



Episode 36 – Mr. John Graden | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everybody it's episode 36 of [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com). The only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest Mr. John Graden. I'm your host Jeremy Lesniak and I'm also whistlekick's founder. Here at whistlekick we make the world's best sparring gear and some great apparel and accessories for traditional martial artists. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of the returning fans. If you're not familiar with our products, you should check out what we offer like our exclusive sparring boots we got rid of the annoying toe strap and made other improvements to make them the closest you can get to sparring barefoot. You can find more information about those and the rest of our great equipment at whistlekick.com and all of our past podcast episodes show notes for this one and a lot more are at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and while you're on our website, why don't you sign up for our newsletter, we offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests and now for today's episode. On episode 36 we're joined by Mr. John Graden, a very well-known martial artist. Mr. Graden is known as an author industry visionary coach instructor and student under 2 legendary martial artists like all of our episodes Mr. Graden tells some great stories but unlike most guests, Mr. Graden does not pull punches. He offers strong opinions on martial arts in the way some things are done. Honestly some of what he says may upset you. I enjoyed our discussion and found his points even though what he said we're a bit unsettling to be made with respect and logic. You might have to listen to this one a few times, I certainly did and with that, Mr. Graden welcome to [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com).

John Graden:

Mr. Graden you say I thought that in my advanced notes I told you I must be referred to as Grand 01:58 don't you guys pay attention over there?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Apparently not no.

John Graden:

You walked in hands down on that one that was good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I did I did absolutely I love it yeah, we I'm sure we could have a whole separate discussion about titles and how they seem to be escalating and people keep finding new adjectives to throw into their ranks.

John Graden:



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Oh, I have plenty of theories why that happened.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But before we get into any of that, why don't you start by telling us how you got started in the martial arts and when and what you've done and all that great stuff, give us some context.

John Graden:

Well I started training you know like a lot of guys we're in the kung Fu boom in the mid 70s my first exposure in martial arts was watching the Batman TV show and there was a crossover guest of the Green Hornet and Kato and I had no idea that Kato was being portrayed by the late great Bruce Lee I guess he's not so late these days but the great Bruce Lee so that young and in the first episode was Robin fighting Kato and Batman fighting Green Hornet and man the narrator can Robin hold up against Karate master Robin? Tune in next time same that channel same that time 03:14 I was freakin out I thought that was cool as can be because the smallest guy on the screen was getting all the respect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah

John Graden:

You know we just you take your eyes off Bruce Lee so years later when we move to Florida my dad took me to see the Five Fingers of Death and it was the first chopsocky Kung Fu film that was widely released and that was the beginning of the whole chopsocky Kung Fu boom in the 70s and we've never seen anything like it. That raised us on John Wayne and Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson and there were rules about fighting you don't you never hit a man when he's down 03:57 kick him and you definitely never kick somebody in the groin but all the rules went out the window watching these guys fly through the air and doing these outlandish fights they not only kicked the guy when he was down they stomped him into an 04:12 he didn't just kick him on the groin they ripped his 04:14 so I'd never seen anything like it before and the following Monday as I you know 04:20 who when I get into something I get into it I was on the phone calling Karate schools locally and I made the rounds you know and they you know I had no idea what karate was like it was just Bruce Lee and what I saw in the back of the comic books and you know all the comic books promise that the smaller guy can be the larger opponent well that really appeals to a 14 year old and as a chubby little 14 year old cause that's what I wanted I wanted those secret techniques I knew I wasn't gonna go to China or Japan to learn them so I called around and you know you get conversations like for people that answered Hi Kyoshu Kyuki Karate how much are your lessons, \$25 a month okay thank you click hmmm Sheng's Kung Fu Hi how much are your lessons? \$30 a month what is kung Fu? That's not like karate is it? No Kung Fu is better fine. But one guy answered the phone and pent 20 minutes on the phone with me asked me why I called what was the motivation what



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interested me about karate and I asked him questions about the yellow pages ad because in the ad it said that he was a kata champion I said what is a kata I don't know a kata I think I called it a Kata so he explained to me what a kata is and then he said that he was the you know I'd say this lightweight champion I said I don't understand I thought the smallest guy could beat the biggest guy why would there be weight divisions in karate I just envisioned that you know there'd be a pile of dead bodies and some Japanese guys standing on top of them you know with bloody chopped hands or something like that. So he was really patient and he ask me to get a piece of paper and write down information and he invited me to come watch their advance class at the new school that just opened in 06:05 Florida and the guy that talked to me was 06:09 it was amazing he really made a connection with me and I you know I convinced my parents to let us go watch class mom stayed home these are kinda guys things and but it was had to do with fighting in karate so my dad was intrigued so he went and watched the class and he would walk in and I sat and I'm watching the class and there's 16 year old blue belt is kicking a pole in the center of the room one of the support poles where they wrap padding around for safety and the whole building was shaking every time he kick it, I thought oh man that is amazing I have to have that so that's when I started my training my parents wouldn't pay for it if I had to insert that the cost was \$25 a month and there was a 2 year contract and my dad was not gonna sign any contracts so we're shelved for about 4 or 5 months and my brother and I were out you know a while later shooting baskets and the phone rings I ran inside it's Debbie Bone the wife of the owner Hi this is Debbie Bone from Florida Karate Academy I'm just calling to see if you're still interested in training with us. I said oh I'd love to, so I really want to do this but my parents won't pay for it. She said well you sound like you're really sincere you'll probably be a good student, I tell you what tomorrow when you get out of the school come on by and you can keep paying the karate school for your lessons. I was the original wax on wax off kid and I was there man oh man next day and I knew from my first white belt class that I was gonna do this for the rest of my life. It was an immediate connection.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's fantastic that's a great origin story of course you know we're big on stories here so bring us a few years into the future.

