



Episode 344 – Senpai Ricky White | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there, thanks for tuning in. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 344 and today, I'm joined by Senpai Ricky White. My name's Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host, I'm the founder at whistlekick, and I love the traditional martial arts so much I made it my job. You can head on over to whistlekick.com, see everything that we offer. And if you use the PODCAST15 code, you can get 15% off all of it. You can also find most of our products on Amazon with free prime shipping and some other cool stuff. We do some exclusive stuff on Amazon, too. It depends. It depends on where we think it's gonna sell better. But enough of that, let's talk about today's show.

A lot of the shows that we've been doing lately come from folks who listen to the show - people in our LinkedIn community and Senpai White is one of those people. He reached out, we had a conversation, and we talked about his journey, his story, and how it's different. It is physically very different from the story that most of us have. I'm not gonna spoil anything. I'll let it unfold as we have our conversation but this is an inspiring man. This is a man who refuses to give up; who refuses to let go of things because some stumbling blocks got in the way. I found it inspiring, I'm sure you'll find it inspiring but on top of that, he's a good man, we had a great conversation, and I enjoyed my time. I hope you do, too. Senpai White, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Ricky White:



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Thanks for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you. It's always a pleasure to meet someone new, right? We've never met

Ricky White:

Nope

Jeremy Lesniak:

And we've... this is our first time even speaking in voice. We've exchanged some emails but here we are, we're here today. We're here to talk about you and your journey and at the same time, talk about how your journey is, you know, similar to everyone else's journey. I think all too often we highlight the differences in martial arts and maybe that's because it's more interesting to find the differences cause for most of us, I'd say 80-90% of what we do, it's really the same stuff.

Ricky White:

Mostly, they're the same stuff, yeah. Going forward, just call me Ricky. I tend not to use Senpai unless I've got a belt on.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fair enough, fair enough.

Ricky White:

I'm very informal so don't worry about that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I understand. I appreciate it and now that I've welcomed you to the show, there is no need to even refer to you cause we're the only ones talking.

Ricky White:

That's very true.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Like when you sit down across the table from someone, you don't really use their name because who else are you talking to?

Ricky White:

That's very true, that's very true.

Jeremy Lesniak:

02:57 and I know that I've explained it on the show before but it bears explaining once in a while. The reason that we use these titles is because those titles are important to some people, and I don't want anyone to stumble on the show, start listening and say ugh you know, he just introduced this martial artist as Ricky. There we go, I used it, right?

Ricky White:

See?

Jeremy Lesniak:

So here you don't hey, Ricky welcome to the show. And someone say you know what, they're not using any kind of respectful terms; I'm out. And I'd rather that we err on the side of caution, you know? What I call kind of the lowest common denominator of offensiveness, right? Like you get right down there. Very few people are gonna get offended if you refer to them by title but there are far more people that will get offended if you call them by their first name. You know some of that is the set that their Facebook name includes their martial arts title, some of those folks are example.

Ricky White:

And maybe that says more about them than about the listeners. But I mean if you put it in your Facebook profile then there may be other reasons for that. You know, obviously from a marketing point of view and those kinds of things but yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely

Ricky White:

That's more understandable, I think.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely, absolutely. I don't want anybody to get offended.

Ricky White:

And you've had this conversation. I have been a long listener now for a while so we've heard these conversations time and time again so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sometimes it gets blurry for me between when the episodes starts and then the stuff on the front and the back, you know, cause we always chop stuff off. And here we are, you know, I think you're schedule to be 348. Yeah. It's a lot of conversations.

Ricky White:

It's a lot of conversations.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I tried to keep up but it's just getting harder and harder. There was a time in the first like 150 episodes, if you had given me a name, I could have told you what episode they were.

Ricky White:

Wow.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can't do that anymore. I can corral it, I can give you like a range of 20 but I can't tell you whose what anymore.

Ricky White:

It makes more difficult, I suppose, cause you probably record more than one person on a single day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Often times, yeah. There will be two of you recording today.



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Ricky White:

That merges everything together even more so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure does.

Ricky White:

Cool

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk about your journey through the martial arts. You know, let's go back. When did you start?

That's a good question. I actually, I've kind of you know, two little journeys. I actually started martial arts when I was very young but I kind of left for about 18 years and then came back to it. So going way back, I was probably around the age of 7 when I first got into martial arts. I was bullied a lot when I was younger. And particularly, it was one incident where two brothers from down the street, they would never let me go down the street to the corner shop at the store, to bribe back bread or milk or whatever I needed to get. And they were younger than me as well so when you're 7, 8 years old, that's quite a big difference being bullied by someone's a year or two younger than you. So my dad did Shotokan Karate growing up so he says, let's start and look for martial arts so you have [06:33](#) confidence and use to do something about these bullies. And so he took me along his old school and they actually wouldn't accept me because I wasn't quite old enough. So I took a few Judo classes but I didn't get on with that. I actually have no idea why I didn't get on with that; I can't remember. All I remember is I never tested for a belt. I remember being there and doing a few simple Judo moves and that was it. I had a Judo gi, that's all I remember. So I didn't stick around very long and I ended up going back when I was old enough to do Shotokan Karate. And I did that through, I went up to almost brown. Yeah. And so I did that for about 5 years so I finished around 12, 13 years old. And I only finished because I was starting to lose interest because you know, I was 13 years old. There was girls and roller skating was popular back then and all these other kind of social activities. So it just kind of lost priority in my life and I kind of got a lot of confidence out of it. Bullying was no longer an issue for me even though I was pretty much bullied at some point throughout my whole school life but it was never... it never affected me as much because I always had this training to defend myself, and now there's more confident so it never lasted.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Sure.

