



Episode 339 – Joe Lewis | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, thank you for coming by. Welcome, this is [whistlekickmartialartsradio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) episode 339. Today, talk we're talking about the legendary Joe Lewis. My name is Jeremy Lesniak I'm your host for the show, I'm the founder at [whistlekick](http://whistlekick.com) and we make great stuff. We make sparring gear, we make most recently some belts, we've got Olympic or WT style sparring gear, we just keep rolling out new stuff. You can check out all of it at whistlekick.com and much of it is available on Amazon. If you want to find notes for this show or any of our other episodes including transcripts, photos, videos whole bunch great stuff, you can find that at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, our social media is pretty easy it's @whistlekick and you can email me directly jeremy@whistlekick.com.

Let's talk about Joe Lewis. I've got quite a few pages prepared here and at the end I'm kinda gonna go off script and talk about Joe Lewis more from a personal place because he occupies this very interesting space in my life and my training. I'll tell you more in a few minutes after I'm done reading what we've got here.

If there was one person we could regard as the greatest karate fighter it's probably Joe Lewis. In fact, he was voted twice as the greatest karate fighter of all time. Lewis was an American kickboxer and karate point fighter who won many, many tournaments from 1970 in 1983 during which here in the titles US heavyweight kickboxing champion, world heavyweight Full Contact karate champion, and United States national black belt kata champion. Even the legendary Bruce Lee regarded him as the greatest karate



Episode 339 – Joe Lewis | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

fighter of all time. He's known by many as the father of modern kickboxing or father of American kickboxing. Now aside from his kickboxing career he was also an actor and he appeared in nine films his last film was death fighter which wasn't released until 2017 five years after his death. Joseph Henry Lewis was born on March 7, 1944 in Knightdale, North Carolina where he grew up on a farm. He enlisted in the Marines and his first duty was to be stationed at Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry point in Havelock, North Carolina from July 20th '62 to April 12, 1964. A month after that he was stationed in Okinawa, where he got the chance to study martial arts particularly Shorin Ryu with Aizo Shimabukoro who was his first instructor. He also trained with John Korab, Chinsaku Kinjo who's the one who promoted him to blackbelt and Seiyu Oyata, the creator of Ryu-te. In just seven months he earned his black belt. Lewis was also one of the thousands of US military sent by Pres. Kennedy into Vietnam. This is where he first met the boxer Rocky Graciano. Afterwards he was transferred to Marine Corps base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville North Carolina. After his release from active duty he returned to United States. Lewis received several medals as a Vietnam War veteran these include the Marine Corps good conduct medal, National Defense service medal, and Armed Forces expeditionary medal. His ovaries recognized his skill in karate so they urged him to join competitions though his Japanese Masters did not tell him to do so.

The first tournament he entered was June Rhee's third national karate championships on May 7, 1966 held in Washington, DC. Lewis easily one match after match using his now famous side kick to finish off his opponents. The referee even asked him why he only use the side kick, and Lewis answer was simple because they can't block it. This was Lewis's first tournament win. From 1967 until 1968 Lewis train privately under Bruce Lee where he learned the devastating double hook combination that he used to win his later tournaments Lewis was Lee's first choice to play the role of colt in the film The Way of the Dragon however, Lewis refuse the role so Chuck Norris was selected instead. In 1975 Lewis was married to Barbara Lee former American actress and fashion model. Unfortunately. Their marriage lasted just two years. Lewis continued to compete until 1983 and participated in three exhibitions through 1991. He was also active in giving seminars after his retirement in July 2011, he was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor which was operated on in the same month. The operation was successful however he died a year later on August 31, 2012 at Coatesville Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Coatesville, Pennsylvania.

