, I mean, when you have fear there has to be a greater fear in order you to get out of the fear you're in and for me it was the thought of being



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physically hurt and beat up. It was very scary to me and so the only thing I could think of them because again I was a type of kid that loved movies I mean, I grew up with movies my dad, I think I was probably three years old he told me that the first Star Wars movie and I actually remember it and I mean I have a 2-and-a-half-year-old son now, I can't even imagine bringing him to a movie theater but my dad did. And I just love that I grew up with movies and so once I start getting older into the fifth grade and hanging out with certain kids. We loved, we love the martial arts movies, you know all the ninja movies back then were huge in the 80s and the karate kid was very, very influential in 84 when that came out and so once this fear came off, man I'm gonna get killed in high school these guys, big kids they are going to destroy me, I just reverted back to what I know is watching kids fight on TV using martial arts in defending themselves and so that seemed at 12 years old student may seem like the most logical next step, if I had any chance at all to protect myself you know when I went to high school in a year and 1/2 two years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay now you get there, you've convinced your mother that this is a good thing for you to do. You going with this belief of how it's going to go, now, we know in hindsight that somehow this worked out because you're still training your teaching you know you are still involved heavily in the martial arts but I'm curious about those early days. Was it what you expected how did that go?

John English:

It wasn't, that's a great question. Did it go as I thought it would? I guess, I guess yes and no that's a tough one because I just, I remember getting in the class and just enjoying the structure and enjoying the exercise and for a kid that wasn't very active growing up, that was something new and I like the way it made me feel at the end and the positive reinforcement it gave, it almost it did its job in a way that it didn't solve the issue of me potentially getting beat up, that was still there but what it did for me, is it almost distracted me from that potential future and what it did is it gave me an outlet and it gave me something to do and it introduced me to a different way of life a life, of exercise. And that was completely contrary to way I grew up. I have a great family my parents are still together they've been married for 47 years, I have a younger sister, they did a great job raising us but there's certain things that they didn't give us and an active lifestyle one of them. And so, coming out of a home where you know, again movies you know, they used take us to the beach I mean I was about the extent of you know our physical activity. You know, it was completely contrary and so was a whole new world that opened up and it got me focusing on something else and so as I'm going to seventh grade and eighth grade you don't starting to get stronger and my confidence is increasing and him playing sports in school and it was just a complete you know transformation more from a mental and emotional side you know than it was a physical becoming tough, physically tough and unbeatable. That was wasn't even thought about anymore when that was the initial, that's what I need to become if I'm gonna survive in high school.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I wanna go back to one of the words you use because, there's something that happens in the martial arts that doesn't happen and a lot of other places and I don't think even the majority of martial artist martial arts instructors are even aware of it. You mention structure, so here you are you're a, you're an overweight kid you're not popular in the school and if we exclude martial arts, your physical activity options are really free-form. If you're playing basketball you have a ton of options, you can dribble the ball, you can dribble the ball in a lot of places, you can pass it to four other people you know, if you're playing on a team, you can shoot it from anywhere on the court and for someone who is not confident in their physical skills, that can be overwhelming. But yet you look at martial arts and the structure is there, when you're doing forms which I've seen so many people that that step in any kind of a similar places is your describing you were. Oh, if I'm doing my basic form pin yan shodan, I look to the left I turn I do a low block. There's a correct way to do it, I'm allowed to not do it well when I start I know I'm supposed to do. And I'm curious if you've seen that in your teaching time and you know, am I am I right was that a hook for you at that time?

John English:

I think it was because you know going in and not being a physically gifted kid and you know not being the most athletic kid it was it was great to be able to learn in a, in a staged process and I think the martial arts have a way of doing that where it's very structured in the sense it has a curriculum. You know and it doesn't really matter the order you learn a certain punch or kick or technique what matters is that everyone learns those in order to get to you know higher level, a black belt. And so being able to do that in not having a ceiling so to speak, like you do in team sports where it's like you try to win as a team, you lose a team, yes some of the class with other people, yes were all working on the same techniques but if someone better than me that doesn't hold me down and it doesn't try to force me ahead. I'm still working on an individual level in and now it's probably, you know one of the hooks for me was you know I don't have to worry about being good or bad at this I just have to show up I have to listen and I have to work hard and you know I can achieve my goal and its one of the other things I think that gravitated me towards Boy Scouts. I mean I got my Eagle Scout as a sophomore in high school. I started Boy Scouts when I was young, my parents got me involved in Cub Scouts you know, it was off and on through the years because of all the different moves and new towns and everything else but I remember what again, I figure was six grade, we just moved in Hampton Falls when my dad built this house and we went to the school one night for a Boy Scout thing and you know they gave a statistic that said the 2% of all scouts make Eagle Scout. And I remember even at 12 I remember going oh 2% wow. I want to be that 2% I want to be that 2%. So as unconfident as I was as a kid there was still something in me that you know wanted to be different and going in the martial arts even then in like 87 was kinda, not it wasn't, it wasn't popular wasn't really still mainstream like it was, like it is today. And so, going back to you know the structure of it yeah, I think that was definitely a hook to get me involved.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know as your talk about Boy Scouts and Eagle Scout, it's kind of funny because I'm seeing some similarities there that I don't think have come up on the show. Here we are nearly 300 episodes in and



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you know we have new things to come up but it's not common that we have comparisons like this no martial arts to scouting. There's a fair amount of structure thereto.