Ricky White:

So it never became a priority in my life so I stopped going. And it wasn't until... So I'm originally from England and I moved to, lived in America in October 2014. In March 2015, I started Shaolin Kempo Karate which is what I study now. Although it's been a relatively short term my some people's measurements, not by mine but by some, I've achieved black belt. I won't probably go into a little bit more of that later on but that's kind of the [08:42](#) overview of it. Yeah, so that's my basics in martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Ricky White:

But even...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Go ahead.

Ricky White:

Sorry. Even though I kind of took this kind of 18, 19 year break, it wasn't till I started martial arts again that I realized I kind of always been practicing. Even though it wasn't punching and kicking things, and doing the physical aspects of the training, I was always trying to improve myself. I was always learning new things, I was always tweaking things about my own personality, about things I do. I was very much, you know, being... I was doing everything you would expect a martial artist to do outside of the dojo, and that's never left me. It wasn't until I got back into the dojo that I realized I've been practicing constantly; I've just not been punching and kicking stuff so in one way, I never left.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's such an interesting notion that you're talking about - the idea that martial arts can be practiced without punching and kicking. And I think anyone who's trained for a while understands that. And anyone who is actively training understands that their training doesn't stop when you walk out of the dojo or the dojang or whatever you might call it. But this idea that you can stop actively training in a martial arts school for that long but still be a martial artist, it's something that a lot of people will disagree with - I don't. I fully support what you're saying. I fully agree that you can remain a martial artist. It's a mindset, it's the way you look at the world, it's the way you conduct yourself.



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Ricky White:

Absolutely. And it took my return to realize that that's what I was doing. I would never have called myself a martial artist at the time but maybe looking back, I probably could have.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely.

Ricky White:

That's the benefit of hindsight, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Not what was it like going back in? That first class after not training for 18 years?

Ricky White:

It was frustrating. It was frustrating. So maybe now's a good time to take a little kind of a side to explain why I went back to martial arts in the first place cause it kind of feeds into the question. So the reason we kind of initially started to talk to each other is because I wanted to talk about disability in the martial arts. So I have a condition called Ankylosing Spondylitis. It's a form of arthritis. There's actually over 200 forms of arthritis and most of them don't affect old people like most people think. They actually affect young people. It's an inflammatory arthritis so it's not a degeneration necessarily of the bone. It's caused by inflammation around the joints. Where your ligaments meet and your tendons meet the bone is called, the exact kind of point the meet is called entheses. And what happens in Ankylosing Spondylitis, which I'm just gonna call AS from now on cause it's too long, is that you get inflammation there. So if anyone's ever had kind of tendonitis or anything like that, knows how painful that can be, well that's me on a day to day basis. I have pain every single day. The last day I was pain-free was probably around not long after I got diagnosed. And I was diagnosed in March or 2010. So it's been a good 8 years without a day-free of pain. Now, at points I would have been classified as disabled. I wasn't able to walk, I can kick people in the head and my mobility's certainly

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm gonna jump in for a second

Ricky White:



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better than that. So one of the reasons I started is because exercise is showing to be beneficial with AS. It actually improves your pain and it keep the joints moving. If my joints... If I sit for too long or lie for too long, all my joints kinda seize up and then I get really, really stiff and it gets really difficult for me to move again. So actually, exercise is a huge benefit. It's one of the ways that we treat it as well as all the pharmacological methods available. So when we moved to America, I'd already kind of let myself gain a little weight. My weight was higher than it should be which affects my pain. Because obviously if you're moving around more weight, then you're gonna have more stress on your joints, on your bones, on your spine. And AS mainly affects the spine and the hips, and the sacroiliac joints which are where the spine. I've actually... I was [14:00](#) a video which hopefully you'll include in the show notes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes

Ricky White:

So if you want to learn more about where these positions are in the spine, I'm not gonna give you a biology lecture now but you can just watch the video. It's a five-minute video so anyone listening can just go watch that. So I've... I've forgot my place.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's okay. That's okay.

