



Episode 326 – Mr. Ryan Hoover | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everyone, thanks for coming by. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio. My name's Jeremy Lesniak and today, I'm joined by Mr. Ryan Hoover. If you're new to the show head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for all of our other episodes. They're all available for free. We have video, we have photos, we have links, all kinds of great stuff to help you understand more about our guest or the topics that we cover on our Thursday episodes. And of course, if you want to suggest a person or subject that we can tackle on this show, go ahead fill up the form there and we'll see what we can do. Honestly at this point, the majority of our guests come from listeners' suggestions and we prefer to do it that way. That way we know we are bringing the individuals to you that you want to hear from because let's be honest, it makes our job easier. And of course, if you want to check out the other stuff that we do here at whistlekick, the best place to start is, you might have guessed, whistlekick.com. From our products to our other projects, so much stuff out there that we're doing for you, the traditional martial artists. Head on over. Let me know what you think. You can email me, jeremy@whistlekick.com and you can find us on social media @whistlekick. But let's talk about today's guest. Mr. Ryan Hoover is a sought after speaker and presenter and instructor of the martial arts of combative. He's a school owner and he has a deep traditional background but like a number of folks that we had on the show, and some of you out there, his roots and tradition led him to some other angles, some other avenues within the martial arts. Things that some might call more real or more street-worthy. However you term it, this was a great conversation and Mr. Hoover is a wonderful man and I really enjoyed speaking with him. I got a lot out of it. I'm sure you will, too. So let me step back and welcome to the show.



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Mr. Hoover, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Ryan Hoover:

Thanks, Jeremy. Glad to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's great to have you here. I appreciate you coming on. You know, we may get into it later but you are a suggestion from one of the rare multi-time guest on the show. So of course when someone that I know so well says hey, here's a person you need to talk to. I say hey, let's get him on the show.

Ryan Hoover:

That's always good to hear.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, you know it's a martial arts show and there's kind of one thing that we gotta get out of the way before we start talking about anything else and that's your martial arts background. So I always ask in this kind of story opening way, how did you get started?

Ryan Hoover:

Probably like most people, it was interesting to me as a kid. I'm 44 years old so I grew up about the time that Bruce Lee had passed but the movies were, you know, pretty popular. So I enjoyed watching those things but never really had an opportunity as a kid to train. So I kind of came to this later in life. I didn't really start getting too much involved on a kind of formal level until I was in college. And I got a black belt in Karate, got a couple of advanced black belts and Shorinji Kempo. But as some point, you know, it was like... I mean I'm a small guy, I've always been a small guy, so growing up I learned that really fast that I needed to figure out how to run, how to talk, and how to fight. So at some point, you know, I came to this realization that the things that I was doing in my training didn't really parallel so well with the fights that I had been in. So I started branching out, trained in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, I did some Balintawak Arnis still do both of those things to this day. I got pretty heavily involved in Muay Thai. I went to Thailand, trained there. Heavily involved in Krav Maga, go authored three books on that topic, lots of wrestling. And now, at this point in my life, you know, I kind of dabble in as much as I can, I bring in a Judo coach, I bring in a wrestling coach. We, earlier this year, brought in and hired all my staff a Thai boxing instructor and another Jiu Jitsu black belt. So I'm always trying to see what else is out there and better myself and whatever. So even though I got started later in life, I still you know, I've got about two decades of this as a major part of my life.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, as you're talking about, there's a... forgive me for kind of reading between the lines but there's a seeming disconnect in the way you're talking about some of your earlier training or maybe the breadth of your training and kind of the emotion. When people talk about having earned a black belt and multiple black belts, there's a... no matter how balanced, I think, their ego is, there's a sense of pride that comes through. And you almost sound dismissive. Am I hearing that?

Ryan Hoover:

It's possible. It's unintentional but it is possible. I guess overtime and travelling and training and teaching all over the planet, you know, I've met lots of people in my life that have no ranks or have lower ranks and are incredible fighters, incredible martial artists, incredible instructors, and then I've met, you know, the other end of the spectrum where guys have walls covered and wallpapered in certificates and things like that. And on the physical level, on the transfer of knowledge level are just not, to me, that impressive. So those things for me were part of my journey, no doubt, and maybe I needed to go through that to get me where I am now. But yeah, I don't... I own two training centers, you're not gonna see certificates hanging on my walls. I don't walk around with a black pair of belt on. I don't walk around with a shirt that says instructor or anything like that. Even in Krav Maga, I mean I'm eight years removed from a second degree black belt in Krav Maga and at that time there were maybe, I don't know, 10 in the whole country at that level. It's just not something that I, you know... I prefer for my abilities to transfer knowledge and my abilities to execute, to speak for me. And that's not to be dismissive of other people that put more credence or value in those things. I mean I have no problems with people being proud of what they've done and their lineages and things like that but to me, those are very personal things and things that, you know, outside of the individual, don't really mean a whole lot. And I know that puts me in a very small category in the martial arts world.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, honestly, it may not be as small as you think and just for my personal anecdote of observation, you know the folks I'm exposed to because of this show, it seems to be a growing group. There seems to be this group of folks like yourself who, for whatever reason, started to value other aspects of the martial arts, found other ways to subjectively score, we'll say