Lewis' karate career started when he won Julie's third national championship in 1966. He had only trained for 22 months at that point but he defeated all of his opponents who were known to be the best of the best in the United States including Thomas lapuppet Carol who became a member of both the USA karate Hall of Fame and the black belt Hall of Fame. Carol was the eighth opponent and Lewis defeated him by a 2 to 0 decision. Lewis wasn't familiar with the rules of light contact karate which was the only form of the sport in the US at that time. From 1966 to 1969 Lewis remained as the US nationals grand champion. He also defeated Mitchell Bobrow and Frank Hargrove at the 1967 nationals in Washington. Before that, he already defeated Hargrove at the Henry Cho's karate tournament in New York City where he also defeated Chuck Norris. Lewis was bested by Alan Stein in 1966 at the Long



Episode 339 – Joe Lewis | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Beach internationals. The next year Lewis defeated Waylon Norris, Chick Norris's younger brother, Steve Labounty, Frank Knoll and Frank Hargrove.

The year 1968 was a turning point for Lewis career. He joined the first "professional karate tournament" namely the first world professional karate championships, WPKC promoted by Jim Harrison which was held in Harrison's dojo in Kansas City other popular fighters join as well including Bob Wall, Skipper Mullins, Pat Burtleson, David Moon and Fred Wren. Lewis won the tournament and was paid one dollar making him the first professional champion in karate history. Lewis' next fight was at the 1968 Orient versus US tournament that was promoted by Aaron Banks where he lost to a Japanese-American named Tanaka. In the same year, he joined the first professional karate tournament held in Dallas Texas where he won the championship against Larry Wittner, Phil Ola and Skipper Mullins. Lewis lost again as he faced Victor Moore at the world hemisphere karate championships in August 1968 held in San Antonio, Texas. The event was promoted by Robert Trias, creator of the shuri ryu style and [00:07:08.04] the prize money was \$1000 and it was split between Moore and Lewis. In the same year at a different tournament Lewis got another victory against Lewis Delgado who defeated Chuck Norris the year prior. Lewis had a come back just three months later after his defeat from Victor Moore, at the world professional karate championships held by Aaron Banks on November 24 '68. Lewis defeated Victor Moore and got the world heavyweight title he also one \$600 in price money. Two years after at the All-Star team championships in Long Beach, California, Lewis lost again to a fighter named John Natividad. However he want to get to Mitchell Bobrow for the heavyweight championship and against Joe Hayes the grand championship at the Battle of Atlanta promoted by Joe Corley. In 1972, Lewis lost against Darnell Garcia at the international karate championships tournament made famous held by Ed Parker. In the same year Louis won against Jerry Pennington at the grand nationals held in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1974 Lewis participated in three major tournaments. First, you participate in the Hidy Ochiai National Karate Tournament in May we lost to Charles Curry. Just several days later, he was in the PAWAK tournament. He got through the elimination matches against Frank Harvey, Smiley Urquidez, Benny the Jet Urquidez and Cecil Peoples. Finally he wanting and Steve Sanders with a 4-3 decision. The last one of the three tournaments was at the top 10 national professional karate tournament, [00:08:40.13] some of these names are terrible, these tournament names. Back into the script. By Mike Anderson. He lost against Everett monster man Eddie in the finals and this was the final year of Lewis karate tournament competition.

Lewis wanted to enhance his skills more even though he was already an excellent fighter. Aside from his training in Okinawa, and his time with Bruce Lee, he trained boxing coach Joey Urbello in one way or the other, these mentors contributed to his belief that martial arts can be more entertaining by being a full contact sport. He felt that sport was not real, was not valuable unless it was full contact. In 1969, Lewis got the chance to participate in a Full Contact promoted by Lee Falkner namely the United States karate championships. Lewis made it clear to Faulkner that he would not participate in less was Full Contact and Faulkner agreed. Lewis fought against Greg Baines when they entered the ring the announcer identify them as boxers and the fight as American kickboxing. This term was also used by Black belt



Episode 339 – Joe Lewis | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Magazine in May 1970. Lewis won the match by knocking Baines out in the second round and this is where many say kickboxing was born. His next kick boxing match was against big Ed Daniel on June 20, 1970 the USA professional open Karate championships promoted by Lee Faulkner and Alan Stein. Lewis defeated Daniel in the second round despite the latter's advantage in size and was reportedly taken to a hospital afterwards because of a brain hemorrhage. They had a rematch and Lewis was victorious again by knocking Daniel out this time in three rounds. Lewis next match was at the second annual United Nations open karate championships promoted by Aaron Banks on January 24, 1971. He defeated the state champion and 10th Dan Ronnie Barku in a minute 25 into the first round. Lewis participated again at the United States championship kickboxing bouts still promoted by Banks, he won against Atlas Jesse King in three rounds by knockout.