Ricky White:

So that's where it started. So I'd let myself go a little bit for a move and obviously that was affecting my pain. So when you move country, you kinda lose friends... you lose all your kind of social aspect of life, you know, I had no friends [14:38](#) or anyone. I just have family that I live with. So I needed a way of getting out the house, I needed a way to trying to lose weight and I needed a way of exercising more. And it turns out that martial arts could fill three of those things.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Yeah, for sure

Ricky White:

Yeah. So I rode up to my local dojo. I had no idea what style they practiced at the time. I just turned up and I met with my Sensei and he was very welcoming. I explained my disease and he says, we can work with that, and we did. So it was very frustrating because when I first started, now I'm actually gonna



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answer your question, when I first started, I didn't realize how much I remembered. I expected to know nothing again, to be completely, you know, a blank slate after all those years. But as I started practicing, it turns out I actually remembered pretty much all of it. So all the technique, all the knowledge was there. I just didn't have the physical ability, and that was incredibly frustrating. And when I look at - I teach white belts and yellow belts and people just starting, they generally have more ability than they have knowledge but I was the opposite way around and that was incredibly frustrating. So it was a bit of a mental hurdle to get over when I first started but it kinda just made me more determined to just nail it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'd like to talk about that conversation you had with the instructor when you walked in... I wanna... I'm gonna go on my own little bit of a tangent before we get there and let the listeners know prior to us scheduling, we talked about what the format of this episode would be and whether we should be addressing the broader topic of, you used the term, disability in the martial arts if I remember correctly - I don't want to misrepresent - or should we be talking about your story in finding ways to thread that through. And at the end, you were pretty firm that your story is your story and you didn't want to speak for anyone else. But you do have an opportunity here to speak to quite a few martial arts instructors and school owners who may have very little experience working with folks who have disabilities. And now only do you have the knowledge and the understanding of where you're at, of your story, but you have the contrast of training before and after granted there's some years in between. But I think that you're a great person to at least open the subject to start a conversation for quite a number of folks. So I appreciate your willingness to do that. Now I'll pull back my tangent and get back to asking you the question that I was starting to ask. When you had that first conversation with the instructor and explained what was going on with you, how did you express that and what was that conversation like and how might it have gone wrong? You obviously stuck around. What would have made you not stick around?

Ricky White:

The reason I've stuck around is because I... the style, Shaolin Kempo I have, has a lot of variety in it. And that means that if this particular thing, cause I have flare ups and there's days where I'm limping into the dojo and there's days when I'm running into the dojo, my... It can vary quite significantly and it's important. And what made me stick around was on my bad days, when I was at my worst, there was always still something I could work on; always something I could still do and there wasn't any expectation on me that I must perform these set of movements today in class. Instead, I could alter it or change it or just do something different that I could do that would not cause me pain but would still help me achieve my outcomes. And so approaching... When I talk to my Sensei, Sensei Gary, he's a very open guy, very friendly guy, he's a very accommodating guy and he sees martial arts in the way that I see martial arts - that martial arts isn't just for one type of person; martial arts can be for everybody and it's his role as an instructor to almost make the martial arts fit the person rather than the person fit the martial art. It's kind of a bit of give and take both ways with that, I think. I think too many people are put off maybe study martial arts because they don't see people like me doing martial arts. They see Bruce Lee or Donnie Yen or all these really hyper-fit, super athletic people doing martial arts, whether that's on TV or on the films



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or even if they read about them. Everyone is athletic and they're not normal, you know, [20:23](#) but they're also even lesser, they're not disabled. I don't know about you but do you know many disabled veteran martial artist or many people that suffer with maybe mental disabilities? I know they're out there but you don't see them and I think part of the reason I wanted to talk is because I wanted people to know that there are people like me. And I think there are people out there, more of us out there than maybe are represented. But also, there's many more people, I think, would benefit from martial arts that are being put off because maybe there's just not the awareness that you know, things can be tweaked.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes.

Ricky White:

And you can still achieve a high level with some modifications to the way you train.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You just got into a whole bunch of stuff so let me ---

Ricky White:

Sorry

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no. Please, this is great. Let me respond to a couple of things there. I do know some folks with physical and mental challenges that participate in martial arts that participate at a level higher than the majority of people who are "able-bodied" - you know, the folks that we would think of as your average human beings. But as a percentage, they certainly represent a smaller portion of the population of martial artists. Now I can't say do they represent in equal larger or smaller percentage as it relates to the overall population; I don't know. Because unfortunately, individuals that have physical or mental challenges don't tend to be put out in front.

Ricky White:

No

Jeremy Lesniak:



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As you have said. And that creates, whether accurately or not, a perception that they are less common. Martial arts is already not terribly common in the United States. We're talking about somewhere around three and a half, 3% of the overall population. And so when you talk about a small percentage of a small percentage, it becomes really hard to see. And the beauty of you coming on the show today is that you're going to reach a lot of people whereas most people, their exposure to those in the martial arts is limited to the folks in their own school. Now you might have a huge school and statistically, from the surveying we've done, a huge school is over 200 people. There are very few schools that even crest a hundred people. So when you consider that, a couple percentage points of that, I mean you might be talking about one person, maybe. So that doesn't leave a lot of opportunity for the instructor and the class overall to know how to support that person. And the more that we have that support in place, the more we can see folks thrive. And the other thing I wanted to respond to was what you're talking about with good days and bad days, with the not only the need but now the ability to make some modifications to what you're training, how you're training - that should be something that is in place in every school regardless. Because you know, like right now, I'm dealing with a wrist thing. Unfortunately last week, I was out for what I knew was going to be the last motorcycle ride of the year, I made a poor decision, the bike went down, not at high speed but it ended up injuring my wrist. Now that's not anything permanent but I need to modify my training because of that wrist injury. And if you are at a school that doesn't allow that, that doesn't allow modification and it's either you're at 100% or you're not there at all, you're probably not there very long because we all end up with bumps and bruises and injuries in and out of training.

