



Episode 52 - Tournaments | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there everyone it's episode 52 of [whistlekickmartialartsradio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). The only place to hear the best conversations about the martial arts like today's episode all about martial arts competitions. I'm the founder here at whistlekick but I'm better known as your host Jeremy Lesniak. whistlekick in case you know makes the world's best sparring gear and some great apparel and accessories all for traditional martial artists. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of you returning fans. If you're not familiar with the products you can learn more about everything we make at whistlekick.com. All of our past podcast episodes all the show notes and a lot more are at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Today's episode also features a full transcript with photos links video whole lot more we put a bunch of time into it so check it out over on the website. And while you're on the website go ahead and sign up for the newsletter we offer exclusive content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests on the show. As I hinted during the introduction today we're going to talk about martial arts competitions, tournaments. It's pretty clear to anyone that is tied into the martial arts that competition is a significant element to martial arts training. You've heard from most guest of this show that they've been involved in competition at some point. For many of our guests competition has been a huge part of their martial arts career if not their life in general. While it's not something that every school or every individual participates in I'd venture that most martial artists compete in at least one competition during their career. I've trained in a number of different martial arts schools and none of them have been what some call tournament schools. A tournament school is a school where the competition is a heavy element in the training. Forms are trained not simply for knowing them or for rank advancement but for success in competition sparring is done with a heavy emphasis on how successful certain strategies are in the ring and so on. While the schools I've trained in do not fit this mold, they all encouraged competition to one's own comfort. Several of them had an unwritten rule that you should participate in at least one martial arts tournament during your lifetime.

While standing up in front of people and performing isn't always easy ñ in fact, a fear of public speaking continues to rate at or near the top of most common fears in the United States ñ it can bring great benefits.

Learning to perform in front of strangers is a valuable life skill. My comfort in speaking in front of groups comes in large part from my time spent in competition. If you can stand up in front of people and present a form, all by yourself, and then be scored on it you can tackle just about anything.



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Many of the people that attend competitions attend more than one in a year. In most areas of the country there are groupings of tournaments that tend to attract the same groups of people year after year. These people become friends and the bonds formed can be just as strong or stronger than the bonds formed within a martial arts school. Many of the contacts I have now with whistlekick come as a result of my time competing back in the 90s. I can honestly say that whistlekick would not be this successful were it not for those contacts.

For many, competition brings out their best. I've worked with numerous students who never displayed their best in a class setting but rose to the occasion in competition. We could argue about whether this is right or it should be, but it doesn't matter. Some people are wired this way. I'm one of them. Whether its martial arts or CrossFit or even an academic test, something changes inside of me when I know I'm going to be compared to others. While its stressful, I enjoy seeing what my capabilities are and I know that I get no clearer picture than when I compete.

Many of the competitions that exist are referred to as open tournaments. I can't say for certain that these are the most common public tournaments, but I suspect that they are. Open tournaments offer a fairly standard set of rules and permit anyone of any style to participate. I enjoy these tournaments because I find I learn the most at them. Diversity in competition encourages the sharing of ideas. Let's take forms competition as an example. Whether you enjoy it or not, you can't argue that there's been a shift in the way forms are presented in competition as years have gone by. Today's forms are now more acrobatic and, for some, more exciting. Individuals engaged in these sorts of forms are pushing boundaries and challenging their competitors to do better.

Other competitions are limited to a certain martial arts school or maybe a style. These events can have dramatically varying rulesets, and were not going to cover them here.

Ironically, the first martial arts competition is thought to have taken place in Kyoto, Japan in 1949. Quite a bit later than most people would think. the first tournament of any size to be held in the United States was in 1955 by Robert Trias while the first open tournament was held in Madison Square Garden in New York City in 1962. Two years later Ed Parker hosted his first International Karate Championships event in Long Beach, California. It was here that Bruce Lee burst onto the scene and into the limelight forever and we have a photo of Bruce Lee performing his one-inch punch at that event over on the website in the show notes.

Today there are a multitude of martial arts tournaments that dramatically range in size. The largest events attract a few thousand competitors while most open tournaments are much



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smaller, bringing in a few hundred competitors. Some interschool or intersystem tournaments can be surprisingly large especially among those schools and systems that mandate student participation.

I feel strongly that in order for martial arts to grow larger in the United States we need to move competitions forward. One of the major criticisms I have always heard of tournaments is that, for most of the people in attendance, they're boring. Spectators are bored at most events unless they're watching their friend or family member compete. Competitors are bored unless they're in the ring actually competing. Judges are often simply just bored, especially as the day wears on and they remain seated in the same chair, scoring.

As martial artists, if we want to see our beloved passion grow and claim a larger place in the American landscape, we need to address these issues. It's ironic that martial arts competitions aren't more exciting, because martial arts is something that so many people enjoy watching whether they train in martial arts or not. While it is not my sport of choice, Mixed Martial Arts has been presented in a wonderful way and you need no better proof than to attend a smaller, local MMA event. The majority of the people in attendance don't participate in any form of martial arts. They're not getting in the ring, they don't know anyone that's there. It's simply exciting for them, it's easy to understand what's going on and there's nearly constant action.