John English:

Absolutely yeah what the ranks and everything else in scouting and I mean you can parallel the two of them obviously they have drastically different curriculums, but there's still a curriculum. And you know you look at the martial arts, being it is very militaristic in its structure you know, the Boy Scouts you know actually that's what it came from was something for boys to learn just outdoor survival skills and you know different things like that, preparedness and you know this, it is a mental and emotional and physical aspect to both of them and that's kind of why when I started teaching fast forward a little bit from my training in 94 when I bought into the business, the martial arts school business. In said you know I want to kind of do something different using the experiences I've had in these different disciplines. You know, the scouting discipline, the martial arts discipline and then obviously being raised by a dad who was a Marine, who served in Vietnam, so he was very, very heavy on discipline. And so, using those three aspects is kinda how we created our program modern day and into karate international.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Forgive me for doing some math there, but seven years later you bought in to a martial arts school, you were 20?

John English:

I was 19 actually okay with 19 just turned I think, 19 just turned 19.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not a common occurrence so, can you talk about that?

John English:

Yeah that's a great story in itself man, holy cow. I always get emotional I tell this story just because it brings up some good stuff. But so it was I earned my black belt thing was 93 and shortly after that, it was there was a chain of schools there was about 12 of them in New England and so my instructor who ran the Exeter location you know, he was he was looking the kind that take a next step in his career .he was he had been running the school for a while, he grew it and he kinda needed a new challenge and so he decided to you know, there's a struggling school in Portsmouth, he decided to go up there take that over and made me an offer and said hey, you know if you want to buy in you know ten thousand dollars if you get 10% ownership of the company and you can take over the school and at that point for me that



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was that was huge. Because I was kind of floundering. I was an okay student in school academically you know, a B-C student, I didn't get great SAT scores I was never a great physical or a written test taker and that hurts you when it comes time to college. So, you know everyone's partner applications and seeing you here and here I am kinda holding the bag, I'm getting rejection notices in the mail just because my grades in my SAT scores weren't high enough. So, at that time, my parents decided to move again and they want to go to Florida my dad want to build a house down there and at that point my roots were established, I have my martial arts training, I had my friends, I wasn't going. And they begged me to go, beg me to go. You can go to school for free in Florida you know why don't you go down and go to school. I dug my nails in this and said absolutely not, I'm not moving again this is my roots, this is my home now and so reluctantly they know they said okay. Just do us a favor and you know what you want to go to Northern Essex it's the local community college down at [00:19:41.13] and I hesitantly agreed but knew I needed some sort of job and so I sat them down one night after my instructor gave the offer to buy in and said this is what I want to I need \$10,000. And they flatly refuse they said, absolutely not. I don't think it's a good idea, you need to go to college that's the only way you gotta be successful and get a good job. You know, this is just, this is a hobby this isn't a good idea and it got heated it was, there was, we weren't talking for a while and it was pretty bad and so that night that we have that sit-down, my at time I think she was about 85 years old my grandmother, my dad's mom, was in the house. Her hearing wasn't the best she had been losing her hearing for quite some time but I think she heard enough so couple days went by and I went back to the house and I walked into my grandmother's, I'm like Grammy, where's mom and dad and oh they're not here. She said come here I got to talk to you. She grab me by the arm and I'll never forget it cause she had this super strong grip. She grab me by the arm, she said what do you need? And I said nothing, she's like don't lie to me, what you need I heard you talk with your parents what you need? And I said well I have this opportunity, I you know, I really want to, I really want to teach karate and I have an opportunity buying into this business and I don't think it's can happen and she's like, do you think you can be good at it? And I said yes, I can't do this and she's like I'll give you the money. And she did, she gave me the money she gave me \$5000 which I tried to refuse, but there's no way and I told her granny I'll pay you back, I'll pay you back and my father finally realized that that I wasn't backing down on this, saw that you know his mother gave me five grand and he relented he took out a credit card he had a \$5000 cash advance which I had to pay for, I have my 10 grand and I was I was off to the races. And that's how I got started.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What would the next couple months look like because I'm imagining your meeting this this debt obligation. I'm sure you're taking some kind of a salary from the school, may be the school's profitable you know, 10% owner you got a little bit of extra coming in on top of that.