Ricky White:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. All that being said, the Sensei's conversation with you, we'll bring you back to that, if we have someone listening who is an instructor, who does have someone approach them to say you know, I have these challenges or maybe someone I represent, perhaps a child or their guardian for someone, who has some challenges, what should that conversation look like? What should they be saying? What should they be asking?

Ricky White:

I think it's really important to understand about the challenge itself not just know the name but actually how it affects them on a day to day basis, on how it's gonna affect them going forward is also important to know. And this should be a question that they ask everyone anyone anyway is, you know, what are you wanting to get out of this? Why are you coming here today? I mean if you're sitting in an office or whatever with a Sensei looking to maybe join up, then you've already taken action so they obviously want to be there so you need to make sure that they know what they're getting themselves in for as to what's to be expected of them but also, you know, know that ultimately you're there to help them grow. You're there



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to help them learn and you want to be respectful of the fact that they may have limitations. And then you can discuss together as a team and less on the, you know, I'm the Sensei, you're the student, do as I say; more of a collaborative approach to your training to say okay this didn't work today. Let's see how we can modify it and make it work for you better. And that's just an ongoing process. And so I think in that initial kind of contact, you just really need to understand - understand the person and understand their challenges - and just ask a lot, and that depends on the challenges what questions you ask but you just a lot of questions. Most people will be happy to answer them because it's nice... when you're living with a condition that most people haven't heard of, to have someone ask questions about your condition and genuinely want to know more about it, it's very pleasing and it's very... I'm not sure what the right word is but it's a positive experience that you just want to kind of want to give them all the information that you can because those opportunities don't present themselves as often as they should.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I definitely agree. Alright. Let's bring you back. Let's talk about you, your story, your journey. Now you can pick this from, you know, your first stint in the martial arts, maybe your second stint, your current endeavors in the martial arts or perhaps the time in between because, as you and I have both agreed, you were still a martial artist. If you were to pull your best story, your best martial arts story from within the grandeur story, that is your life, what would that be?

Ricky White:

Well it's not Bill Wallace story - I'll put it out there. Everyone has a Bill Wallace story but me

Jeremy Lesniak:

They seem to, don't they?

Ricky White:

Yeah, they do. Maybe one day that'll change. So I have kind of... it's kind of a two-part story that I was gonna share with you guys. It doesn't paint me necessarily in the best light in the first instance but I think it's a good teaching opportunity, that other people may have experienced similar things so... So back when I was in doing Shotokan Karate as a 12-year old, I entered a tournament and we did probably three or four tournaments a year, I'm not quite sure, we did a lot of them though. This is towards the end of kind of my Shotokan career. I was in doing sparring; now for some reason, and this was a tournament we went to every year, of some reason, this particular year, they were running about 2 hours behind. So they were way, way behind and it felt like we were there all day. So when it come for our division in our age group to do a sparring, they said look, we normally do round robin but we're gonna have to cut it. Everyone only gets five fights, cause there was probably 8 or 9 of us in the group, we haven't got time and no longer is it the first to three, four points or... then it's... you just... first point, first full point. The way we scored it



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back then was, you know, if it was just a good strike or just contact, it was like half a point but if it was a good control strike, maybe to the side of the head, that's something 30:02 So they kind of scored the points like that. And back then, we never wore headgear and stuff. It was just a bit of foam on the back of the 30:12 so it really had to be controlled when we were hitting each other as a 12-year old, those were the days. So we was sparring and we did okay, and it turns out there was... Sorry, we had three fights each and it turned out that the five of us, all had won two and lost one. But obviously, they could only advance four to the next stages - you know, bronze place fight and then there's silver and gold medal fight - and I was the one that got left down. Now looking back, it was probably because I had more points scored. I mean we all won the same amount of fight so we all scored the same amount of points. And I got very angry about that, even more so when I realized that the people I beat were the people that got gold and silver. And I beat them both, you know, leading up to that. So as a 12-year old, I got very upset about it; I'm very angry and I carried that around with me like until about two years ago. That's always been something that annoyed me. I should have won that tournament, that medal, because I was better than those - I beat them. So fast-forward to maybe, I want to say two years ago, I was maybe a first degree or second degree brown belt in Kempo, and I was going into a tournament and the previous two tournaments, I took first place in sparring. So this was my third tournament with them, and first for sparring because we only spar... Because in our school, we do two tournaments a year - the tournament is just for our school, we have kind of four dojos in the area so we're a pretty big school, big enough to have our own tournament. And we only do sparring every other tournament because of all the other events we have. So I was going in undefeated, looking for my third straight gold medal in sparring. And it happens at this year, there was this new guy come. He just signed up few weeks before, he had no belt on him because he hadn't tested yet. So no one knew who he was cause we were in a different location, we've never met before. No one knew who he was but he was there, he was a legitimate student and he... I'm 5'7", he must have been about 6'4". Yeah. There's a big height difference, his reach just felt like forever, and turns out that he had multiple black belts. He did all kinds of martial arts before that which is why he didn't have a belt yet. So he was sparring and he was just wiping the floor with everyone because he'd done American sports fighting karate and that's what he was good at; that was his bread and butter. And in Kempo, we tend not to kick much. We're not the best, you know, we're not Taekwondo practitioners. We don't... we can kick high but we don't usually practice it that much. So when it comes to sparring, we generally spar in Kempo way not in a Taekwondo way, and he was doing Taekwondo type kicks and he was just beating everybody. So it got to the final and it was just me and him. And he was the only person in my way of getting this third gold medal and keeping my undefeated record, and I lost very badly. And I got angry again, I got that same feeling then when I felt... that I felt back when I was a kid. And the next event was my forms; I went out to do my form and I completely screwed it up. My head was all over the place cause I was still annoyed and angry and frustrated from the previous event. And I completely screwed up my form, didn't even place. And I thought, I knew something was wrong in my head so I just disappeared. My next event was a weapons event and I had a bit of time, I had quite a bit of time between events so I just disappeared. I just went and find a quiet corner somewhere and just sat on my own and... Excuse me, I'll take a drink