Ryan Hoover:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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The effectiveness of someone as a martial artist, as a martial arts instructor. Was there, in epiphany, was there a moment that led to you looking at things in this way? Or was it something more gradual?

Ryan Hoover:

I think it was more gradual. I think it, you know, it just kind of happened overtime. The more I was exposed to large organizations and the way that instructors were cultivated and pushed through systems and things like that, I think at some point and... You know, honestly maybe I became a little bit jaded. But at some point I kind of looked at the world around me and decided that I didn't really want to be contributing to the things that I was currently contributing to. I didn't want to engender this culture where the certificate was the thing as opposed to the thing being the thing, you know? When I travel and do instructor courses or teach seminars or whatever, if I go to somebody's center, I try to watch their students and see how their students move and interact and perform. I don't really watch the instructors all that much. I've met plenty of world class athletes and fighters that could not coach, could not teach. And then I've met some that you know, on the attribute side, are maybe mediocre but have an incredible ability to transfer knowledge. And to me, where I am in my life, in my journey, I put more value and more emphasis on that person - the person that is able to take someone and get them to a level of proficiency - as oppose to an instructor that has incredible attributes. Not that there's anything wrong with that, and if you've got both, that's fantastic. But my premium has been on, in the past few years, especially on the ability to teach, the ability to coach, the ability to take somebody from 0 to 100.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now the first couple times you used the notion of teaching, you used the word transfer knowledge.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are those words chosen intentionally? I've never heard anyone expressing that way. I'm guessing there's something to it.

Ryan Hoover:

Right, right. I mean you know, in our industry, there's a lot of terms going around - teacher, instructor, coach, Sifu, Sensei, all of these things. And I think each one on its own carries certain connotations. And for me, the title doesn't really mean that much. It's the person's ability to take information that they learn over time and then be able to transfer and be able to give that to somebody else and then allow that somebody else to kind of make it their own. Our teaching kind of protocol here is we give students



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a skeleton, a framework, and then it's up to them to kind of fill in the muscle around it because I just don't believe in teaching everyone to fight the same way. People don't move the same way, people have different body types, people have different backgrounds about their experiences, people are longer, taller, you know, bigger or smaller, older, younger, whatever. And for me to make 240-pound 6' 4" guy fight the same way that you know, 115-pound 5' 3" woman fights just make no sense. So in my opinion, to be a really good instructor or coach or whatever, it's not about reading from the manual and going to your frequently asked section or your common problem section or whatever. It's the ability to take information that you've gathered over time and then transfer that in a way to people that is palatable for them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like that. I enjoy the imagery of that. Long-time listeners know that I've spent a fair amount of time teaching, sharing, transferring knowledge, whatever you choose to call it, and there's so much more of a process in identifying how to share that knowledge with students, with students differently, right? I mean you certainly know that if you've spent anytime, anybody who's spent any time teaching knows it. You have 10 people and you're teaching them all the same way, you're probably doing it wrong.

Ryan Hoover:

But that's the easy way, you know. It's really easy for me to get up in front of a group of people and gotta have them all conform to one way. As an instructor, that's easier to do because now I don't have to think, I don't have to be analytical. I can, you know, just draw on whatever has been force-fed to me through manuals or videos or courses or whatever, and then I can just parrot those things. So I get why it's done - because it is easier. And on some level, I think a lot of students want that. I mean a lot of people, in all walks of life, just want somebody to tell them what to do, you know? It goes to having to think about it critically. So that's why I say, you know, we try to get that framework and let students kind of paint that picture on their own, or we can give them the skeleton and let them fill in the meat and muscle. Of course, again, people are different. And I try as best I can to cultivate instructors that are able to analyze and transfer in a way that is not cookie cutter.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes sense. As you spend your time travelling around, imparting knowledge, transferring knowledge, there we go, onto others and in your own training, I'm sure you've picked up quite a few stories. As you already know, as the listeners know, I love stories. They're my favorite part about this show. So if I was to ask you, what is your favorite martial arts story, what would you tell us?