John English:

No but it was brutal.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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But that was kinda where I was going, I can imagine that this is a large amount of money especially if ownership and the teaching is transitioning anybody that's ever watched any business transition who's running it there's always a dip that follows some guessing some of the students left because you were different you were this other gentleman.

John English:

So yeah what happened is once he, once he decided to go to Portsmouth obviously, he had a following and anyone that's involved in martial arts knows it's very much a personality-based business. You know you get attached to your teachers and your instructors and it's very, it's very difficult sometimes when some new steps in to be able continue to train just because you have such, such a tight relationship well with the person and your teacher so you know the school took a huge step and it went from, I don't even remember the numbers back then but you know, it took up a big enough that it wasn't doing the numbers it was and so here I am 19 years old and I have this credit card payment I gotta make every month, for the money that you know I bought into the business with, I had rent, I had food, I had gas, I had insurance, in essence I was on, I was on my own, I was 100% on my own. So, it was a struggle for the first couple years and those times when you're not making rent and you know you're eating tuna because that's all you can afford. In the summertime I used to go down because my buddy's parents had a basement apartment down on Boar's Head and Hampton Beach, so in the summer time I used to, I spear fish and I jump in the water and I grab a couple flounder and that was dinner, that was dinner that night. And so, it was I was deftly a starving artist in the beginning. It took me a while to really get my feet on the ground where I was sustaining myself in a comfortable way through the business. But it was yeah, in the first really is a tough.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I want to talk about those first couple of years. Statistically the majority of people listening right now I've never start a business or taken over business, run a business. I've started a few so I understand what that mindset is, I understand what it's like to be in that space with no money and trying to build something. I mean, that's the story of whistlekick I mean, truly I was down my last thousand dollars with nothing coming in, going, I don't know what I'm going to do. But I'd love for you to talk about where your head was at their? Here you are with passion starting out I don't know if your passion dwindled, I don't know if he thought about giving up, but I'm going to guess that there is there something in there that may be because you are a martial artist, you were able to move forward a little bit differently than someone who isn't a martial artist might have.

John English:

Yeah, I don't know if it was that or just being naïve. Being young and being naïve. And in essence I think that can sometimes be a gift because at that age, I wasn't thinking about a business failing, I was just thinking about I love this, this is my career and it's going to work. And as hard as it was, I just knew, just



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every day you put your shoes on, you get to the school and you work the school. And I had a good support group in the sense that you know, my instructor, he had out here in a very good business sense about him and so I had support there. You know wasn't like he was gone, he was still around and we would meet weekly for meetings, he would recommend different audiocassettes to listen to in the car and so I had some direction. It wasn't like I was on the silent all by myself and didn't know what to do, I knew what I needed to do and I have the support there when I didn't, I have that phone call. So, I had a business mentor you which is huge but that and I think being naïve were probably the two greatest gifts I had because failure wasn't an option, you don't even think about it. It's like this is my job this is my career, I love doing this and its gonna work. There's no other option at that point and so I think, I think those two things together was part of the reason why the success started to come.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Talk about that success that transition from eating tuna and fish you cut yourself to something more.

John English:

It's a process you know and I think, I think people think you know, you look all over the news and you look in the media and yet you hear of these business people, who they just they make it big one day. I don't believe that, I think it's a process. You know, we try to speed the process up we speeded it up in a 60-minute phone call or 30-minute television show, but at the end of the day there's years and years and years of foundational stuff that takes place in a person's life to get them to the point where they hit that breakthrough. You know and for me it was, it was a nibbling process. It was you know, each year the school would grow a little more. It will grow a little more, you know, I had more opportunity where my name was getting in the community more. I was starting to get into the school systems, I was getting to know the local teachers they were seeing what I was doing I'm coming in as a guest teacher for gym class program and so now I'm exposed all of these kids in the community and I'm exposing them to martial arts in a way that I wasn't, I didn't get exposed to. I got exposed to it to the movies you know now able to use gym class which I think for elementary and even junior high school kids is how they get exposed to different sports to see if it's something they want to pursue. So now, I have a platform where, I'm able to you know expose these kids to what real martial arts is. You know and so that started to help and the school started to grow. It started to grow and you know it became, set our peak, we started to peak out it real close at 300 active students by 2004, 2005 so in about a 10-year period, you know we overcame pretty close to tripling the school.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you chalk it up to?