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Sure

Ricky White:

So I sat there thinking about what just happened and thinking I've gotta get my head straight for the weapons, I gotta do well in the weapons. And I started thinking about this was just exactly how I felt when I was a kid and I lost that sparring tournament. And I was thinking, why am I feeling like this? This isn't like me. I've went in all my other events, I have lost before, I have performed badly before and in at no point have I got angry. I just accepted, maybe I didn't do my best or maybe I didn't train hard enough. I just... it was like [35:48](#) back and I just moved on, kept moving forward. I never got angry and frustrated. I always try to stay calm and humble. But these two particular occasions, it wasn't the case and it was completely because it was sparring. There was something about it that just got to me. And so I sat and I thought about it long ago and thought, well this can't be a coincidence that I'm feeling the same way as I felt back then. And I started thinking about back to then, and then I started thinking about things that my dad had told me back then which I now was starting to appreciate - he always had two things to say to me. He says, doesn't matter how good you are, there's always someone bigger, better and stronger than you. And the other thing he always told me was, you always leave your ego at the door. And I've done neither of those. So now I started getting upset for a completely different reason because I was acting out of character and I had taken my ego into the match and really, I probably would have done a lot better if I hadn't. And it took me a while of sitting there and [37:02](#) on my own to kind of realize this. But that was kind of a changing point for me, not just in kind of tournament practice but also kind of in my whole martial arts career because it made me realize that even as calm as I normally am and as determined as I normally am, even I still have things to work on. And even something as obvious as not letting your ego get the better of you when you're sparring, is something that we can all [37:40](#) to. And I managed to clear my thoughts and clear my head, I come to this realization that that was the problem was - it's that I didn't leave my ego at the door. I took it in the match with me. And after at, I just outside and I just started practicing my weapons form, getting ready for my tournament. And just having that time alone and coming to that realization, just how tremendously... it was just like someone flicked the switch. And I went into the event and I performed that weapons form the best I have ever performed that weapons forms. I have never even come close to it since. And that just reinforces the fact that I needed to stay calm and I needed not to take, you know, to carry that burden with me. And looking back, at those you know, the event that happened 20 years ago, I've been carrying that all my life and it took another occurrence and incidence to teach me that you know, there was... I wasn't approaching it the right way and actually, I needed to change something. And thankfully, it's never been an issue since.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great.

Ricky White:



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I mean it's not a particularly fancy story, it's not a humorous story but I think it's a story that other people can relate to because I've seen instances where people have done the same thing since then. I've now have kind of cut [39:15](#) and I think it's something that people suffer with and you don't always realize that you're doing it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. You know it's really easy for us to talk about these values, these mindsets, of you know, focusing on yourself and letting things go. It's really easy to say those words. It's really easy to agree with those concepts but if you don't have the opportunity to practice them... because I would argue, they're not natural. Instinctively ---

Ricky White:

I would agree.

Jeremy Lesniak:

we're self-protective.

Ricky White:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We're out for our... you know, there's an element of selfishness that I think has to exist for species to continue on. And here we are, we talk about incidents, stories, like what you're sharing with us today, where in both of those examples, you had something to point at to say this is not right, this is not fair, I have been wronged. And it's really difficult to let things go, to let it roll off your back when you believe you've done your best and circumstances beyond your control negatively affected the outcome. It is unfair, as many of us would say. So to have that opportunity to practice that, to practice saying you know what, yeah, it's unfair but I just have to move on. Otherwise, as you expressed, it can continue to affect other things, and there's some value on working on that. Now I'm certainly not saying this from any kind of ivory tower. The last couple of times that I've competed, I felt things went against me in a way that I was not thrilled about. And I continued to practice, excuse me, in and outside of martial arts, in and outside of competition. This notion that sometimes it's not going to go my way, it's not easy.