Ryan Hoover:



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Man, that's tough. Years ago... Well I'll say one thing, if anybody ever gets a chance to train with Grandmaster Bobby Taboada in Balintawak Arnis, the man is a terrific storyteller. I would just sit there and listen to him tell stories all day and forgo the training if I could. The training is great but his storytelling is fantastic. I don't know, that's a tough one. Earlier in my career, I spend a lot of time with Bas Rutten and if anybody knows much about Bas Rutten, he's quite a personality, he's quite a character, and I probably had him here at my center, I don't know, six times maybe, something like that. And there are several stories that I could tell about Bas but I'll tell a quick one because it also involved Randy Couture. I hosted Bas and Randy here together, for something they had together, and we, the turnout was tremendous. So I ended up renting a high school gym for us to train. And I've never met Randy before this, I've worked with Bas several times. And so I picked them both up on the airport and it was kind of late. We were training in Gastonia, North Carolina which is kind of a smaller town, smaller city, so there wasn't much open. So we stopped at a... I can't remember if it was a Chili's or an Applebee's but one of those because that was about the only thing that was still open late. And Randy was sitting directly beside me and Bas was sitting directly across from me. And Randy was wearing, you know, this like some cargo shorts and a t-shirt and had a hat on, was pulled down real low kind of over his eyes, and he was sitting beside me. And I could barely hear him talk. He was just very quiet, very reserved, and I had to really listen to him to hear what he was saying. And Bas, sitting directly across from me, was completely opposite. He's big guy, bald head, he's wearing a Bas Rutten shirt, he's getting up in the restaurant, telling stories, really loud, really demonstrative, virtually shadow-boxing right there in the restaurant. And just the dynamic between the two of those guys, both you know, former UFC World Champs, both tremendous martial artists and fighters, and just to see the interaction between the two of them - how different they were - was pretty interesting. That same trip, Bas had just done some kind of martial arts movie, I can't remember what it was now, that straight-to-video kind of thing, and so this was back when you know, Blockbuster and Media Play and places like that were still a thing. This movie had just been released so Bas wanted us to take him to one of these places to see if they had it because he hadn't seen it in a store yet. And it was like a 12 year old waiting for Santa, you know? It was pretty funny to watch, such a big, tough, strong, seasoned fighter be gets so excited about something like that. So that was a pretty cool trip and experience to just get to hang out and spend time with guys at that level. I don't know, there's so many, man. I've cornered UFC fights, I've you know, trained in Thailand, that was pretty awesome, but that's an experience I'd love to do again. I don't know... a lot.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There should be a lot.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Sure.

Ryan Hoover:

It's hard to choose and as soon as we get off here, I'm gonna think of 10 things but yeah. It's a lot which... Yeah, it's awesome. I mean that's... I never would have imagined when I started doing this that, you know, I have clients that are NFL player. Well, here's the... I'll tell you another story real fast. Maybe 7 or 8 years ago, I got an email through my website from a mom looking for some training for her daughter who's gonna be going off to UCLA. And this would have been like late spring so we would have maybe two or three months to train. And I've had a few sessions with them, they both worked out, they train together - mom and daughter - and they are both athletic and you know, really into it and did really well. And one day, mom says do you mind if my husband comes and watches a session? I'm like no, it's fine. Well, I started teaching them and then he comes in and it turns out, he's Ron Rivera, the head coach of Carolina Panthers. And I've been training these people for a month and had no clue. So we go through our session and whatever. And at the end of the session, he gets up and starts asking me a bunch of questions about some of the things I was saying - angles and push-pull energy and making space and filling space and all this kind of stuff that, you know, it's bread and butter stuff for us - and we had a good talk, an interesting dialogue, and whatever. And then that led to us training players at Panthers stadium. We started doing one day a week with the veterans and one day a week with the practice squad. And you know, when I first started doing this, this was a part-time gig for me, you know. I worked a real 8 to 5 job with insurance and 401K and vacation time and all the things you're supposed to have - salary - and I was teaching at night as something to do because I hated my actual job. And you know, when I started that, I never would have imagined that would have led to, you know, working with an NFL team or we've done a NASCAR pit crews and you know, all kinds of things. So it's... Martial arts has really, you know, provided a lot of pretty cool opportunities for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now what if somebody's out there and they're feeling like they want to kind of shift, you know. Maybe they're in the hyper-traditional space. You know, they're going to Karate, they're going to Taekwondo, and let me take a moment to step out to the side and say this is not advocacy for one thing or the other. I think anybody who listens to the show knows my passion for the most traditional of traditional martial arts. So, okay, tangent over, if somebody is listening and they're thinking you know, I want to explore Muay Thai, I want to explore combative, I want to explore some of these things that you know, honestly dovetail in. You can stack them on top, whatever visual you want to use, they relate but they don't know where to start and maybe they're nervous. Maybe they haven't gone through the mindset shift of letting of the stripes on their belt or something like that but they know that they want little bit different or a little more. How might you suggest they make that first step?

