



Episode 41 – The Martial Arts in MMA | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everybody what's going on? Its episode 41 of whistlekick martial arts radio. And today, we're going to talk all about the martial arts in mixed martial arts. 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. Thanks to everyone tuning in again and thank you to any of the new folks checking us out for the first time. Don't forget, you can find all of our past podcast episodes and show notes for this one, and a lot more at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and while you're on our website, go ahead and sign up for the newsletter. We offer exclusive content and discount to our subscribers. It's also the only place to find out about upcoming guest on the show. So, you know we make stuff here at whistlekick and that includes some great t shirts. They really run the gamut from comfy to cozy, functional to stylish so, why don't you head on over to whistlekick.com and check out the great t-shirts that we have to offer. Like I said, today's episode is all about MMA, mixed martial arts. And if you've listened to the show for a while, you know that I have some mixed feelings about the sport and we're going to delve right into them today.

My first MMA memory actually goes back to UFC 5, 1995. It was Royce Gracie and ken shamrock's second match up and the thing that sticks in my mind was how quickly they went to the ground and they were there for what seemed like forever and once or twice I remember the referee standing them back up but both of them are more comfortable on the ground and so that's where they were and I looked it up and it was actually a 37-minute match. So, this is the old days they weren't rounds, it was just till it was done and this was ended in a draw they just, they decided you know what, nobody's gonna win this. Like I said, it was the second match up, Royce Gracie won the first one and what I find funny when as I was doing a little bit of research for this episode, it's now more than 20 years later, both of these guys are just about 50 I think. One is on one side of the line the others on the other, hundred and one years old combined that's what I read, they're getting ready to fight again in match with bellator, the other major mixed martial arts organization. So, that's funny I don't know if anybody is gonna be super interested in that, I might check it out but probably not. So, what really stood out for me when I think back about that first experience with mixed martial arts, was that I didn't see a lot of martial arts in there. At least not martial arts the way I define it. And the impetus for this episode was that, you know, I have a lot of people kind of poking me over the last few weeks be it friends or martial arts colleagues or internet trolls or just these random articles that I come across, and they're all kind of taking these really strong liberties with the definition of martial arts and that's the heart of what I wanna talk about, what is martial arts and throughout this episode, we're gonna comeback to that. So, when I look at mixed martial arts, and I don't see a lot of martial and I don't see a lot of martial arts, I'm seeing combat, I see fighting. And in fact, they refer to the participants in a mixed martial arts bout as fighters, not martial artists and I think that that's significant. The other thing I see a lot of and it's growing, from my vantage, is disrespect. And MMA really seems like it's become the new professional wrestling you know, this maybe a point where someone who is listening and really interested or even participates in MMA starts



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to take some offense, and it's not what I'm trying to do here. It takes a lot of skill, a lot of talent to engage in that sort of combat. It's exciting to watch, I enjoy it, I think it's valuable and I think it's a necessary sideline to martial arts, but it's not martial arts. Now, on an amateur level, I've seen some fights that I would sort of classify as martial arts and I really love watching amateur MMA. I think that it's so much more fun to watch than the professional stuff because the people that are engaged in the amateur stuff, they're not out there for money. Some are trying to build a career out of it, but most of them just want to test their skills about somebody else, against somebody else. There is respect, there is honor and these people are thanking each other so genuinely at the end of the match. I mean, there's something that really embodies the martial spirit when to people can step on to the ring, beat the tar out of each other and recognize that they are better for the experience and genuinely thank the person for putting their time and their body on the line in that contest and I love that and I support that. But that's not martial arts.

So why isn't it? Let's take a step back, let's define what martial arts is. And if you've listened to the show before, you might have heard me break it down into a definition, if when we take a look at the words martial arts. First and foremost, it's an art, it is a martial art but the core of the term is art despite what some people are gonna say. Yes, you can be a great martial artist without fighting, in fact, in most martial arts schools, one of the things that is taught initially and continually reinforced throughout training is not the ability to win a fight but to avoid a fight and I think it takes a great deal of skill to avoid a fight, it takes humility, it takes confidence, it takes a lot of wonderful personality traits to make it through an altercation without actually engaging in a fight. But if martial arts aren't about fighting, what is it? What's it about? Martial arts is really about self-improvement, it's personal growth to the martial training that we do. Let me say it another way. Martial arts aren't about fighting today, it may have been in the past, I don't know, I wasn't there, but from what I've read of the great masters over the last hundred years, it wasn't. This is why I have an inherent problem with the term, mixed martial arts. Because I've seen mixed martial arts, the way Bruce Lee defined jeet kune do, it was a mixed martial art. I've trained at schools that incorporated various martial arts styles, they created something new and unique of their own, those were mixed martial arts. But what we see in the UFC and Bellator and these other fight promotion organizations, is that it's fighting, it's martial combat. Mixed martial combat. And that's the term I really think it should have, MMC not MMA. And I can't take credit for that term, I read it years ago, I don't remember where, but I think it more accurately embodies what happens in one of these combat situations, one of these fights. Nobody on earth's gonna watch what goes on in a traditional martial arts school and then watch a professional MMA fight and think that they're the same thing. They might be related, they might have some things that correlate, but it's pretty loose. And so how do we know that? The majority of traditional martial arts schools teach a lot more than fighting skills. They teach respect, they generally have some code of honor, they teach life skills and self-respect and a whole bunch of other wonderful values all these great reasons that so many of us martial artists encourage parents to get their children involved in martial arts. But look at the controversy that comes out of the professional mixed martial arts world. And yes, I'm gonna continue to use that term MMA