Ricky White:



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It is definitely not easy and I agree. It is almost against human nature. And that's... yeah, that's very difficult. And it's something that you can't just do. It's something you have to fail at first before you can actually learn and move on and actually do it. You can't just turn around and say oh, this is the way I'm gonna act from now on, this is the way I'm gonna approach life. You've got to fail. Otherwise, you're never gonna actually truly understand what you're trying to achieve and what it is that you need to overcome. So you have to fail. Failure is part of the process.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, couldn't agree more. Human beings learn more by making mistakes than we do by succeeding.

Ricky White:

Absolutely and that's how I learn [42:14](#) I'm very good at learning ---

Jeremy Lesniak:

Success teaches you one path, right? It teaches you one way that things can work but failures allow you to cross off away that didn't work. And you narrow up the options that are worth trying. I think it's great. If you could train with anyone, anywhere in the world, anywhere in time, you've probably heard this question before on the show

Ricky White:

Oh, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Who would you want to train with?

Ricky White:

So aside from the obvious, alright, I know Bruce Lee, right? But everyone says that but yeah, he's on the list. I can't give you any other reason that anyone else hasn't explained to you in the past, you know, few episodes of the podcast but I think, right now, the person I'd like most to train with probably be Dan Inosanto?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Inosanto.



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Ricky White:

Inosanto, sorry. Yeah. I mean he's a great martial artist and he's someone that is... I've always heard positive things about and that makes me want to be around him. I've never heard anyone say anything negative about him, ever. There's not one story I've seen or read so him. I mean the honest answer is I want to train with anybody. I don't even care what rank you are. I learned some of the best things from white belts. White belts can teach you more than training alongside a fellow black belt can. So I mean, the honest train is I want to train with everybody but I think as far as putting a name on it, I think him. And also, I'd put alongside that, Hanshi Bruce Juchnik, as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hanshi Juchnik is great. I just saw a number of friends, several folks who've been on the show were, in fact were in Reno, Nevada at his event this past weekend.

Ricky White:

And my head master was there as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, awesome. Awesome.

Ricky White:

He trains alongside him sometimes so, yeah. He's a character from [44:28](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, absolutely.

Ricky White:

I'd like to learn more about his style of Kempo, as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Have you heard the episodes that he's been on?

Ricky White:



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Oh, yes. I went back and listened to them, absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And for folks listening, he's been on twice. The first time, did our standard, you know, conversation with him. But then it was his idea, and we actually videoed this one, he talked to Grandmaster Bill Wallace at an event last year. And I got the privilege to film that and so that's available as audio in your feed. I want to say it's like 180-something. We'll link these in the show notes but it's also available in video on YouTube, tons of fun watching two guys who have a library of stories.

Ricky White:

Yeah, they have a lot of stories, I know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Going back and forth. And to folks with absolutely phenomenal memories. When you look at your time as a martial artist, you know, if you were to take a snapchat of who you are as a martial artist right now, who had the biggest contribution to that persona?

Ricky White:

I think, obviously, my Sensei has had a big impact on kind of my training and how I work. But I think aside from him, it's been my father. My father's been probably the biggest influence on my martial arts. Mostly because, although we didn't... he spent some time but he didn't really teach me how to punch and kick, and do any kind of moves or techniques. He taught me the values. He taught me like... going back to the two things he always told me, you know, there's always leave your ego at the door, and there's always someone bigger, better, stronger, faster, and those applied to it - not just martial arts but at every walk of life, anything you try and do in life. There's` always gonna be someone better and he always told me, find that person who's better than you and that's who you'll learn the most from. Go and work with them. Don't try and be the best person in the room, try and find that best person and then learn from them. And that's kind of what I do now, and that's how I've always approached everything in life. He also helped me obviously with things like confidence and discipline in my work ethic, and all of that comes from him. And that has all fed into my martial arts. A part of that is probably who he is and part of that is because he trained in martial arts as well, and part of that is because we used to sit down and watch Bruce Lee movies when I was far too young to be watching Bruce Lee movies. And yeah, I think those have had more impact to my martial arts than anything else.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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You know, certainly not an uncommon answer here on the show. You know, the influence of the parents on who we are not just as people but as martial artists. And you mentioned at the top of the show that your father had trained in Shotokan. But we've had plenty of folks on the show who will still mention one or both of their parents as their major martial arts influence even if they didn't train. And quite often, it's the support that they received, the transportation, the financial support to do martial arts. But then sometimes, that answer is maybe a little less positive, you know it's the negative influence of the parents that showed them what a good "family" could look like that they found in the martial arts. So I continue to find it fascinating that you know, we think about your instructor typically being the one. You know when you mentioned your current instructor as being your first primary influence but... You know, I don't know that I'll ever wrap my brain around how deeply someone outside the martial arts can influence what we do in the martial arts. I find it neat - I'm just pointing that out to myself as much as anyone else. We've talked about Bruce Lee a couple of times today and you mentioned that you watched his movies when you were maybe a bit too young to have done so. What's your favorite one?

Ricky White:

Probably Enter the Dragon.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Me, too.