Ryan Hoover:



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Yeah. It's tough because if you hit google and just start throwing some things in there, it's really hard to figure out what is good training and what isn't. Because there is a lot of bad stuff out there especially in what's often termed the reality-based self-defense world. There's a lot of fear-mongering and false promises and things like that and that part of our industry. So it's not easy and I get why it would be daunting to people. It's one of the things we talk about a lot in our instructor courses because my personal opinion is, most of the people that really need that sort of training will avoid it like the plague because of the way that it's often presented and marketed. So my suggestion would be - and none of this is foolproof - but my suggestion would be, check out reviews, visit centers. Centers to me, if your go is to find a space that is conducive to learning and with an understanding that your goals are self-defense or fitness or whatever, they should have no problems with you know letting you watch classes. They shouldn't have no problems with you talking to others students and members in the field for the place. It's like anything else, you know. If I walk into a place and I immediately get this bad vibe or this unwelcoming vibe or this ego-driven kind of culture, then that's probably not the place to go. There are some great Thai boxing gyms out there, there's some great Jiu Jitsu gyms out there. There's some really great Krav Maga gyms out there. But man, it's not easy to find if it's all foreign to you. So I would start by looking at reviews, narrow it down from there, visit the center, and you know look at it the way you would look at anything else. I mean if you went into a doctor's office and things were in disarray and you know, it was dirty and there's nobody really paying attention to what's going on, it seems unsafe, then these kinds of things, then walk. If the equipment is not in good shape, it's all in disrepair and if it doesn't seem that the instructors or the owners are taking care of their space, then odds are they're probably not really gonna take care of their students either. And look, I've been in some great like basement-garage type of gyms, too, but I think those probably are more well-suited to people that are not daunted by first time experience. So it's not easy, there's a lot of garbage out there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There is. And I'm curious if you agree, I've always suggested that regardless of what style you're looking for, whatever your goal is, you know the type of people you like to learn from.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You have an idea of the personality of the instructor. You have an idea of, you know, the general location you want to look in. And let's be honest, by the time you combine those two things, maybe with some restriction on the type of styles you want, you don't have a lot of choices.

Ryan Hoover:



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Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So you're going in and you're visiting, you're chatting with the instructor, you're chatting with students, you're watching a class. And really, to me, it's a process of elimination. You're looking at the reality of it - what's the good, what's the bad - and you're looking for the things that say you know, and I gonna spend a couple of years dealing with that? And if it's something you can deal with, because no school is perfect, but if it's something you can deal with then that one stays on the list. And if it's not, you know, just like a friendship or a romantic relationship, don't waste your time.

Ryan Hoover:

Sure. Absolutely. It's like an [28:40](#) The no restaurant's perfect, you know. I mean you're gonna have to make some sacrifices to get what you want but you gotta make sure that it's actually worth the sacrifices. And if I go into a place and I'm watching the instructor, just for me personally, in the way that I learn and maybe this is 20 years removed or whatever but I'm not there to be treated like in boot camp. I'm not there to be treated like I'm a child, you know? Treating me like an adult, treating me like a human, I'm not into stroking an instructor's ego or anything like that. And that's just me, personally. I have no problems respecting people that I work with and I learn from - again, Bobby Taboada is a great example of that. But at the end of the day, I'm paying for a service and so I want that to be reciprocated, you know? It's a yes, there is an instructor-student relationship but there's also a consumer-provider relationship.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, that relationship goes both ways.

Ryan Hoover:

Yup.

Jeremy Lesniak:

The student has to receive value for the time and the resources became money, you know, that they're investing and the instructor should feel like they're getting a good side of the deal to and that the student is attentive and pays on time and all that stuff. I mean we could talk at length about that but it sounds like we're on the same page. And I'm gonna guess that 99% of the people listening would agree. This isn't a subject that tends to get a lot of disagreement. Where the disagreement comes in is how that's implemented and of course that's so subjective.



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Ryan Hoover:

Yeah. Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When I talk to martial artists, one of the things that they have consistently is the ability to overcome adversity whether it's the mentor, the emotional component of training or the physical component of training, you know. We have a toolbox that most people don't have. I'd love for you to tell us about a time where things weren't good and how your martial arts helped you move past it.