In order to bring more people to traditional martial arts competition we need to make competitions more exciting for both the participant and the spectator. We can no longer ask people to spend 50, 75 even \$100 to spend the day sitting around ultimately having 10 or 20 minutes of action in an eight hour day. This is not the way most families will choose to spend their time now or ever.

There isn't one simple way to address this challenge, but the easiest way seems to be a two-pronged approach. First, offer more events. The typical small, open martial arts event has only two or three events ñ usually forms, point sparring and weapons forms. Some of them add a breaking division but it usually stops there. When I see other events offering divisions like continuous sparring team demonstrations may be musical forms I see the crowd respond. People enjoy watching these events because their exciting and often different from what they're used to seeing. Crowds demand that excitement participants want opportunities to participate in something different. We saw that proven out over the last couple years where we offered the push-up challenge at many of the events that we attended.

The second prong involves offering things other than competition. When whistlekick shows up to an event plenty people come over to browse simply because it gives them something to do



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other than sitting in a chair waiting for something to happen. Tournaments need more activities and options for those people in the crowd.

If we can keep people engaged, families will no longer make a decision between doing a martial arts event and then doing something fun, later on, as a family. Keeping them engaged will mean less pressure to finish a competition by 2 or 3pm. We can keep people there for the day they can have a great exciting day as a competitor as a spectator and as a family.

If more families are engaged and enjoying the time you're spending at martial arts events more people come to and remain in the martial arts. If these events grow well see more companies come through with sponsorships which will yield prize money. If we can offer more and better prizes, including money, well see an entirely new generation of martial artists that are actually able to make competition their profession. How good would a competitive martial artist be if training was their full-time job? I would imagine they'd be incredible to watch. If we develop an environment that fosters this sort of growth, martial arts will skyrocket in popularity.

And this is whistlekick's vision for martial arts competitions.

For those of you that don't know whistlekick is holding a martial arts competition I don't want to turn this episode into an advertisement for that event so let me just say it's on April 2, 2016 in Vermont and you can learn more at whistlekick.com or we've got a link in the show notes at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com.

Now I'm often asked why we're holding a martial arts competition. To many it seems counter to what we do. We make sparring gear. We make apparel. We don't put on events. We have put on some smaller events some seminars and we're gonna do more of that in the future. It's true that putting on a competition is a bit outside what you might expect from us but there's a really solid reason why we're doing it. Our tournament has 14 different events compared to the typical 3 or 4. Whereas most tournaments have 150 divisions, we have 250. During the day of competition you won't have downtime unless you want it, because were offering 8 different, free 30-minute martial arts seminars, free massage, free acupuncture, free access to the facility swimming pool and a ton more. Why? Because we believe that there should be too much happening for you to do it all in one day. We want you to stay the whole day and have a great time with your friends and with your family.

We're going to prove that martial arts competitions can be different. We want to raise the bar for what people expect from a tournament because we believe other tournament promoters will follow suit. In doing so, participants and spectators will be more engaged. They'll attend



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more tournaments and they'll stay in the martial arts longer. More new people will come to the martial arts and we'll see martial arts grow. And the more people involved in martial arts the more customers will have. It really is that simple for us. So hopefully you enjoyed this conversation. Hopefully it sparked something in you you're looking at things may be a little bit differently. If you haven't competed in the martial arts I'd like to encourage you to make that a goal for 2016 attend one martial arts competition of any size. Make some friends learn something better yourself as a martial artist. If you have feedback for us go ahead leave it over on the website whistlekickmartialartsradio.com put it in the comment section we're starting to see more comments come up as the show grows and that's great we love to see those. If it's better for you go ahead reach out to us on social media Twitter or Instagram we've got the [whistlekickmartialartsradio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) Facebook group if you search for that that's a private group but we'll let you in as long as you're not some crazy spammer or something so other than that head on over to the website whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes. Like I said the beginning we've got a full transcript a ton of pictures there's video some great old stuff some some more impressive newer stuff people doing sparring you know things I think that you'll really enjoy if you want to learn more about the competition that we're hosting there's a link there like I said whistlekick.com we've got something right in the top menu to bring you to that website you can check it everything we've got going on it's gonna be pretty impressive we're really really excited about it. If you want to follow us on social media we're on Facebook Twitter Pinterest and Instagram all with the username [whistlekick](http://whistlekick.com). If you want to be a guest on the show or you know some of you awesome interview and we are always looking for more of recommendations for guests with much rather have someone on that you want to listen to than us digging around finding someone that we think you want we want to know that you want them there is a form of her on the website fill that out help us out and don't forget subscribe to the newsletter while you're over there stay up on everything we do. If you liked the show subscribe or download the IOs app or the Google play out android app so you never miss out in the future that android app is also over on the Amazon App Store too. So we've got just about everybody covered and if we could trouble you leave us a review wherever you download your podcast. Those help us out, help us find new listeners and remember we read that review go ahead shoot us an email and we're gonna send you a free pack of whistlekick stuff. Remember all the great stuff we make here the gear the apparel you check all that out at whistlekick.com. That's it for today so until next time train hard smile and have a great day.