Ricky White:

I like them all but yeah, probably Enter the Dragon. I actually just got back from a trip to China which was not martial arts related, and obviously there was Bruce Lee movies on the plane ride over so that was quite interesting. It's been a while since I've seen some of the old ones but yeah. I actually watched a really interesting documentary about the way of the dragon. And there was a documentary about them visiting the old filming location and seen how much they've changed on all of these famous fight scenes of his. So that was interesting.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He continues to be such a strong influence and you've probably listened to him, many of the listeners probably listened to the episode with Mr. Matthew Polly. I remember the episode number on that one, 305. And do you know why I remember that one? Because every couple of days, I have to go on YouTube and delete some horrendous, hateful, just vitriolic comments. He is the most famous martial artist and still the most polarizing figure. You can't say anything about Bruce Lee without someone thinking you are wrong. Doesn't matter what kind of evidence you have, doesn't matter how innocuous it is. You could say on this day, Bruce ate a ham sandwich and there would be people tearing you down saying it was a turkey sandwich you --- I would have deleted.



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Ricky White:

That is true of everyone though that has changed their sport or changed the society in some way. I mean you pick a popular figure that has made an actual [51:01](#) meaningful change in our culture and you can say the same thing about them. I mean some of the most genius people on this planet have got people that say extremely negative things about.

Jeremy Lesniak:

The next one that comes to mind and certainly not a martial arts figure is Michael Jordan. And if anyone out there is even a casual basketball fan, you've probably seen some pretty deep arguments about Michael Jordan - comparing Michael Jordan to other people as a contemporary. People comparing him to LeBron James

Ricky White:

Yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, I don't that you can help something take a big step forward without becoming a polarizing figure. As you've just said, it's an interesting idea.

Ricky White:

I honestly believe that's not possible but... To move things forward, you have to push people outside of their comfort zone, right? And you have to push those boundaries and people like being comfortable. They don't like being uncomfortable. So there are gonna be people that are open to that new way of thinking or a new way of doing something. And there are gonna be people that just want to hate. They just want things to stay the way they want because they don't like change. I love change. Change is my favorite thing. Change is one of the very few things in life that is guaranteed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you can't have growth without it.

Ricky White:

You can't have growth without change which is why I embrace it. Because I always I want to, you know, as a martial artist and a person, I always want to try and better myself day on day on day, and I can't do that without change. If things stay the same then there's no growth.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Totally. Outside of Bruce Lee, do you have any other martial arts movies or actors that really resonate for you?

Ricky White:

All of them

Jeremy Lesniak:

All of them? Okay, that is a broad [53:02](#)

Ricky White:

No, I like watching every one purely because I like to see how different people move differently - that I find extremely intriguing. Now you put Michael Jai White next to Donnie Yen next to Jackie Chan, they're all very different and they all move in a different way. And neither of them move like I move so I'm interested by them. If I found someone that move exactly like me which I think is doubtful, then maybe I wouldn't be so interested. But I'm interested because they're different. There's always something to learn from everyone, right? You know, going back to martial arts philosophies, Shoshin, beginner's mindset, you learn something from anyone. So I love them all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good.

Ricky White:

Even the bad movies, I love them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Some have even said that the bad movies are the better movies.

Ricky White:

Yeah, they are. Sometimes they are.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Because without the martial arts, there's no value there. So you don't know bad, skipping ahead.

Ricky White:

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. And the Karate Kid... we're of similar age so we kind of share this in common but you know, the Karate Kid movie is probably my favorite martial arts of all time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a phenomenal movie.

Ricky White:

And it goes back to, you know, when that came out or when it was popular. I mean kinda come out around the time probably a little before I was old enough to watch it. I can't quite remember but yeah. But watching that growing up as a child who was being bullied, I can very much relate to Daniel. And then you know, I started martial arts so then I just saw all these parallels. That's why it became, you know, my favorite film. In my mind as a young child, I was Daniel LaRusso, and I always wanted to win the tournament at the end. Actually, I've just thought about it, maybe that's going back to the story I told earlier. Maybe that's why I wanted to win so much. This is like free therapy. This is great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is. You're not the first to say that.

Ricky White:

I've just made that connection now. I've never thought about it before but maybe that's it. Maybe that's it. I always wanted to beat Johnny in the final round. Maybe that was why.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, you still have the chance.

Ricky White:

I still have... I kind of retired from competing - don't judge but that's fine. I'm happy with that. You know, season two of Cobra Kai is kind of coming out soon-ish, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah. I think we're in the 2019 for it but you know, they did get the green light and

Ricky White:

But they've already started filming so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right. Talk about a [56:00](#) success.

Ricky White:

I know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think I went through the entire season in two days? Three days? I got into episode two or three and went, oh I need to clear my schedule. The beauty of doing what I do is I get to call that work. Well I'm gonna need to do this because...

Ricky White:

It's research for a future project.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. We'll need to write something on Martial Journal or you know, there will be a podcast episode about it. I need to watch Cobra Kai right now.

Ricky White:

And both of those things were true, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes, yes. They did happen. Those did happen.

Ricky White:

There you go, then. So it was work.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

It was. Let's talk about the future. We spent a lot of talking about the past. What do you see in your future as a martial artist?