Ryan Hoover:

Well 2003, I opened my first training center. I've been teaching for a while before that but 2003, I opened my first training center. Small city where I grew up, it did really well, doing really well. Probably 2008, I opened my second center in a much larger market at much larger space and then the bottom fell out of the economy. And that goes... you know, in our industry, we're a luxury item. We're not something that people have to have. So if people start looking to cut cost, we're gonna be one of the first to feel that, one of the first to experience that. And so 2008 came and I just opened up the second center, we just had our second child that April. And I was looking around like I don't know that either one of these centers are gonna make it now, you know. I had a super successful center and then I added one and adding that one, I was pretty sure it was going to bring down both of them because of the climate, you know. And so it would've been easy to fold up shop, go back to an 8 to 5 and have guaranteed salary and all that stuff but that just wasn't my mindset. That wasn't my mentality, that wasn't, you know, the way that I had kind of been conditioned over time. My mindset was to dig in my heels and you know, push harder. And so went to the landlord and said look, we're not gonna make it. If you give me a smaller space with less rent, I'll stay here and I'll make this work. And that was late 2008, three years after that, we doubled our space. Three years after that, we doubled our space again. And we just signed, last month I just signed a new five-year lease on a 8,500 square foot space. So you know, I think a lot of that probably has to do with the training, a lot of that probably has to do with the way I was brought up but you know, training has definitely put some adversity on me and forced me to fight through some things that, you know, otherwise it would have been easy to just walk away from or quit on or give up or whatever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Knowing what you know now, you know if you went back obviously you didn't know the bottom was gonna fall out of the economy, obviously you didn't know that those challenges were necessarily going to arrive. So let's go back to before those facts had occurred. With what you know now, would you have done anything differently?



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Ryan Hoover:

Honestly, I don't know that I would open a second center.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, that's good.

Ryan Hoover:

Just to give you a little bit more back story, when I opened my first center, we sold our house, we had our first child, and we had our grand opening all within about 3 months of each other. Yes. You know, we sold our house so we could start in business. So I have a bit of an intrepid kind of mindset and mentality which probably drove me to open the second center. But in retrospect, you know, I don't know that I would do that again. My experience is you don't just double the rent and double the utilities and all that stuff - you may be triple or quadruple the headaches.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. That was my experience with opening a second location in my last business.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah. I just... A lot of good things have come from it for sure but I just don't know that I would do that again. Or if I did open a second one, I would maybe downsize the first or sell the first or you know, something like that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. It's interesting to see the choices that people make in business, you know. I am very open, I have made a lot of mistakes.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah, same here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But what I'm proud of is that I learned from those mistakes. And some things you just have to... you've got to screw up before you can figure it out. I mean that's how human beings learn, that's how we work



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martial arts, right? Doesn't matter how many times the instructor show you this is how you do it. You're gonna do it wrong a whole bunch of times before you get it anywhere close to right.

Ryan Hoover:

Oh, yeah. I've learned way more from failure than I have from success. And you know, if I'm doing this good and I'm rolling, I learn a lot more from tapping to someone than I do from tapping someone, you know. If I make a mistake and get arm-barred, then that's an opportunity for me to figure out how not to do that again. If I catch somebody in arm-bar, it's probably something that I've done hundreds of times before. So yeah, my kind of personal opinion is if you're not failing, you're not really doing much. And it's not an easy way to go about things and you have to have a certain level of emotional toughness to be able to continue to fail and then push on. But I don't know that there's much other way to really grow and get better without that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. What was the motivation for opening that second location?

Ryan Hoover:

On some level, probably ego. On some level, you know, maybe monetary. But honestly, when I look back at it now, I think probably more ego than monetary which is why I hope that you know, in retrospect, I would learn from that and not repeat that mistake.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. And you know, I asked that because I suspected the answer. And the reason I suspected the answer is because that was my path as well.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Listeners know, you probably do not know that prior to whistlekick I had an IT company. And you know, it was... The world told me I couldn't do it. So 13 months after we opened the first location, I strong-armed a second location into happening. I've spent a lot of time driving back and forth and not sleeping and... I've lived in one of the locations for three days because there was such a bad snowstorm, I couldn't get home.



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Ryan Hoover:

I get it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ego is an interesting thing, isn't it?