John English:



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Oh, hard work absolutely. I mean being, you can relate to this as well I mean, being a business owner, the great thing about there's no there is no ceiling. Yet there is no safety net either and so you have to, you have to be self-disciplined to go to work and it's so easy to, you know bag at that day and go to the beach in the summer cause the attendance is down and everybody's on vacation and you know, you just got to oh I'll take today off and you have to be a self-disciplined person to know that you have to work your business. You don't have someone doing it for you, you're a small business owner and you wear a lot of different hats. You know you're the instructor, you're the janitor, you're the accountant you're the marketer and you have always have a job to do in the second you stop doing one of the jobs, the business starts to get affected. And so, with my background, again coming from, I'll give my dad the credit first he instilled in me such a strong, strong work ethic I mean it's four years old, I had to be out stacking wood on a Saturday one only want to do is watch Saturday morning cartoons. He is electrician by trade and on Saturday mornings during fall he used to have to go set up the speaker systems at tough university because that's who he worked and used to bring me with some and so I was up at six in the morning on a Saturday, in the truck going at [00:30:55.41] I remember Neil 4,5,6 years old go give me go give me the romax I know what romax was at that age, taught it to me. I used to run down the bleachers and get it bring a backup. You know, so he was instrumental in giving me that work ethic. You have to work hard for things you want in life. Then my martial arts instructor. You know I would say would come second where you know, taught me that if you set a goal when you work hard you can achieve it. You know and gave me the self-confidence that I needed you know to be able to do it and also giving me, you know the business side of it after I got my black belt in teaching me the business of martial arts. You know, he was extremely influential obviously and then obviously my background in scouts and high school sports and the coaches that I had in my life and the people, you know all the people you start reflecting on that kinda planted seeds in you that helped you to blossom over time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, knowing what you know now especially after seeing that success. You know, post the two years we'll call the dry spell, if you were to go back and do all that again with what you know now, what would you have done differently?

John English:

That's a great question. That's a great question and my initial reaction to it is I don't know if I do anything different because it got me to where I am today you know, if you start tweaking the path does it could affect the future? Absolutely but I think you might be missing some lessons in the process. You know I guess, I guess the one thing that I would have to say that I would change is just learning the better money management system and getting some more mentoring and counseling and just basic accounting in money management. I think we all, as much as martial arts and you know other things teach us and help us with discipline, I think we all, we still all as human beings have certain struggles. You know and again I never learned money management, I think money management is something that comes from our upbringing and when you have a blue-collar worker like my dad who works six days a week I mean it was feast or famine when recessions hit you know we stayed home. There was no money



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you know but when the booms were going on, we would they were taken us to Disney World in Hawaii for family vacations and so I saw, I saw the highs and the lows of that and I think as a business owner we tend to kinda mimic our financials based on may be how we were raised and so you know in retrospect here, in introspection as you're asking the question I would probably have to say getting a mentor with some sort of teaching you that discipline of money management and how to be disciplined with money would probably be the biggest thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I just want to go that from not simply the martial arts perspective or the business perspective, from the life perspective. The number one skill and I saw this as know someone is to hire people and I mean just general observation that people don't have when they come out of high school is the ability to manage their own finances. We understand the math of okay money and money out and we think that that's all it is but it's so much more than that. The idea of applying cash flow which we often think about as a business thing only is just as valid on personal and I'm surprised how often we as martial artist who our condition from day one to find someone to look up to that knows more than us to teach us, how often we do not do that when it comes to martial arts business. We assume that we are the only ones that know our schools worse we assume our ideas are the only ideas and I'm not saying that out you know, universally but in my travels and I'm curious if you would agree, it seems to be much more common than it isn't.

John English:

I would agree and it's and again this is, it's one of those things where you know, you look at it and you look at martial arts and in all the buzzwords are always used you no respect in humility and discipline but look let's face it again where were human beings and you know we have our own biases and ideologies and personalities and sometimes in the areas that are supposed to exemplify certain traits, don't and I think is as great as the martial arts are you know, you get egos, you get pride and so as school owner sometimes you don't want anyone knowing your numbers. You know, how many student you have that number always gets inflated because that's based on you know, your level of success. you know it's kind like rank if your 5th degree black belt your you're better than me the brown belt and so that gets translated over into the business side and you get guys that just they have no humility and they don't want to ask for help because that's weakness, I can't ask for help. And I never subscribe to that and always realize just like training if I want to get better in a certain discipline, I gotta go find a teacher that knows more than I do. In transferring that over into the business is the same thing so we started you know, early days, one of the biggest jumps that the school made is we got on a, we you started using the billing company. Which at that time was a little taboo, you didn't necessarily want someone seeing your numbers? But that was one of the influential things to help us with our growth and then we started doing these roundtables in business seminars or school owners would get together and discussed different strategies on marketing about class structure about rates and all the different things at school must go through and then sometimes just even just kind of complain you know, about when you lose students and how discouraging it is and disheartening and everything and just you know,