John Graden:

Well I there's some darkness there I'm writing a book actually it tells these stories in depth and it's really pretty dang interesting the school is run by Walt Bone. Walt was an acclaimed competitor he was in the magazines he was a national Kata champion, fighter and all that kind of stuff and he came out of the Jhoon Rhee, Allen Steen, Mike Anderson's school of Taekwondo as we referred to it in that day so it was a very good lineage I joined without knowing that one of the best schools in the country and it was run with a high emphasis on martial arts skill, there was not much in the way of life skills in fact the school in many ways you know today that we advertise that the best thing that you can do for your kid's school grade is to enroll them into martial arts, well the worst thing you could've done for me for my school grade is to remove me into martial arts because I was a straight A student I was on the honor roll, but once I started training nothing else mattered. I would open you know I'd be in Biology class, I would



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open my Biology book and I would slip in the latest issue of official karate magazine and I'd been reading you know the instructor will be talking about cell 09:04 and I'd be reading about self-defense instead so my grades dropped I started I really went down a bad path and, in many ways, it was following the example of the leadership of that particular school. So it was a unique situation and one that I don't think a lot of people have had but I eventually after I mean let me put this into context and so moving forward I was training like a beast I was going to the school every day to clean the school and then I would train and the instructor at that school a man named Hank Farrah, F A R R A H he took me under his wing and made me his personal training partner from the time I was a green belt until the time I was a brown belt so we would spar every day and did drills every day and I got really good really fast and it was an interesting process and then I eventually actually got thrown out of the school. I got kicked out of the school by Walt Bone for being a complete butthead and martial arts with a lot of things about the martial arts that people subscribe to that had not been my experience and things that I didn't learn until later that I wish I had known then one of those was the importance of controlling pride and being humble which is in many ways the way in karatedo in traditional training but this school was far from that so I was reading in the magazines and this I was a brown belt at the time I refuse to test for black belt. they wanted me to test for blackbelt I was really good I was sparring the only black belt in the school that could beat me was Walt Bone so I was really dominating at the time and I refuse to test for black belt because I didn't wanna do kata. I thought this is a freaking waste of time and so what I would do is I would wait during born belt, brown belt class until the students were sparring I would wait outside looking in the window and I saw it when they started to get the gear on I would run inside I wouldn't bow in I would just put my gear on I would spar and then I wouldn't bow out, I'd get out and leave. It was completely disrespectful I would throw myself out of this school if I was my own student and that's what happened.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But at the time sorry to interject but at the time you didn't realize you were being disrespectful.

John Graden:

Oh, I know I was.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay

John Graden:

I didn't care I was too full of myself I was master Butthead I was a Mr. Know it All it's like the bumper stickers that you see you know it's I was 16 again so I'd know it all that was me at age 16 17 so eventually Bone had it he just threw me out of the school for about 9 months and I got a real dose of



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real life. I started working at a Shell station and I missed karate terribly and eventually let me back in and once he let me back in I learned the air of my ways I started reading books by Funakoshi and all these traditional masters. I really gained a high respect for kata in fact I started competing more in kata and won more trophies in kata when I actually did it in sparring, so in a long roundabout way martial arts came easily because all my instructors took me on as personal training partners from the beginning but I had to get my head on straight and I had to go through that pain of being thrown out of the school and would really appreciate the value of what I was doing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wonderful sort of you don't know what you have until you've lost it.

John Graden:

Yeah so that's sort I had and I just threw it out the window.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's fantastic and I think it gives us a pretty good context for your love of the martial arts and certainly a career that has been based in the martial arts and we're gonna get more into that later but we're all about stories as I've said so I'd like you to share with us your best martial arts story.

John Graden:

Some of your listeners may know the name Mike Anderson. Mike Anderson is a genius, he's the guy that created full contact karate, he created semi-contact karate because he was the first tournament to require safety gear in 1973 13:19 nationals then he created full contact karate with a 90-minute ABC sports special that was the highest rated special of the year so this was a big deal. This was when Joe Lewis, Bill Wallace, 13:33 Smith and Isaiah's 13:36 from Mexico earned the world titles and became legends in the sport. Well Mike Anderson was the guy behind all that and what he used to drive his sport ambitions was his magazine which was professional karate magazine. I distinctly recall buying the first issue on my first night as a white belt I still have that issue, the best magazine ever. So fast forward a couple of decades and he wants to replicate or kinda relaunch the professional magazine karate concept in a new magazine called Fighter magazine and this was full colored, distribute in 140 countries I was an editor of it it's my first magazine job so it's super cool and then things started kind of going crazy and Mike had to leave the country real fast to avoid going to jail so he sold the magazine to a guy named Howard 14:31 last name out but Howard had moved to the 14:36 area from Atlantic City he was in the witness protection program because he 14:41 some of the Gambino gangsters up there he was involved in fight cards, drug smuggling dealing and also he had a city mag Atlantic City, City mag which is a good magazine to have because you get free tickets you're connected to everybody so he and his partner had this magazine the City mag. And then one night his partner emptied the bank account \$27,000 and left