Ryan Hoover:

It really is. It can be... On some level, you know, you have to have some of that. If you're gonna get outside of your box and you're gonna grow and succeed, I think you have to have about some level of ego, something that pushes you to go beyond what you are doing now and what other people think you can do. But it's pretty easy, I think, for it to get out of hand you know. For you to lose sight of certain things because of it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I agree wholeheartedly. I think it's such a common occurrence for martial artists or for anybody who engages in something that they developed some skill at, some recognized skill, that we develop ego. Especially when you didn't have a lot of confidence in who you were, you know. That's my story, that's a lot of young martial artists' story. You know, we start off, we're young and hey, I'm kind of good at this. And people will start recognizing us. But then we have this strong divergence between people being tempered and the ego, you know, settling down a bit, and other who don't.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah, for sure. I think what you said there you know, I mean, that's what drives a lot of people to martial arts. And then you know, at some point... And I think with social media now, you know, maybe that is a whole other animal, you know, that drives and feeds ego. It's a dangerous thing. I saw and shared and exchanged a post the other day where a student of another self-defense instructor, they basically were saying that you know, the numbers of followers, the numbers of years, the numbers of shares, it's a direct correlation to value as an instructor. And that's a dangerous thing, you know. In our lives, in our history, the people with the biggest followings aren't always the greatest people, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, I think if anything, the correlation is in the other direction.

Ryan Hoover:



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Yeah, absolutely. And so I think in the social media space, it's easy to lose sight of ground sometimes. And I've caught myself on that sometimes, as well. I mean we put out a lot of video content and I've caught myself on occasion like why does that video not have X amount of views or why is that video getting so many thumbs down or whatever, you know. And I have to check myself because I'm like cause at the end of the day, who cares? None of that really matters. Everybody's opinion is equal in those faces and most of the time, they're probably people that have no real experience in what we're talking about. But it's easy to get inflated, you know. It's easy to lose sight of that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you want to see how critical people can get on the internet, I suggest you put any content on YouTube related to Bruce Lee. We have a few videos up and in fact none of them are videos, they're podcast episodes related to episodes mentioning Bruce Lee, and I won't even get into which ones, but one of them I've had to add a disclaimer and I've removed about 50% of the comments because they're just offensive. And then I watched this conversation on another one that just... it was very clear that people were there with an agenda. This is the thing about social media that baffles me. In the real world, if I hear that somebody is on a street corner, you know, three blocks away...

Ryan Hoover:

Yelling about Bruce Lee

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yelling about anything that I believe to be false, I am never going to get in the car or walk over there and stand across the street and yell you are wrong, you are an idiot, etcetera, or try to prove them wrong. I'm just gonna say man, that person's dumb. But something about the convenience of being able to do that from a phone or a computer has created this massive culture of people trying to... I don't know. I get your point.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah. I think it's the convenience, it's the anonymity especially on YouTube, you know. YouTube is a whole another layer of anonymity.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you wake up on any given day and you find you have too much faith in humanity, if you think people are really good and kind and loving, go on YouTube and you'll level up.

Ryan Hoover:



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It's awful. When I first started doing videos for Funker Tactical and Aperture Fight Focused, I had to tell my wife and my son, and my son's 15, that look, you can't read the comments. You just can't do it. It's gonna be nothing but vitriol, you know. With a small smattering from here and there of maybe some slightly positive things but the people that are gonna be the most negative are the ones that go out of their way to say the most. So yeah, YouTube is awful. I've put out a lot of video content but I don't read the comments on YouTube. Every now and then I'll have somebody send me something that you know, they think I should interact with but that's the only way that I ever deal with YouTube comments. It's just not... It's not worth the emotional investment to me. There's just so much displaced anger out there, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think that we could probably take a hard left here if we wanted, and I don't want to because it's a show topic under itself. But to draw the correlation between that anger and the changing landscape for self-defense.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've been in martial arts long enough, many of our listeners have been in martial arts long enough to know that what you have to consider when teaching self-defense now is different than it was 23 years ago. And I just don't mean that more people are carrying guns or more people are carrying knives. I just mean the psychology.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah, if as an instructor who were forced to teach real self-defense, and I'm making a separation if you're teaching, you know, I don't even want to throw out a name but if you're teaching something for the art of it, I'm not talking to you. But if you're out talking about you know, you're teaching self-defense based on modern realities then you cannot be teaching the same way that you were 20 years ago. You just can't. You have to be talking about use of force legalities. You have to be talking about pre-contact indicators. You have to be talking about body language and gesturing and situation awareness to the point where it's not just about, you know, don't turn on dark corners, you know. That's not situational awareness. That's just common sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Self-defense doesn't come on a business card. It needs to be a little bit more thorough.