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kind of talk that through and so that's you know that was one of the major reasons why our school started to grow. I was never too good for something, it didn't matter what it was, if someone had something, to me that you know, I felt I could make work at my school I would do it. I would do it. There wasn't a lot of pride there, the pride was getting the school to grow. That was we wanted and not just get the school to grow but get it to grow in a way that we were producing quality students and that was really important for me too because I decided in a very young age that if I was going to do this, my dad always taught me do it right and you do it right the first time because your name is everything and when people hear your name you want to know that they think of integrity, honesty because you can't buy that. And so, with our students who want to make sure your ranks were earned. You know and earn for the individual and that just attending wasn't enough, it wasn't just a matter of coming to class, that's the easy part. You got to come the class, you had to work hard. You know, you had to learn what you needed to learn and you have a listen and those are the characteristics that they really helped us shape the school and the growth of the school. And so, it wasn't just about coming to karate class to learn a front punch to get my yellow belt, well Mr. English also wants us to make sure that were listening in school and so we started sending out teacher sign off things when it came time for Bell time. Teacher at school had to sign it saying the kid was your listening behaving in the classroom, you know and doing the best they can. I didn't care if they had As or not they could had Bs and the teacher could still sign as long as their conduct and effort was there and then mom and dad had to sign that at home. You know, to make sure that the kids doing their best at home they're listening to being respectful. And I think that was another catalyst that really helped us to grow the school in numbers but also in quality.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Who are you looking to now for growth and education?

John English:

Oh. I'm still, I'm in a kind of at a different phase and in my career right now, I'm heavily involved in refereeing MMA events, I have the privilege and opportunity work for Bellator, flying overseas so I'm going to Italy to judge an event and so now it's my mentors have changed I've kinda got my school in a groove where I want it where it's manageable, I have a staff that I've developed over the years that have the same vision I do, and that are going to take the school into the next generation, but I moving on to my refereeing so guys like John McCarthy I meet with couple times a year actually become friends with. Good friend of mine from Watertown mass Kevin McDonald who is probably one of the best if not the best referee in the Northeast if not the East Coast. He referee training judging training courses are all over the country, he's a mentor and a very close friend. I've gotten to know Rob Hines, who's an Illinois referee that's done major UFC shows and Bellator shows and so I'm kind in the inner circle now of the Association of boxing commissions and combat sports. You know, I'm a key figure in one of their committees are charitable committee which is something we're working on right now for the Orlando show or Orlando convention for once a year. These people are some of the greatest minds in the country actually internationally for boxing, wrestling, MMA, kickboxing, Muay Thai, it's kind of become,



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that's my next passion and that's kinda really what I've been working on and just looking to network with the best in this area to help me to continue to grow.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What makes a good MMA referee?

John English:

Decisiveness. Decisiveness. I would say is the most important quality. You are forced to make a decision in the blink of an eye and once a decision is made, it has to say made. You can doubt yourself, you can reflect, you can I screwed up, I made the wrong call, you have to stick with your call, you can't waiver and you can't look to have people everyone like you because they're just not. There's gotta be one winner and there's gotta be a loser and sometimes in close fights, you have to make a judgment call and someone's not gonna like it and you don't get blasted by the media and you're gonna get blasted by coaches and fans and fighters. But you have to stay true to the decision you made and you can't waiver and so decisiveness is probably the most important quality that I have is an MMA referee.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think, you can almost make the same evaluation of being a fighter.

John English:

Yes absolutely. You know as a fighter though, for a fighter and this is coming from someone that competed, so I'm going in there with, I know with these guys go through, I know what it's like to do a 10-week training camp get ready for a fight. But I only have to worry about me in there and what I want to do and what my opponent is trying to do to me. As a referee I go are about two guys and so you know as a fighter is still a little bit easier in the sense that I just got a worry about me and what I'm doing and protecting myself and my offense and the other guys trying to do the same thing. Were they're each and trying to impose their will on each other, but I gotta watch both of them at the same time and the three mean things a referee therefore is one, a number one always fighter safety. We want these guys to be able compete but we want them to sustain the minimal amount of damages possible. Alright the second is to make sure the rules are enforced so it's a fair playing field in the third thing is to make sure the integrity of the contest stays at that event and that doesn't waiver. And so again going back to kinda level playing field and so as a referee, you know I've called fights early. I'd rather call hundred flights early than call one fight too late and have a guy take damage, it could permanently affect him the rest of his life and that's a dilemma every time we step in there, is to give them the opportunity to win but not at the sake of their long-term health. And that's the hardest part, that's the hardest part.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It's gotta be hard and anybody that's ever-watched amateur MMA has likely seen sites and seemingly very early, because of course the more novice someone is as a fighter, the more you're trying to protect them.