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and left him high and dry and that's about the time that Howard got popped with drugs and pleaded out and was in a witness protection program 15:16 it was the witness protection program that your allowed to keep your same name so anyway he's here so Mike Anderson sells him Fighter Magazine and we go to work on the next issue of Fighter Magazine under now Howard and instead of Mike Anderson and we did it the old way we did it where you'd actually cut paper out and paste it to a board which you may refer to as cut and paste we actually did that, laying this magazine out, it was incredibly tedious and at the same time I had my school and I was teaching at a Racket Ball club in St. Petersburg Florida high end Racket Ball club and they love me they thought I was 15:53 cause I was I had a TV show I was in the magazines I was on the radio an all that stuff I was a local celebrity. So I was treated well there so the owner kinda took me under his wing, the owner's name is Al and Al showed me the Macintosh computer and it's particularly this program that they use for their newsletter is called page maker and this allowed you to lay out a newsletter or a magazine in the computer and then just deliver the files so you didn't have to physically do it anymore so I went to Howard and I said Howard this is amazing we've got to look at this, we can do this without having to do it physically, we can do on the computer, it's just program called page maker on this thing called a Macintosh he said oh yeah okay so I set up a meeting between Howard and Al and we went to Al's office I walked in first and then Howard walked in behind me he stopped stared at Al and then I realized what the situation was, AL was his former partner who ripped him off for \$20,000 overnight. Try mediating that conversation, hi Howard this is Al, Al this is Howard so needless to say we got a couple of years with the Fighter Magazines done for free, but I always thought that that is one of those you know you can run but you can't hide stories there's out there's karma.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's some absolute karma going on in there and you said it was difficult to mediate, did it stay at words yeah they didn't sort to throw it down, I wasn't gonna let that happen but it was it worked out amicably in the degree Al's situation was he had a daughter and who was very ill and he needed money for medical expenses, I'm still in touch with Al to this day he is a good guy and Howard has gone on and done his thing but they just worked out a long term trade for the production of the magazine so in a sense Howard got his money back with interest in just indirect way so in the end it worked out okay.

John Graden:

It's a good ending to quite the intense drama at the beginning.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, no kidding.

John Graden:



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I was wondering whether how that one was gonna play out, that's a heavy story, certainly a great one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, what are the odds of that.

John Graden:

Yeah yeah, I was expecting probably the strangest plot as you were describing this meeting, the strangest plot for a fight scene ever.

Yeah

John Graden:

You know it's usually you know you wronged my family or

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah you could sum up every martial arts movie in 3 lines you know you did something wrong I've consulted with my GM now you must die. You have offended my family you offended my 18:44 you did something I've consulted with GM now you must die.

And this was you must die or print some magazines for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah

And fortunately, we went the nonviolent path.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah that was it was pretty cool, I guess some of these guys were serious players and they're involved in they were involved in 19:04 jobs and murders and all that kind of stuff 19:06 have that?

Ah no no but you're not the first to talk about a bit of that on the show, Victor Moore has shared some intense stories.

John Graden:



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I bet he does yeah 19:18 I saw him at Joe Lewis' funeral19:21

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, wow yeah, he's a great guy and loves sharing his past. Now you've been involved in the martial arts pretty continuously other than that that short break I expect, so it's had a big impact on who you are as a person, would you say that's a fair statement?

John Graden:

I hope not.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No

John Graden:

Yeah, I hope not.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay well then, I'm gonna ask you to run with that because that might bring us in a different direction in the question I was gonna ask. How has the martial arts not changed you you hoped?

John Graden:

There were a lot of things that I discovered goal setting and the principles of success that I formulated in my life through Bryan Tracy not through Walt Bone or in my Karate instructors, these guys were not examples to follow in any area other than Karate, their martial arts. They were good guys, they were honest they were honorable they wouldn't rip you off in fact they'd give you 20:26 off their back and to that degree it was a helpful process but I learned far more outside the martial arts than I have inside the martial arts. I'm the voracious reader studier and I never there was a point when I was a brown belt, there was some things that happened that made it very clear to me that these are not necessarily the role models I really want in my life and I kept that filter and I still have that filter.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting, well you've answered that in a very different way than anyone else has, so it makes me wonder have you had instructors that fit more the idealistic model that many of us look to that the role model that it sounds like you really didn't have in your instructors?



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John Graden:

Yeah well, I wanna be cleared when it came to fitness honesty sharing your knowledge honoring the arts by proper execution demonstrating respect they were all great role models in those regards in those particular say categories of life skills. When it came to judgment morality that kind of guidance was not existent, there was a different set of rules that I slowly learned way too slowly learned that was not the path that I wanted to follow. So I'm always suspicious of let me just rewind the tape for just a second we have to understand that the martial arts is an unlicensed un there's no educational prerequisite to become a martial arts school owner, you don't even need a black belt, in fact there is no real requirement for black belt and I think that's good I don't I'm not a regulations fan 22:39. However you can come out of college with an MBA and open a school, and you come out of prison and open a school as well and often or maybe that former prisoner carries a lot of baggage with him but he's very charismatic and he can get kids teenagers other people to follow them and in their mind they're learning under this Master instructor and it create it can create a very dangerous loop there's a lot of Cool Aid being dispensed in the martial arts. there's a tremendous amount of it's a regurgitation of sickness because people that are deeply involved in the martial arts to the degree like I was and to the degree my instructors are there's some common denominators in there and I just spent a lot of time with psychologists and counselors that have that have brought in specifically for interviews related to this and that there's some there's just some things going on at that make that should make people more suspicious of who they're training with and what is being taught. If somebody becomes a martial arts martial arts as a career like I have or particularly in this is particularly people who got the black belts up until probably 2000 so cause I really don't know as much from that point but and these are people that in most cases in their childhood had a lot of intimidation. They were either getting physically abused mentally abused, sexually abused any or all of the above and according to psychologist that gives them a sense of powerlessness and a feeling of intimidation and lack of control you have no control of your life cause you're just a kid and all of this stuff is going on around you. I've had this conversation with 24:47 all major martial artists from Joe Lewis and Bill Wallace down and it's it's the answer I get is holy cow you're talking about me. So there is this period there is this period of during very formative years where there's this abuse is going on then you join a martial arts school and in that school you have a direct path to getting respect and control if you train hard you advance in rank as you advance in rank people start to respect you this maybe the first time in your life anybody respected you and before you know it they're calling you Mr. Graden or Master Graden or Shihan Graden, so now these titles start to become like light to a moth or water to plant it gives them a new life they have a new identity and that can lead to a very dysfunctional interaction with students and the whole school scenario for someone that has been intimidated for a long period of time, bullied a long period of time out of control for a long period of time once they get control of the karate class they're in heaven, they're controlling everything, everything has turned around they're gonna tell you how to position your pinky how to breathe where to look and when to think what to think and everything about that class is being controlled in the beginning of the class at the end of the class, they're all gonna bow to me. That kind of situation can create some really messed up personalities and psyches so that's kind of my probably too long 26:38 insights into dealing with martial artists the full range of over the course of say 40 years we'd just sum it up there.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, and that's some pretty profound stuff and I found myself listening and I'll be honest there was a little bit of an emotional response there for me but I can't find disagreement with anything you said you certainly profiled me as well and I grew up a smaller individual who was bullied and the only thing that ever kept it from going physical was that everyone knew I'm trained in karate. So, do you have any advice for people cause yeah quite often we're telling people get your kids into the martial arts, look for a school that they're gonna respond to, that they're gonna learn good things at but you're adding another level it sounds like of determination to figure out is this an appropriate school to train at?