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Ryan Hoover:

And again, that goes back to what we talked about earlier. It's a lot easier for me to just get in front of a group of people and say well all you have to do is I did A, he does B, I did C, he does D. That's really easy to teach that way but it's intellectually dishonest. So as an instructor who is teaching self-defense, you know, if you're telling the 35 year-old accountant had to get from her office to her parking deck to her house safely, you have to be recognizing and understanding the realities of where we are today, and you can't just be about technical solutions.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you could train with somebody that you haven't, anybody, anywhere in the world, any style, and let's even open it up to anywhere in time, who would you want to train with?

Ryan Hoover:

That's an interesting one. I don't know on the coaching side of it but there are a couple of just athletes that I think I would like to train with just to kind of be in their presence to see how they train, how they do things or did things or whatever. And most of that is in the boxing world, you know. Loman Chanco for example, Pacquiao, and this will sound nuts but I don't think he would be, you know, somebody that maybe you'd want to spend a lot of time around but I would like it... When I watch Mike Tyson, early Mike Tyson, doing pad work, it's crazy scary.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is. He was a frightening man.

Ryan Hoover:

Incredibly frightening. And I remember watching videos of Kevin Rooney holding hands for him and thinking, you know, that man's taking his life in his hands holding this for him. But to be in that environment and to kind of take all that in and see how Cus D'Amato or Kevin Rooney or Teddy Atlas took a 17, 18 year-old kid and turn him into a 20 year-old World Heavyweight Champion, that's something that I think I would want to be a fly on the wall for. Would I want to train with Mike Tyson? No. Would I want to train with his trainer? Yeah, maybe. Outside of that, I mean there are guys like Olympic wrestlers like the Jordan Burroughs or somebody like that. I think an interesting guy that is probably overlooked a lot maybe Sammo Hung.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, we say a lot of good things on this show about Sammo Hung.



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Ryan Hoover:

I mean I know you're probably supposed to say Bruce Lee and Chuck Norris or whatever. I'm not these guys and those guys. But it's like last weekend, I taught at an event called Revgear University and Dan Inosanto was there teaching and Francis Fong and Ajarn Chai and Erik Paulson, a lot of guys from the Inosanto camp. So when I wasn't teaching, I took workshops from these guys. And I've worked with Paulson several times, he's an incredible martial artist, incredible fighter, but I've never worked with Dan Inosanto. So I wanted to experience that and it's clear the man has probably more knowledge about the history of 20 different systems and styles and disciplines than anybody on the planet and I was probably in the minority here but I wanted heard stories about Dan Inosanto. I didn't want to hear stories about Bruce Lee. Dan Inosanto to me is a guy that's got four times the experience than Bruce Lee ever had and in his 80s continues to train in new and different systems. I saw earlier this year where he got certified as a boat wrestling instructor through Kenny Johnson - the guy's in his 80s.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He's amazing.

Ryan Hoover:

And so I wanted to train with Inosanto and this is gonna get me in trouble on the Bruce Lee from it but I wanted to hear Inosanto's stories. Bruce Lee has been dead for a long time, those stories have been told over and over again and they're not changing, you know? I wanted to hear about Inosanto and I wanted to hear about his journey and I wanted to hear about his training and things like that. So it's funny you asked that because last weekend, I got the opportunity to train with one of the guys that was on my short list. So I don't know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's okay, you don't have to come up with a hard and fast answer because I don't have a time machine, I don't have a golden ticket. I can't you know... Just point this down and say your wish is granted so a little bit less pressure.

Ryan Hoover:

You come up with a time machine, I'll come up with that name, okay?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. And it is true, Bruce Lee occupies this really interesting space and we've talked about him before and we're talking about him again. The most influential martial artist and he's been dead longer



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than I've been alive. I mean just utterly fascinating. We've had people on this show who have trained with Bruce Lee. We've had people on the show who trained in Oakland at his school. And they were all nervous coming in, is this gonna be a repetition of me talking about Bruce Lee? And I had to assure them in every case, no. If you want to go there, you can go there. But I'm having you on because of you. And I think this is truly important. You know, we end up in some of these lineage conversations that maybe there's some value when you consider credibility or quality. A good instructor is more likely to pass on good knowledge to the good student, right? So there is some value in there but just because someone trained with Bruce Lee or read his books, everyone has read his books, everyone has trained with someone who trained with someone who trained with someone.

Ryan Hoover:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Who trained with Bruce Lee, right? You know, we're only a few degrees of separation from that so it really doesn't matter.