John English:

Yes and that's and that comes down to again setting the stage and I think running a martial arts school for as many years as I have has been very influential and in helping me succeed in this area is just pre-framing what the expectations are before the event and so when you're having your rules meeting, you know we tell these guys as amateurs listen, you know I can stop a fight without a tap and they look at you like so you can't, you guys are amateurs if you're in a straight out arm bar your method of defense is just biting down on your mouthpiece and grunting thinking you going to be a will muscle your way out that's not an effective defense, you're gonna get your broken I can stop the fight without a tap. Same thing on a choke if I'm not seeing you actively trying to escape that choke, I don't need a tap to stop the fight because we want you guys to get the experience that you're going to need to get in order to turn pro. Now once you turn pro if you make the decision that you want to get from broken I'm gonna let you get your broken without a tap, but as soon as I see a break the fights over. And it's getting them understand that in pre-frame it and usually when you do that a good effective rules meeting you will curb a lot of your problems it's when that communication doesn't take place and everyone has their own perception of what's going to happen and then something interrupts that is where you get the controversy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You mentioned that you spent some time competing can you tell us a bit about that?

John English:

Yeah. I dabbled as an amateur kickboxer, I had a couple amateur kickboxing fights, I had one MMA amateur fight and I realize I was a better coach and teacher than I was competitor. So, I don't really have much to brag about other than I'm really good at getting punched and kicked

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's a skill in that.

John English:

I don't know if it's a good skill, you know, I got a hard head I mean I know I can take a beating if I need to but again that's not something to be proud of because the long-term effects of that were starting to see it in some of the supports of guy that has taken years and years of abuse. You know a lot of things we



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talk about at the convention and one of the constant training that were trying to do with referees is you know CTE and the effects of you know trauma and being knocked out and even sometimes not necessarily knocked out but just taking blows to the head over and over and over again and what their finding is the long-term effects of that with early onset Alzheimer's and dementia and just so many so many issues that can occur that the sport is still so new. I mean 93 really it started, it really became started coming mainstream around 2008 and now, where we are it still, we still have no idea, were starting to see some of the effects as we are in the NFL with the concussions, you know in the suicide rates and the depression of these athletes and they're all, they're all starting to correlate that with the CTE in the in the trauma that brain takes from just being rattled inside of a skull, it's really starting to take an effect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's pretty amazing. On the one hand you're starting to see a lot of this pressure and when we talk about traumatic events, I don't agree seeing it anywhere more concretely than youth football and if anybody out there has kids that play football, you've likely noticed and unless you live in some of the big football areas like Texas, Alabama, some those deep South states, the dramatic decrease in participation in football as were learning about what's going on there. But then on the other side listeners know that one of the things in addition martial arts are very passionate about his CrossFit and a lot of the information that's come out around nutrition through some of those circles talks about dietary things that are actually shown to reverse some of this brain damage. So, it's fascinating to me kind of on both sides and I'm excited to see as we become the society that that seems to be craving more and more dramatic sporting contests, where would be no 10 20 30 years from now you know we've seen plenty of sci-fi movies that predict all these fights to the death by what 2040 and things like that so we are really get there.

John English:

Yeah and I think that's a great thing about it to. We're using the science now and we're becoming more educated and you even look at you know fighters how to use the train in the early days since I have the opportunity of still Tony Franklin was a guy that he ended up making it to the UFC and he fought all over the world and he was someone that in my early days used to drive down to New Jersey together and train with and you know, the training back then was, hard sparring was done three or four days a week, I mean Full Contact, hard and now these guys are realizing that a lot of the abuse it's taking is done in in the training sessions. It's not the fight itself it's all of the concussions and how many times had he been knocked out in practice? In realizing that hey you know we don't need to take, we don't need to take it that hard in training anymore and the science is showing and guys are starting to see that they don't have to go hundred percent in training their hard sparring now is maybe 70% in training up to a fight and that it's more about the skills in the drills in the conditioning is a bigger part of the support now than just being the toughest guy in there that you're just constantly being bombarded with Full Contact strikes in training. When you got a guy get ready for flight and he's doing rounds and he's got a fresh guy every minute or two and he's going to five or six guys taken a pummeling, absolute pummeling, those



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days are over. You know these coaches have realized that they have to do something different to protect the longevity of this fighter so he can have a long career whereas guys back then you know they just, you just that, the human body can't sustain that type of abuse for that long without some sort of damage occurring. And so with the education and the science of the coming out, I see the sport moving forward that way in between officials and corners and trainers and instructors and fighters starting to get on board and realizing hey you know there's a safer more effective way of doing this, I think it's going to help everybody and I think a long-term and even with the football you're right the numbers are down now but I think with some modifications with young kids, focusing more on flag football focusing more on skills and drills when they're putting the pads on, I think football will start to surge again because of you know the education that that's happening now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What lessons are there for traditional martial art schools, especially school owners and instructors, that we can take out of you know this change to training styles for Full Contact.