John Graden:

You know I am speaking as though I'm speaking to peers and I'm not necessarily speaking to mom and dad who is picking the school but if mom and dad out there are listening and thinking about a school I understand that choosing a school is choosing a style and it's not a martial arts style it is the teaching style of the person in charge, watch that person very closely go visit many classes, watch the advance students, A you wanna see that they're in shape, B watch how they carry themselves, are they rude or are they polite? Are they in shape are they out of shape? Does it look like they really learned some skills you know I don't care so much about the content I really do frankly but I think the decision to join the school starts with the leadership so the first style to evaluate is the teaching style of the instructor and after that you know you can get into curriculum and all that kind of fun stuff but I you know I find it very interesting to me and it's telling it is very telling that here we are in 2015 and probably no doubt the most influential martial artists in American history and probably all history Bruce Lee wrote in his article the class 29:00 whatever you called it in 1971 a black belt talked about the futility of style and that to label a style is to limit a style and that you know to discard what is useless and useful as useful and that's certainly going to be a matter prospectively in terms of useful and 29:23 but at this late stage with all this information in education that's gone by called decades and right now I would hope though I don't see it but I would hope that we are the most educate martial artists in history that there's still a tremendous emphasis on style. we do taekwondo, we do kempo, we do Shotokan, we do goju ryu and I just I it baffles my mind how and why some would perpetuate in fact build their future around a style rather than focusing on just the results of his style, does that make any sense to you. What I mean by that is I want my students to be in good shape, I want them to honor the arts for having excellent execution on their punches kicks and techniques. I want them to be respectful, I want them to have a positive, resilient outlook on life. So, if I can get those results I want to get them as fast as I can regardless of the style and what I see in working with martial arts schools worldwide in half a decade is that a style is the biggest impediment to getting to those results. It's as though the school advertises locally 30:52 we will teach in English and people that don't speak English say wow that's great I want to learn English I need to learn English, English would really improve my life in fact I know I can protect myself and have a safer life in America if I could speak English, take care of my family better so now I signed up because this school is gonna teach me English and then the school starts to teach you Latin you say wait a second you promised to teach me English you said it was easy and fun and now you're teaching me Latin and the response is well you gotta do Latin first for a while, before you can really



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appreciate English, that's the experience in most martial arts schools today. They get promised self-defense, they get promised fitness, they get promised that this stuff is easy to learn it's fun and they get started in on the tedium of front stance back stance 31:54 stance punching and all this held over technical traditional material that has its place and has its value that I don't think that that value is part of a new student's experience and that's all I'm gonna say about it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well I'd like to push you a little bit on it because I think it's a really interesting subject.

John Graden:

I don't wanna get long 32:20

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no. we have a pretty academic audience people like getting into the weeds on this stuff and even if they don't I do so I wanna hear a little bit more so are you advocating over all against traditionalism?

John Graden:

Not at all, I don't think here's the reality and this is where I like to live it puts me at odds with the vast majority of martial artists 32:46 The traditional experience is contrary to what most beginners want need or benefit from. Less than one half of one half of one half % of schools or students 33:03 join a school A because of the style or B because they wanna learn forms and traditional techniques, they don't that's not why they joined the school, but that's what we give, they joined to learn English but we teach them Latin and what happens? It's not attractive, it's not interesting, it's boring it's hard and there's a huge drop out. Retention becomes really difficult of course it's difficult it's like you're teaching Russian ballet to someone who wants to learn hip-hop, it's exactly like that so I think that if you are a traditional martial arts instructor 33:41 for you that's great you have a great skill and if you can take somebody to black belt in that particular style, that's fantastic but understand that the majority of people who are inquiring about martial arts of your school don't have that interest. There is a percentage that will and I'm not saying don't teach it because I if you wanted to learn to get a black belt in Taekwondo from me which is the only traditional style I'm qualified to teach is Taekwondo, it's the only one I know. So if you wanna earn a black belt from me in Taekwondo, that's gonna be the most expensive course I teach, it's the most difficult to teach it requires the highest and most rare qualifications in an instructor so when you contrast that to a more kickboxing or eclectic style where you don't need to have that level of complexity or qualifications for the instructor nor do you have as much interest there's less interest in the traditional material and there's a lot more which is on the more eclectic side, the using what works, mindset. This is very similar to what we've designed as empowered kickboxing, empowered kickboxing is a program designed exactly as I'm describing but it mixes