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because it's the accepted term, whether I like it or not, this is what people know that sport to be. Back at UFC 193, Ronda Rousey lost, she lost horribly, we saw that. But at the beginning of the match she refused to touch gloves with Holly Holm and a lot of people had a hard time with that and I did too. And yes, you can go online, you can read Ronda's comments about why she didn't do that, but at the end of the day, she was acting disrespectfully, she was bringing herself down to the level that she's claiming Holly Holm set for disrespect. And I've been to a lot of martial arts competitions over the years and I'm sure a lot of you out here have too. And that kind of stuff does not fly in the martial arts world. I've seen people thrown out of tournaments for less. These aren't the same thing and they don't get to use the same terms. I believe it when I read that the original idea behind the UFC was to bring in people from different martial arts and test them to see who won, to sort of see, which martial art was "best". But that idea is long gone. And we're starting to see some people that are making the jump from MMA from sport karate and other traditional martial arts. Sage Northcut is probably the best example right now, he came in, had a great first fight, did a nice job, here's a respectful upstanding, wonderfully athletic, martial artist who has also engaged in an MMA bout. Sage Northcut was a tremendously successful martial artist in the sport martial arts world, but after all, there's no money there at least not yet. But there is a fair amount of money in mixed martial arts. And I can't for certain that's why Sage moved over, but I'm guessing that has something to do with it. Now not all traditional martial artists are gonna do well in MMA. In fact, most wouldn't, I probably wouldn't, I hate getting hit. I tend to avoid things that might break my nose and maybe I'm foolish but that's as martial arts as traditional as I can really get, avoiding that sort of an encounter. That's how I was raised. So, I'm not taking away anything from the people that choose to participate in this activity that I would not, I applaud it, I think it's great. If that's what you want to do, by all means please do it. And I'll probably watch you. I've supported friends when they've trained for it, I've helped them out where I could. I've been to the matches but it's not martial arts, it's fighting. It's a combat sport like boxing, now I watch boxing from time to time, it's impressive, I envy the skill those fighters bring to their matches, but they're fighters, they're not martial artists, neither are the majority that step into an MMA match. Now let me be clear, majority, most. There are some, some of the folks that participate into the MMA are legitimate and even excellent martial artists. Lotto Machida has deep traditional roots, and from what I've seen, it shows in the way he conducts himself both inside the ring and in life, he's respectful. Now sure, there are traditional martial artists that miss that whole respect and honor ideal and I don't even mean people that cross over MMA. Most of us met some martial artists that miss that concept, some of them learn, some of them don't, we have some folks come on the show that have talked about how they missed that piece early on that maybe they had some strong skill and they got cocky. Now, I don't care how good of a kick someone like that throws, you're not a martial artist until you can embody the whole piece, the mental the spiritual, the physical aspects. Now a great martial artist isn't someone who can throw a great kick, it's someone who carries that warrior ideal through life. And they face challenges with grit and determination and they respect the boundaries that are placed in front of them if they're appropriate to respect. And they use the concept of combat to hone their body and their mind into something better. Now I'd say that everyone that participates in MMA gets the body part. These people are in great shape and they're



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constantly refining their skills. They are amazing fighters and I don't want to tangle with any of them and I applaud what they do. But do they really better their mind? And I would say that most, again let me underscore most, do not and those that do are not doing so because of their participation in their mixed martial arts but because of who they are or perhaps some traditional martial arts training. And the more money that gets involved in MMA the less common it seems to be and all you have to do to see what I'm talking about is watch a modern UFC event and then go back one of the first ten or 20. They were a wholly different event, people treated each other differently, and I'm not saying one is better but I am pointing out that there has been a degradation of martial arts attitude within MMA over time. Some of my best fight memories come from attending amateur MMA events, I said before how much I enjoy watching it. Watching the fighters come out knowing that they're there just to get better, watching them touch glove or even hug, before they fight and when it was over through the blood and the sweat, they are hugging again. And to be that is just incredible. And while I doubt that all of them could be accurately described as martial artist, some of these folks truly were. They had martial spirit, they had a warrior's spirit and I'll watch that stuff all day long. And the other stuff, that's spectacle. It's professional wrestling for a new generation but the violence is just that much more real and that's not really my style.

So, those are my thoughts, I really welcome yours. And I hope that you'll share them. So, head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes, sign up for the newsletter, remember this is the episode 41 so go ahead, check all that out, leave us some comments, see what other people have written. Did you agree with what I've said today, whether you do or not, we really want to hear from you so, give us some feedback. Remember, if you wanna say something on social media if that's easier for you, we're @whistlekick just about everywhere, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, I mean you name it we're all over the place and please if you haven't already, go ahead leave us review on iTunes or if you get your podcast somewhere else, leave us a review there. Hopefully five stars but if you have some constructive criticisms for us, we'll take it. Now those reviews really help us a lot, they help new people find the show and like I keep saying, we wanna hear from you. This show isn't just what we want to put out there, it's about what you wanna hear. So, let us know what that it. We wanna know what you think so badly in fact that if you leave us a review and we read it on the air, we will send you free stuff. Seriously. And don't forget, we have our free apps on google play and the app store, tons of great feedback on those, people say they really prefer them to their podcast app. I'll stop blabbing now and let you go, so until next time, train hard smile and have a great day.