John English:

Well I think you know, for a while there when UFC first came out and mixed martial arts first started to become prominent, it was pitched to us as a style versus style of men. Which style is the best, which is a Mercedes of martial arts? And the initial events would pit karate against judo and Brazilian jujitsu against American wrestling and taekwondo versus kung Fu and that's how they started to sell it. And then I think fast forward to where we are today, guys who realize it's not so much about a style versus style as it is taking almost a Bruce Lee method taking what works in not discarding it. So, you got guys like Steven wonder boy Thompson who's a traditional karate guy and you watch him fight and he takes that side stands like you doing karate point fighting he's a master at it. Michael page out of England same thing he's a karate guy and he's making that work in in the octagon but then you got, you still have your high level BJJ guys. You know Damien [00:54:17.10] in his 40s and still fighting using BJJ effectively in the octagon but every one of them have learned, they have to have a basic knowledge of all of these arts in order to be effective in that sport. And as a martial arts school owner we have to realize is much as we love it, it's still a sport and there's still rules. How we do our program we need to continue to do our program but we also have to be open enough to see you know, that maybe a Muay Thai kick might be a little bit more effective in a certain situation than say a traditional karate kick would. If we're looking at a self-defense standpoint, if we're looking at it as a sport standpoint, that's different the sport has rules and can be manipulated and so to that traditional school owner, do what you do, do it to the best of your ability and find the things that really, really work and focus on goals but also be humble enough to see certain things that don't work and don't be afraid to necessarily modify it for your students and give them the option. And I think that's what a good teacher needs to do, is give the students the tools so the student can create their own toolbox because really, it's called martial arts for a reason. There's artistic aspect to it, so I was taught all the tools but I gravitate toward certain ones of them because of my body type, my height, my physical attributes, certain athleticism that I may or may not have, and so that's going to be different than the guy next to me who might be 4 inches taller and



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longer and faster than me, he has all the same tools I do but you utilize different ones in a different way to make himself unique in his own way. So, we all really become a file within ourselves and I think that's one of the beautiful things about martial arts as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're talking about that diversity of training and being willing to look around and see what works and course brought Bruce Lee who sort of the quintessential example of looking around at all the different options taking what works discarding the rest. If you had the opportunity to train with someone you haven't yet to add tools to your toolbox and let's say this person could be anyone from anywhere in time, who would you want to train with?

John English:

Great question and I'm blessed in the sense that I kinda already have that at my disposal. I am I'm rubbing elbows with the highest people, in the highest levels of this industry, you know with the connections I have through the ABC, the connections that I have through you know my officiating and so I rub elbows on a daily basis with some of the top teams here in New England. I mean I just saw Joe Lowe's on Friday night you know and we chatted with them just briefly, actually in passing he had one of his guys fighting at the reality fighting show that I was officiating down to Mohegan and you know there he is great [00:57:33.18] been around forever. Such a humble guy, great guy. But I mean if I called him up tomorrow, I know he he'd be more than willing to let me go now to train with him. But yeah, I mean, I still I'm in a funny stage in my life right now where I'm always looking for that new adventure and so I've couple years ago, I started another business and taking a lot of the principles I'm learning in martial arts and applying it to this new business and you know I'm really trying to get that up off the ground really spending a lot of time like with my officiating. And that's kind of, that's my training right now that I'm constantly looking to get better and better at in picking guys minds and in doing different seminars and training courses to go to the next level with that but that's probably the short long answer to your question.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. What are your goals? You know, if you look out 5-10 however many years you choose, what are you hoping to accomplish as a martial artist?

John English:

Someone said to me once... This has stuck with me for a long time and it's kind of it's my mission statement, I tell all mygh level kids that I work with my teenagers we call it the varsity program, some schools might call it a black belt program or Black belt club. We call varsity and it's kind of the highest-level training for teenagers and the goal of the program is by the end of the senior year we're looking for



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them to potentially earn their adult black. We separate kids and adults when it comes to black belt, but I tell them you know for me my mission statement is you know success is when you look back upon your life that other people were better off because you lived. So, everything decision I make tries to go back to that mission statement and so at this point my goal in training my students is to make sure they're physically mentally and emotionally prepared for life. And so, our program has kinda shifted to making sure that these kids are ready for the real fight. It's not a physical fight on the street, I've been doing martial arts now I'm I think this is my 30th year of training and I've never been in a physical fight on the street and I tell a lot of people like that will be like a doctor going to school for 16 years and doing a residency and they never treat a patient. Why did you do it? Why did you spend all that time? So there has to be something more and deeper than just the physical skill and so my goal moving forward in the future with this program is to produce physically mentally and emotionally tough teenagers that are going to become tough adults. So, when life punches him in the face they know how to react to it than when they don't get that job, that job they wanted they know how to deal with that type of failure. That every time they get knocked down they know how to get up and they know how to be self-motivated to do it and not necessarily rely on the world to pick them up and to provide for them that they have to do it themselves. That they have to fight, they have to fight their fight and that's the mission of the school at this point and that's where we want to be five years from now and 50 years from now and even if I'm not involved anymore for whatever reason and in my man, Craig takes over, that he's going to continue that tradition of producing physically mentally and emotionally tough kids teenagers.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And he's doing a great job he's become a good friend. Now if you want to reach out to you sooner find you online on social media or websites, whatever else you've got going on what links should we drop in the show notes?