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kickboxing martial arts ground and weapons all into one curriculum, every class is interesting, every class is challenging but you can get a brand-new students up and running in 3 minutes and they're part of the class and they'll be fine for the whole class and you can have all ranks in one class it doesn't make a difference. The students can advance and get their black belt but you don't have to have separate classes you don't need to have complex curriculum that people are gonna forget a year after they stop training it's highly doable, what I'm describing is it can be done, it just 35:38 in the face of the Kool aid that's been dispensed for the last four decades.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting so for those martial artists that have a school that are teaching traditional martial arts in a traditional way with the Kool aid method as you're calling it would you advocate starting students in a more self-defense fitness environment and gradually bringing them up into the more traditional?

John Graden:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Elements?

John Graden:

Yeah that would be a good way to do it and I wanna make a couple of points one martial arts and self-defense are like well it's not a good they don't martial arts has nothing to do with self-defense. Most schools are engaged in false advertising when they advertise self-defense, I'm just and I'm first to admit I owe people thousands upon thousands of dollars in refunds for what I called a self-defense that was I mean you don't know, you don't know what you don't know it's just 36:46 but I was told this is self-defense and I rethought it for years and it was just stupid. I tell you what, I tell you what a moment that I remember well this really came to me I was running I created the first professional association for the martial arts school business, it was called NAPMA in 2003 no 1997 I'm sorry. So I was in Dallas Texas getting ready for a seminar I was teaching the next day to a bunch of schools and I was on a 37:15 master in the gym in the basketball court that's in the center and in the basketball court a guy came out and started a karate class it was about 8 adult students, green belts in the class and he was teaching a form that I knew well, this was in Texas he was a Taekwondo guy, he was probably in the same school chain as I was cause he was doing the same form and they did this move where you spin around and you do a square block, we call them a rectangular block you got one hand that's doing the kinda rising block or high block then you got the one other arm that's going up from the shoulder doing kind of a side block so he explained to the students with this block, you're blocking 2 attacks at the same time, you're getting the guy who's attacking your head with this high block and then from the side you're blocking



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this kick that's coming around your head like a round kick with this block so you're getting both at the same time and I watched all those students nod their head in understanding and I thought to myself that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life, how on earth can you say that with a straight face and I thought I've been saying that exact same explanation for 30 years, it's just dumb it's Kool aid, that's Kool aid, so going back to your question you advocate starting, I advocate starting students in a program that's easy to learn fun and it really gets them connected to your school. A traditional program is gonna have a hard time doing that now mind you there are very charismatic, excellent traditional instructors out there who got packed classes and people on waiting list that is far more the exception than the rule and I'm not advocating an LA box scene or a fitness kickboxing that's not what I'm describing here either, I'm describing real martial arts again going back to the benefits I want my students to be able to write a check if they need to, they must learn to defend themselves, they have to be in good shape, they have to have excellent quality in their techniques because we honor the arts by doing them well and I want that positive attitude and I want them to be respectful so, it's 4 or 5 serious results that I'm trying to get and I'm not saying we're gonna get those to a fitness kickboxing program what I'm describing with empowered kickboxing is a martial arts it's martial arts program every month the focus of the curriculum changes at month it might be Muay Thai the next month it's gonna be the open hand techniques of karatedo, the following month it's going to be 39:48 the following month it's gonna be 39:50 cause you if you understand the classroom structure, all real teaching happens in about 7-10 minutes in terms of technical breakdown in teaching at least in a good class. In many classes the work out is in 78-10 minutes and the rest of the time is spent following the instructor doing a form, step by step which is about as fun as watching grassville, so it's backwards so again there are plenty of guys that are doing a good job with their traditional programs I wouldn't suggest them changing anything but when schools come to me and they say I'm struggling I've been open for 5 years you know I've got 15 students first thing I ask them what are you teaching, traditional fill in the blank and that's where the problem lies initially.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that's fantastic advice and obviously we're gonna get a little bit more into what you do and what you offer as we get towards the end of the episode. For the people that are hanging in here to the end.

John Graden:

I'm sure everybody's listening no this is good stuff. This is great stuff and I feel like I have just learned a lot listening to you over the last few minutes as you were talking about that you know I did have a school for a couple of years and I'm absolutely am able to remember specific instances where what you were talking about what you're suggesting would have worked better with some individuals. So, thank you for sharing those.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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If you think about you know 80% of students now are kids, traditional forms weren't meant to be taught to kids, they were meant to be taught, they were developed by highly disciplined adults to be taught to other highly disciplined adults, mostly in kind of a military atmosphere, they weren't designed for 8-year old's with ADHD, it's just torture, why 41:43.

John Graden:

It's true. And I have to say this is one that really will this is a good one I would say it's the truth though.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I feel like you're getting ready to poke the bear again.

John Graden:

It's just a lone that I heard from Woody Allen, he's my all-time favorite directors and comedians, he's talking about self-defense in taking self-defense and he had a couple of lines and one was that you know once I started taking the classes it was really hard I figured I'd just tale the tuition pay the instructor to follow me around. That was a good line but what he said was and this is Woody Allen thinking he won the war. Why would he go into Japan to learn how to fight? We won, I thought holy cow he's right, that's really interesting, that's just perspective you see I listen to all perspectives and that was the one that struck me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's absolutely fascinating and.