You're noticing a trend here? You are. Lewis defended his United States heavyweight kickboxing title in eight consecutive matches which all resulted in knockout between 1970 and 1971. His excellent record made him the first kickboxer to be featured in top sports magazines such as *The Ring* and *Sports Illustrated*. In 1971 Lee Faulkner tried to organize a match between Lewis and a Thai kickboxing champion for a world title match. However, the fight did not materialize for two reasons the first. There were no heavyweights in Asia. The heaviest Asian fighter was only 162 pounds. The fight organizers asked Lewis to lose 10 pounds while the Asian fighter to gain 10 pounds. Lewis agreed to this but he couldn't agree on the payment which was the second reason. The organizers wanted to pay the Asian champion \$3000 for the fight but they only wanted to pay Lewis \$1000. While it was important to Lewis to have that world title, he stuck to his principles and declined the offer.

Lewis retired by the end of 1971 undefeated in his kickboxing career with a record of 10 and 0 all knockouts. He was the undisputed United States heavyweight kickboxing champion. In 1974, Lewis participated in an all new Full Contact karate in Los Angeles California introduced by Mike Anderson. This is where the competitors were foam hand of footgear in the fight could end in a knockout. Lewis, being an undisputed champion of heavyweight kickboxing easily one the PKA professional karate Association heavyweight Full Contact karate title. He knocked out Frank Brodar of Yugoslavia in the second round. In the same evening, Jeff Smith and Bill Superfoot Wallace also won in their respective divisions for light heavyweight and for middleweight. He was featured in *Black belt Magazine Hall of Fame* as a 1974 Full Contact karate fighter of the year.

Many of you have seen the photo from that night with Joe Lewis, Jeff Smith, Bill Wallace wearing their Stars & Stripes uniforms, the three of them together, that's that night. That's when that happened. On July 27, 1975, Lewis participated in the World Series of martial arts championships in Honolulu, Hawaii he just married Barbara Lee two days before. During the match Lewis was overconfident at first and he was even knocked down to the canvas by Ron Clay. However, Lewis took the fight seriously got back up and he knocked out Clay with a blow to the head. Supposedly Clay was a purple belt in [00:13:31.09]. In the same competition, Lewis fought against a formidable opponent named Teddy Lemos. Lewis took a blow and it hurt his eye. The doctor said he could continue so we did but Lewis ultimately lost to Lemos



Episode 339 – Joe Lewis | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

by decision. The next month on August 24, 1975, Lewis fought Ross Scott. During the match allegedly in the third round Lewis dislocated his shoulder. He was given five minutes to rest and then the match continued Lewis received quite a few kicks to the head will block most of them. However, Lewis ultimately lost my decision he won two rounds while Scott had won three and the others were draw. This loss stripped Lewis of his PK world heavyweight championship title. And Lewis rested for a while after this loss, he starred in a couple movies Jaguar Lives in 78 in force five in '81. Then in 1983 Lewis had his second comeback. His first match was against Bill Morrison who had a 10-1 record. Lewis defeated Morrison by knockout, but Morrison reported that he was blackmailed into fighting moves by the promoter when he announced he was planning to cancel fight. On February 3, 1983, Lewis won on points against Curtis "cowboy" Crandall who had a 19-2 record. Lewis then fought against Tom Hall who had a 13-2-1 record but lost by unanimous decision. Later on he lost to Mark George Gergantus by decision, Lewis lost in his match against Kerry Roup for the PKA US heavyweight title Lewis suffered an injury above the eye that ultimately stopped the match in the fourth-round.

After the series of defeats, Lewis retired. His overall record combining his careers both in kickboxing and PKA Full Contact karate with 17 wins, 4 losses with 15 of the wins coming from knockout. Then in 1990 after several years of retirement Lewis fought against his best friend Bill Wallace in a kickboxing exhibition match. The match was labeled speed versus power by a number of promoters and people watching. Wallace one the exhibition match with two judges scoring a tie, while the third favored Wallace. Lewis recalled that he was warned not to go all out as he had a 30 pound advantage over Bill Wallace and they remain friends afterwards.