John English:

You can go to our web address which is KIAMACNH.com that's abbreviated for karate international martial arts Center New Hampshire. Alright that's one, my email address is actually on that site they can email me directly. I'd really love to encourage your listeners to really try to support this charity that were working on, the retired fighters fund its put together by the Association boxing commissions in combat sports which is a 501(c)(3) organization nonprofit. And the charity is really designed to help fighters who retired from the sport they might be going through life challenge they have some sort of medical expense that's you know inhibiting them. They may not have the funds they might be down on their luck and this is a something that they can apply for gift where you know we can try to help them out and in a tough time. The tagline of it is still helping them with life fight when their career is over and we all we all go through tough times and so you know why I believe is a community were here to try to pick each other up one we fall down and help each other out whenever we can and so this is been a great avenue for that in the information on that is they can go to abcboxing.com and there's a tab that says fighter fund and on that tab they connect to make all donations through PayPal right on the website and that would just be a huge blessing for some these guys. We gave out a gift last year actually



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Gary Goodrich if some of your listeners remember Gary Goodrich from the old days just an absolute beast of a man, he is he suffering the effects of CTE, he's having he was having a lot of problems and we are able to give him a gift last year to help with some medical expenses that he needed and you know this year were looking at starting a college fund for a boxer who died in the ring. We want to start a college fund for his two kids and so that's going to be one of the gifts that we give this year so, to all my martial artists you know if you could support us and that that would just be a huge blessing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, absolutely and will drop those links and links and photos of the things we talked about today over on the show notes for anyone that might be new to the show that's it whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Well, sir I really appreciate your time today appreciate all these wonderful, wonderful stories that you shared had a good time you know you hopefully will connect in person at some point soon here.

John English:

Absolutely it was a blessing for me to I really appreciate taking the time, I'm one of many, we all have a story and that the great thing about it I think is most being a martial artist, I've met people that relationships to last a lifetime and so and we all have our stories and that's great thing about it being a [01:04:48.59] is just a blessing and I just want to thank you and your listeners.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you're welcome and that's the beauty of the show as we bring people want to hear their stories. Before let you go I like test for just one more thing. We always ask our guests you know what parting words would you give the folks listening today?

John English:

Keep fighting it all I suffice you know when were all fighter and so in between rounds when you sit on your stool and that usually the time you the most discouraged, hopefully you have a coach, you have an instructor if someone in your life it's going to give you the words that you need to hear to get back out there to fight for round two. So, life is a fight, don't stop swinging no matter how many times you get knocked down you just gotta keep getting back up and that's the true heart of a warrior. We all have it within us we just have to learn to bring it out.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think if I have one take away from today's episode with Mr. English, it's that a student mindset, that humility, that white belt mentality that we sometimes talk about on the show, if you can hold that throughout your life you can learn a tremendous amount and you can succeed more than you might



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otherwise. Because the ability to constantly look to other people for help or advice, for growth, is something that isn't just relevant when you start martial arts but once you've been in it for a while and honestly anywhere in your life and it's been great to see Mr. English passing on what he's learned to the next generation and honestly even the generation past them. Some great martial artist at his school. Thank you, Mr., For coming on the show today. If you want to find a short note you can head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com check out photos, links, all kinds of other stuff that we've got going on there on this and 295 other episodes. If you want to support the show you can join the newsletter list, you can check our products whistlekick.com or at Amazon, you can encourage someone else to come on the show as a guest, you can join our wholesale program there are a multitude of ways that you can help make sure the show sticks around which kinda sounds like I'm threatening you but I'm not because it's gonna stick around, because I like doing it and let's be honest this really cost us that much money. We're doing it, were investing the time because that's really the biggest cost on this thing is my time, we do it one because I love it, and two because I think it's good for the martial arts we capture these. Stories unfortunately we've had two guests passed away was recently Master Jhoon Rhee and well I don't pretend that the episodes that we've done with him or Hanshi Jim Smith are a true memorial of who they are as human beings or as martial artist, I'm happy that I had a chance to talk to them in the you can hear their words in our in the future. If you want to reach out to me jeremy@whistlekick.com we are @whistlekick all over social media. Find this episode on YouTube, iTunes, pretty much anywhere you can find podcasts. You know if you're really specific about it, you can even listen to the show on your Amazon Alexa devices, yeah, it's kinda neat. Thanks for your time today I appreciate you listening, you help give me purpose. Until next time train hard, smile and have a great day.