John Graden:

A big poke at the bear.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah that's a big bear poke right now and we're gonna have to make sure your contact information is in here on the show notes so I'm not getting all the hate mail, no I'm just kidding. You're raising good points I mean and even though I'm sure that there are going to be plenty of people that listen that disagree with some or all of what you're saying, your logic is good, there's abs well disagreement doesn't always have to be rational.

John Graden:



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No doesn't, it's just my observations and for my perspective and what my goals are it's different for everybody.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But they're sound and what I'm enjoying about talking to you is that you've given me a lot to go think about and that's a lot of fun, I like thinking about martial arts, so let's pull back let's go back to some more, martial arts.

John Graden:

Fun stuff.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fun questions and aspects to who you are so I'm I know you've trained with quite a few people, you've already dropped a few names and mentioned Joe Lewis and that you know Bill Wallace and everything, who would you say the most influential on your martial arts career has been?

John Graden:

For different reasons, Walt Bone for dedication to the arts, sharing your knowledge, you know he taught in a really different, he was raised and I think his influence actually was Tom Landry, the coach of the Dallas Cowboys cause he was a huge cowboys fan in the 70s was negative reinforcement you never give a student a compliment and I look at schools today I was in a school recently watching an exam and this is a top notch black belt who had really good students but every time the kids did anything he said good job and one kid in fact was trying to skip side kick 3 boards and he never did it and on the final try he bounced off the boards and he got a good job and a high five and that is I think really dangerous and it's happening throughout our society right now and that's an offshoot of the self-esteem a little bit back in the 1970s oddly enough the purveyor the pioneer in the self-esteem movement in the 70s was a Los Angeles based psychologist name Dr. 44:54 Brandon one of his proteges was this guy name Joe Lewis and Joe Lewis was the second person who really influenced my martial arts he had a completely pragmatic approach to training he had no baggage and mind you he was raised in a very strict Okinawan karate school, he got his black belt in 3 months the instructor tried to show off on him so he picked him up and threw him across the dojo and walked out, he went across town and joined another school he failed his green belt test there but he came back and he made his black belt in 7 months and when he came he entered his first tournament reluctantly he showed up to watch the Nationals in DC Jhoon Rhee convinced him to compete he won fighting had one point scored with him on him the entire day, he won kata and he won weapons and then he went back to following year and did the same thing and went all three, that's like a rookie stepping in and winning the masters and then coming back and then doing it again but shortly after that time he completely discounted kata as a waste of time and he never spent



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any more time or thought on it so and I'll give you another example, Lewis was always evolving we trained he moved he moved back here in 1984, took me on as his personal training partner for about little over a decade and shortly after I started to work with him my brother Jim did as well so we're going to a local boxing club with a 12x12 ring in the center and just basically kill each other, so it's loads of fun but he was always teaching and so then you know fast forward a decade and I get together with him and work out and I'm hitting the bag and he says he's correcting my right cross which I used to call reverse punch in my Taekwondo days and he'd basically told me the exact opposite of what he told me 10 or 12 years earlier and I said Joe that's the exact opposite of what you told me you know at this particular time when we're training, he goes what you don't think I should evolve and it was a really simple answer what you don't think I should evolve? But I wonder how many instructors have that as an answer have they evolved? So, my answer is to who was influential was Walt Bone for dedication to the arts and Joe Lewis for a completely pragmatic critical thinking approach.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If I'm gonna pose a question that was not in the list that I sent you and I'm hoping that that's okay if Mr. Lewis was to listen to our discussion earlier about teaching martial arts, do you think he'd agree with all of it or part of it?

John Graden:

Completely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely.

John Graden:

We had this conversation a thousand times.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, okay.

John Graden:

You know he was raised he was the youngest of 3 brothers, they were bad dudes they were really rough you did not cut across the Lewis lawn in Wilmington North Carolina, he's raised in a farm, his brothers one murdered some guy and they both spent time in prison so when Joe went to you know grade school or middle school or high school the teachers all thought he was gonna just like them so he was



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immediately condemned and so he was raised in a hyper violent intimidating atmosphere, his parents would beat him if he didn't read something right and then once he got it right they'd beat him again for not doing it right the first time, so I mean I've had again, there's not a career serious, this is what I'm doing for my life martial artists I've had this conversation with they did not say holy cow you just described me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, it's intense.

John Graden:

It is, it's interesting. I find it fascinating I love this stuff.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good me too and that's why you're on the show. So, if you could train with someone that you haven't living or dead we'll open it that wide who would that be?

John Graden:

Jesus Christ or Paul.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, that's we're getting out the realm of where we usually go, tell us more.

John Graden:

Well better teacher, there is no better teacher, you know we our time today was set at 1030 why was it set at 1030 what is our time based from? The birth of Jesus Christ I mean who has had more influence than that, I mean I've just as I get older I just get blown away and with all these guys running around call themselves master, I would see you walk on water pal you know that's why I don't buy in the master thing I never had even when I was a young brown belt I just I watched these guys and they would make you do push-ups if you didn't call one master and Jesus Christ nobody has had more influence what better teacher is there and then Paul I just learned about Paul in the last five years and he had you know he was the biggest anti Jesus leader he was he participated in the stoning of Steven, he was persecuted in the early Christians oddly enough they weren't called Christians they were followers of the way it's what they called it, isn't that interesting, martial arts use that word as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah

John Graden:

I discovered that's what initially before Christians were called Christians they were followers of the way and it is the way of Jesus Christ and then Paul had was blinded in a vision where he was visited by Jesus and he went from being the most critical aggressive violent antagonist of all of people following the way to the biggest champion and he wrote the vast majority of the new testament I mean all those stuff is mind blowing so anybody out there listening who's tried to read the bible like I have in going to sleep real fast like I have I'll skip the old testament go right to the new testament and get one of the easy to read versions, it is a fascinating read and again most of it is from the guy who is the biggest anti Jesus guy on the planet until he had his vision, it's fascinating, fascinating.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting how do you how does your tie to should I say Christianity?