Ryan Hoover:

And that's gotten me in a little bit of trouble in the past. And again, I think a lot of times people, they don't hear what's said, they inject what they feel, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Ryan Hoover:

Or they don't read what's written, they inject what they feel, you know? I think it's really easy to get caught up in that. And anytime I've said anything about lineage or about Bruce Lee or whatever, it wasn't about the lineage or it wasn't about Lee. It was about, for the most part, that the people that you know, put those things and those people on pedestals and can't think outside of what he said or taught or whatever, you know, I think and obviously I don't know and I'm not a student of 55:29 or anything like that but I have read the books. I have, you know, watched the 55:34 I have trained with you know, people in that lineage and whatever and I just can't imagine that he would be on-board with a lot of the ways that the people down the line have conducted themselves over the years.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Well we see that all over the place in martial arts. If you go back to you know, the early Karate books, the instructors there, they spoke quite clearly against a good deal of what has been in their name.

Ryan Hoover:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk more about you again, though, as we start to wind down. What's keeping you going? What is your motivation for waking up everyday or tackling this lifestyle that frankly is not an easy one? You've talked about the 8 to 5, I mean that says how much dedication you have. Because most people would call it a 9 to 5, you've talked about it as an 8 to 5 several times. So what is it about what you're doing that has you still fired up after decades?

Ryan Hoover:

Well, a perfect example is last week, my team and I were in two charter schools and one private school teaching staff members how to deal with an intruder in the building and how to administer trauma care. And things like that, to me, are super rewarding, you know. To hope that they never have to use any of it but to feel like they at least have some options if they do where before they didn't really have any. That's the kind of stuff that gets me up in the morning and gets me going. I'll teach, you know, I teach everyday in my centers and I still travel and teach seminars and shorter courses all over the world but everyday, I'm teaching classes in my center. Last night, I taught three classes. One of them was a kids' class, you know, I have 12-15 kids in my class. And when I have a parent come to me and say that you know, Treyvion is doing better in school and paying attention and you know, he's got more competence now. He's not being bullied, blah, blah, whatever. Those are the kinds of things that make it all worthwhile, you know. It's definitely not... I know that there are ways to do it and I know that people have done it very successfully but I don't think martial arts is the way to get rich, you know. So if somebody's out there looking for it in that way, and again I know people who have done it, I know it can be done, but to me that's not what motivates me or what gets me up in the morning. I mean don't get me wrong, I need to make money. I need to you know, keep centers going and I need to pay my mortgage and you know, all those things, and pay staff and buy new equipment and all of that but that's not what drives me. What drives me is you know, Treyvion. What drives me is the woman that came in and had super low self-esteem and lost 30 pounds, or the teachers that now feel more confident about their abilities to keep their kids safe in their schools. You know, those are the kinds of things. And I love teaching. I love staying in front of a group of people and seeing light bulbs go off and I love watching somebody that's never thought about throwing a punch before in their lives hidden focus mitts. So yeah, I mean I love what I do. Do I want to have centers for another 10 or 20 years? Probably not. But do I want to keep teaching? Absolutely.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

And if people want to learn more about you, they want to find you online, social media, websites, any of that, where can we send them?

Ryan Hoover:

fittofight.com or ryanhooverftf.com and then there's a little bit of video content at aperturefightfocused.com.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. And of course we'll link that stuff over at the show notes. If you happen to be new, that's at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Well I appreciate your time here, this has been great, lots of fun. It's some good conversation, some stuff that honestly I didn't know we were gonna get into and I always love when that happens so I really appreciate -

Ryan Hoover:

I really appreciate the invitation.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool, cool. Well one more thing, we always ask our guest for that last little bit. There's always more, there's always a little bit more and this is the little bit more. What parting words, what wisdom would you offer up to the folks listening today?

Ryan Hoover:

A big mantra of ours here is everyone's fighting something and so whether that's getting through traffic everyday or whether that's standing in line at the DMV or that's dealing with relationship issues or health issues or whatever. I don't care who you meet in your day, everyone is fighting something. And so I think it's important to know a. that you're not alone and, b. that maybe that guy or girl that cut you off or put you off or [1:01:21](#) or whatever, you don't know what happened to them in that day so maybe just blow that thing off and move one and make the most out of your day. At the end of the day, the only variable you really control is you so maybe just let that pass.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What a fun conversation. Really had a good time with Mr. Hoover today. And actually, he referenced coming back from a training event recently. And you know what, I know some folks who were at the



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event and they said wonderful, wonderful things about him. Hopefully, I'll get to train with him soon, too. Mr. Hoover, thanks for coming on the show. Thank you so much for your time. If you want to check out the show notes, be sure to head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You can find photos and links and of course, 325 other episodes. Unless you're listening to this in the future, in which case, we will have more. Every one of them available for free. If you want to find out about all the other stuff we do, head to whistlekick.com and of course you can find us on social media. We are @whistlekick pretty much everywhere you can imagine. Thanks for listening today. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a good day.