Lewis was not known only for his extraordinary power but also the speed. In his youth Lewis was a weightlifter and he wrestled in college after he won his first few tournaments his presence was intimidating other fighters as they all knew he had both strength and skill. According to Lewis, his training with Bruce Lee taught him quote good strong positioning being able to bridge the gap fast being explosive off the initial move and mobility. Overall Lewis study the following styles: Shorin Ryu Karate, Kickboxing, Jeet kune do, ryu-kyu kempo, taichi quan, judo and wrestling. Having knowledge of all the styles may lose a well-rounded and formidable fighter.

Joe Lewis was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor in July 2011. After 13 months of hard-fought battle, he passed away on August 31, 2012 a Coatesville Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. The cancer had already spread to his left shoulder and hip. He was 68 years old. The father of American kickboxing was buried in the Knightdale Baptist Church Cemetery at Knightdale, Wake County, North Carolina. Lewis' legacy includes a full contact karate system that he left behind. He was the one who introduced Full Contact karate in the USA and was considered the father of modern kickboxing. Some say the character Ken Masters of the popular videogame series streetfighter seems to have been based on Joe Lewis. The character also visited Japan to study karate and came back to the USA to become a US champion. I can't say for sure but I personally choose to believe. Lewis appeared in



Episode 339 – Joe Lewis | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

nine films: the wrecking crew, Jaguar lives, force five, Zhan long, Mr. X, blood moon, the cut off, kill em all and the posthumous, Death Fighter. It is quite legacy that he is left.

And this is where I want to talk a bit more personally. Everything I just read this was researched it's fact stuff but I don't know that it fully expresses this man's legacy. I never met Joe Lewis I was not lucky enough to. However, quite a few people who have been on the show, quite a few people who have become my friends did spend a lot of time with this man and I feel that i've gotten to know who he was through them. What I find most fascinating is that Joe Lewis, the man, is the person most likely to bring some of these amazing martial artists to tears as they talk about him. I'm not gonna name names but I can think of four people who have been on the show who have come to tears in front of me talking about Joe Lewis. Now we've heard some folks get emotional on this show, but what I find fascinating when I find most expressive of who Joe Lewis was is the fact that in one sentence people can talk about how rough he was, how aggressive, how honestly brutal he could be and yet how much love the way he treated people created. I never tire of hearing of the stories about Joe Lewis whether they're told from the Wallace or any of the other folks have been on the show and if you ever attend a superfood seminar with Bill Wallace or if you have in the past you know that it's pretty likely he's gonna mention Joe Lewis or has Bill Wallace will refer just Joe. He'll talk about Joe and everyone knows who is talking about this was his best friend. And as much as we think about Bill Wallace is being the greatest kicker ever, the one person that i've heard him talk about in his kicks as being incredible is Joe Lewis's sidekick. So if you hear me being a little bit emotional talking about him especially as I was reading about him passing away, it's because of the empathy I have for these folks that i've gotten to know who knew him. When I consider what i've done in martial arts, when I consider what's happening in whistlekick, I believe that for the rest of my life my greatest regret, not that I really had a lot of choice in the matter because I didn't know, but in hindsight I wish I could've trained was Joe Lewis even once at a seminar even just to meet him so I could put some better context to these things that i've read, to the stories i've heard.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. I hope you understood how important this man is to martial arts as we understand it today. The story of his life threads through so many others. I suspect you recognize quite a few of those names, Jhun Rhee, Ed Parker, Bruce Lee, Bill Wallace Fred Ran and a bunch others. His life weaves through so much of what is important to us as martial artist. We can't let his memory fade. If you wanna check out the transcript because of the multitude of dates and names that I mentioned today, you can find that whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You can email me directly jeremy@whistlekick.com and you can find us on social media we are @whistlekick. I love for you to share this episode or maybe leave a review on itunes or somewhere else, just help us out. Help people find the show, help the show grow, help us make an impact, as we reach as many traditional martial artists as we can. Thank you for your time today, thanks for listening. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day.