John Graden:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I mean is there a religious influence in the way you approach martial arts?

John Graden:

I would like to think that as I get older and hopefully wiser that I am balancing my decisions that sort of they walked with Jesus it is incredibly hard to do, it is enormously difficult, it's particularly living in a society that is now in many ways following chasing worshiping Kanye West and false gods and I see the same thing in the martial arts, these are just guys, they're just guys like you're just a guy you know, this guy started karate before you did, doesn't mean he is he walks on water, he doesn't walk on water he's just a guy so yeah I do my best to do that and I fail miserably most of the time but it's a quest.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's a lot of parallels there absolutely awesome, awesome I'm really enjoying your blowing my mind and people that listen to the show might hear that I'm stumbling a little bit more than I normally do in asking my questions cause I'm trying to shut off the half of my brain it's really trying to process what you're saying to me so I appreciate that.



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John Graden:

It's nice it's recorded then.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I'm gonna have to go back and listen to it a couple of times,

John Graden:

Tonight, and you'll have a hard time sleeping 52:47

Jeremy Lesniak:

No this would keep me up without a doubt. So, let's get into some lighter questions, some really fun ones, movies are you a movie guy at all?

John Graden:

I'm a huge student of film.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh wonderful, how about some martial arts movies that you enjoy?

John Graden:

Raging Bull

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay

John Graden:

That would be the closest thing I mean I saw enter the dragon as a kid 53:18 sometimes I loved it I 53:21 but I saw a recent film with my wife in a theater and it just didn't hold up at all Bruce Lee couldn't act to save his life and it was just it was terrible I was actually thinking 53:33 watching the movie and thinking alright we've got them, they're gonna kill Kelly then there's gonna be the courtyard fight and then the fight against Han and the mirrors and 53:47 and I was counting down till it ended. I've never seen a



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martial arts film other than enter the dragon when I was a kid but I thought that was really anything other than grade Z entertainment but Raging Bull Martin Scorsese it can be, it can be it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay

John Graden:

Or Excalibur this is a good example Excalibur 1982 John Boorman was the director beautifully shot film great story of King Arthur and the round table completely over acted. I mean that these guys really went over the top in their lines and all and as over acted as it was it's a gazillion times better than any martial arts film I've ever seen.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's fair, it's absolutely fair and I'm you're right the vast majority of martial arts films and I think even those of us that are fans agree the acting's terrible and for some of us that makes it fun.

John Graden:

Yeah sure I mean it's action as the main attraction.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. Now you've written a number of books and I'd like you to tell us about a couple of them in hopefully you can tell us about one that's not from your catalog that you enjoy.

John Graden:

Well in terms the first book that I wrote was black belt mgmt how to achieve success without selling out in 1993 I had opened my school I struggled with my school I had no idea how to run the business and it almost went under but then I started studying school owners that produce excellent black belts cause that would always be part 55:24 but had a 6 figure income from the school personally in doing so so I studied these guys and I discovered there were consistent key elements that were always in place and I applied those elements to my school and it worked and I was one of those 6 figure school owners within about 18 months of doing that so I knew that there was a lot of guys out there like me who were running a dojo 55:50 dojos as I call them so I wrote the book hoping it would connect with people, it connected big time they knew me as a fighter again cause I was in the magazines and pretty popular getting some acclaimed in that regard so they knew that if Graden can do it I could cause he's 56:07 good black belt he's not gonna sell out and that was the big angle. So, I started doing seminars teaching



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these principles and at a seminar in Las Vegas the host of the seminar the guy who runs a billing company called the independent funding company 56:21 walked up on stage in front of about 300 school owners and handed me a box of business cards and it said John Graden president National Association and Professional Martial artists he said John you're the only guy that can do this ad that was and then the crowd went crazy it's one of those moments. So it was that was the launch or at least the encouragement and support that helped me launch the National Association and Professional Martial artists NAPMA which eventually got too powerful because when I started advocating that the reason so many adults stay away from martial arts and one of those big reasons is because we have the world's ugliest fitness 57:05 and that was in reference to the karate 57:09 and century martial arts didn't like that so they started the attack and over the course of the next 5 or 6 years they sued the company away from me and I lost it in 2003 and then I started the martial arts teachers association which is basically an online version which I think has offered a lot better so that this function in the martial arts 57:30 at all levels let me assure you. The next best book I would recommend for your readers or your guys especially if they're involved in the 57:39 schools the truth about the martial arts business from 2006 that was a big seller and right now I'm working on a book called who killed Walt Bone and it is the story it's the coming of age story that is kind of the karate kid meets dazed and confused, if you're familiar with those films

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah

John Graden:

That was my upbringing in the arts and I've alluded to some of those stories today I started at age 14 and I trained very hard my instructor died at 1979 in a plane crash while smuggling drugs and it was a shock to me and all that stuffs in the book but it's a fascinating book and it's certainly is a different experience than most people's experience 58:32 coming up in the martial arts school definitely different CIA killers and drug smugglers and all the kind of fun stuff that makes an interesting book.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah will that be your first non-instructional book?

John Graden:

Yes it is well I think it's gonna be the first of a trilogy and we're gonna this is up until my instructor died in 1982, December 16th 1982 then the next segment would be my school when I was running the schools competing on the US teams around the world training with Joe Lewis and the third book would be launching NAPMA the lawsuits from century and the interesting insights and revelations that came



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out of those documents and experiences so I'm 55 in a couple of months and I think this is the time to start telling my story it's a pretty good one I think it will help a lot of people and this will entertain them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely and if you're writing as anything like you're speaking they'll be wonderful entertaining and I'm certainly going to read them so please keep me in the loop so can keep listeners in the loop.

John Graden:

Yeah please do

Jeremy Lesniak:

As to where you are with those books. Do you have any goals?

John Graden:

Tons.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us about some of it.

John Graden:

I am a speaker, that's what I like to do I'm let me rephrase I'm a teacher by nature and I use various mediums to teach and that's writing obviously we're doing a podcast here but I'm best in front of thousands or hundreds of people so that's what I'm starting to work on now and one of the things that came out of the century thing was that there was at least for a little while a persona non grata became damage goods in such a way my value to people was diminished cause I no longer had now and that's been changing and it's been a beautiful thing where people are re-embracing the way that I teach and what I teach and it's really turning full circle so 1:00:35 to get in front of students instructors school owners and oddly enough the other area that I'm doing a lot of presentations is in training attorneys training attorneys on how to present how to speak how to market, that's been a trip and there's a tremendous amount of similarities between the legal field and the martial arts field they're both very traditional, there is all kinds of stigmas about selling out it's a lot of what I've experienced for years in the martial arts but just with the much higher invoices.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Cool yeah, that's really interesting. How about with your training you doing much training at this time, sounds like you're pretty busy?

John Graden:

Training two times a week at least I run lift weights I don't have a local school I like to I miss sparring I didn't spar in the few years I've done some work with Chris Sutton from Cobra Defense I had to recommend to you make him one of your interviews he's the best self-defense instructor I've ever seen his material is the best and I have seen 1:01:48 that I've seen them all but I'm the one that brought Krav Maga into the martial arts industry I did that in one of my conventions when I had NAPMA had 2000 school owners there I knew by that time that most schools had no business advertising self-defense and I wanted to bring in the best self-defense guys I could find to really help bridge that gap so I brought in Krav Maga, Bill Kipp, Peyton Quinn from RMCAT, John Pellegrini from Combat Hapkido and a guy from 1:02:25 Tom somebody 1:02:27 I brought these guys gave them the stage and really it took lots of money and got them lots of exposure but 10 years after all of that I'm watching a class here in Clearwater Florida and the instructor walks out and does a segment on anti-abduction I turned around 1:02:44 I couldn't have taught them 1:02:45 that's the best I've ever seen and that was Chris Sutton who has got this fantastic program called the Cobra defense systems so all you instructors out there check it out if you're not an instructor check it out just to learn the principles of the self-defense it's all law enforcement based it's not martial arts based.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting yeah if you can make an introduction I'd love to him.

John Graden:

I will do that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fantastic.

John Graden:

You know as an interesting side story Chris like all guys he falls in the same category I described earlier when he was 10 years old 11 years old his dad came home after hitting the bars and started beating beaten up on his brother and Chris had been watching my TV show and I had a show called USA karate for 10 years and one of the things I said on the show is you have to do something if nothing else pick up something and hit them with it so he picked up a book and he hit his dad and he knocked him out cold and he credits me as his first karate instructor 1:03:51



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Jeremy Lesniak:

That's super cool, that's so much fun.

John Graden:

It is.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So now is your chance not that we haven't gotten to know a lot about you and what you offer but tell us a bit more if people want to see you speak or become part of MATA am I getting the acronym right?

John Graden:

MATA like KATA.

Jeremy Lesniak:

MATA okay

John Graden:

That's interesting I called Mike Anderson as the first guy I called he speaks 7 languages guy's super intelligent and I said I've got this some idea and some Martial arts 1:04:23 the acronym is MATA that's a really good idea except one problem I said what's that? MATA means to kill in about every version of Spanish, I said oh well some martial artists are like that so anyway my website is martialartisteachers.com just like it sounds and my do you wanna follow my books my writing my coaching that kind of stuff if you're writing a book and you'd like some help with it johngraden.com is my site and my email address is really simple it's john@johngraden.com or senior master grand 1:05:00

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm expecting if someone send something to that it's actually not gonna resolve its gonna bounce back at you.

John Graden:

Who can resist.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Absolutely so much fun I really enjoyed talking to you and I'm hoping you have some closing words of wisdom for all of us.

John Graden:

From me wisdom? I don't have any idea watch out for Kool Aid dispenser but I think that's really big if you're training right now you know really evaluate the amount of time you're spending on things that in 5 years you may not ever do it again so I right now have no urge to do another kata in my life even though I really embraced it but I'd sure like to go hit a heavy bag or somebody in the head. But I'm not 1:05:53 So I don't wanna do anymore Russian ballet.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fair enough.

John Graden:

Okay well thanks very much Jeremy and good luck with your podcast.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thanks for listening to episode 36 of whistlekickMartialArtsRadio and thank you to Mr. Graden. Head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes including links to Mr. Garden's websites books and a lot more. While you're there if you wanna be a guest on the show or you know someone, who would be a great interview please fill out the guest form. And don't forget to subscribe to our exclusive newsletter if you want to follow us on social media we're on Facebook twitter Pinterest and Instagram all with the username whistlekick. If you liked the show please subscribe so you never miss out in the future and if we could trouble you to help us out briefly please leave us a 5 star review wherever you download your podcast if we read your review on the air just contact us and we'll give you a free pack of whistlekick stuff and don't forget to spread the word about our show to anyone that you think might like it, remember the great stuff we make at whistlekick like our comfortable lightweight sparring boots available at whistlekick.com. So, until next time train hard smile and have a great day.