Ricky White:

That's a good question. It's something I don't give a lot of thought about because I've always... When I've tried to plan stuff in the future and I say I want to get here, it just doesn't happen, you know, for one reason or another. I do obviously has set goals and targets otherwise I'd never get anything done. So right now, I'm just working as hard as I can to work towards my second degree but that's a little off, I'm sure. I've not been a black belt for that long enough, not really been doing Kempo for that long. So that's my kind of immediate goal. Beyond that, I've not concentrated on it, I've not thought about it to be honest. I'm kind of in a good place right now. You know, day to day, I'm a stay-at-home dad to my 6-year old and 4-year old, and my condition is under control. I train just the amount of times a week and I don't train too much that makes my disease worse cause that has happened before. I can't over train, recovery is very important to my disease. In that balance between training and recovery has been a challenge but I kind of got it down now so you know. I kinda just want to keep things the same while I try to push a little bit further with my knowledge. And part of my disease is that it's degenerative. There is no cure for my disease, and any damage that happens to my bones, what happen is overtime, some of my bones may fuse together in my spine. The old name for this, it used to be called Bamboo Spine because your spine used to look like a piece of bamboo. It was just one straight rod, it didn't move at all because all the vertebrae had fused together. Now, where we've got much better treatments these days, medications, and now I'm training all the time. That's probably never gonna happen to me but if there are any bone growth or damage, then it's not reversible at all. So this is a degenerative disease so as far as my physical performance goes, I am probably gonna be as good as I'll ever gonna be. But I'm just gonna keep training to maintain what I've got. I'm very much interested in increasing my knowledge because as I get older and possibly more disabled, my knowledge is something I can still work on even if I can't physically get any better as a martial artist. So those are my goals.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Those are great goals. Love it.

Ricky White:

As well as trying to be a better father, you know. Being a stay-at-home dad, martial arts has helped me a lot. When I started, there has been a significant difference between when I first became a stay-at-home dad before martial arts and after. I am much more patient, I'm much calmer. I am a better father because of it, because I have now got all this practice. And they're the main reason I started martial arts. I mean I mentioned earlier that I started martial arts because I wanted friends and [1:00:12](#) exercise but the main



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reason really was the fact that I was at home with my kids and I found that my son was cocky and everything I did. I realized that some of those things, I didn't want him to do. And it's very hard to say no you can't do that when you're doing it yourself. Children don't understand that and it made me take a look at myself and think, I need to lead by example. So if these are the values and virtues I want to instill on my kids and this is the way I want them to live their life, in a positive healthy way, then I need to be doing the same. And that was what really, you know, kind of clicked and got me really, pushed me over the edge to train and train again. And I've completely changed my lifestyle around - you know, the way I eat, the way I exercise, the way I treat my body. And that is now [1:01:07](#) cause I can now see those kind of being reflected in my children and that's what I wanted, and that's what I want to keep on doing. I'm constantly improving myself to show them the things they couldn't and should do so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wonderful. Wonderful things to talk about, to think about, and certainly a mindset that I wish we could all choose. You know, this notion of just trying to get better where you can, accepting where you are but being open to that growth, that change that we've talked about, and recognizing that you know, nothing is permanent. If people want to get a hold of you, find you online, anything like that, where would they do so?

I'm mostly on Twitter these days. My [1:02:02](#) EndlessTrax. I actually have endlesstrax.com which was a blog. I used to blog about my condition and dealing and managing, but it's not an active blog so probably don't go there unless you think you got the disease. But you can also find me at rickywhite.net, I'm around there and that has all the different things I do. I wear many, many hats in life - martial arts and being a dad are just two of the many things I do, so you can get me there. Those are the two main places.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. And of course folks, as most of you know, we will link all of that over on our show notes. Page is whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, this is episode 348. We don't normally know the episode number when we go live but I have this one plugged in, make sure I kept the spot. I appreciate your time here. This has been a lot of fun, great conversation. I'm pretty sure you and I can chat most of the day.

Ricky White:

Absolutely

Jeremy Lesniak:



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But let's wind it down because I don't think listeners are gonna be so keen if we suddenly veer into six-hour episodes which is probably where our conversation would tail off. What parting words would you leave everyone with today?

Ricky White:

I think regardless of whether you're a student or you're an instructor or maybe you're just listening to this and you've never done martial arts before, everybody is fighting something. Whether they're fighting a chronic illness, a disability, whether they've just got divorced or just lost someone dear to them, everyone has a fight they're going through. And that... you won't ever understand somebody until you understand what they're fighting for or against. And if you want to help them, make an impact in their life. You need to get to know the person by understanding what they're fighting for. And if you're an instructor, find out what your students are fighting right now, and then you'll be able to help them through martial arts, deal with whatever they're fighting for. And if you've never done martial arts before, well maybe martial arts will help you get through what you're fighting for. Everyone's got something.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We all deal with our own physical challenges but it seems to me that folks who have persistent physical challenges do a much better job of wrapping their head around them, of being able to integrate those challenges into their lives. And it's that lesson that I took from Senpai White today that I think is most important, at least for me, the idea that yeah, I'm gonna have things feel bad; I'm gonna have things that don't work right in my body and as I get older, it's only going to get worse but that doesn't mean I stop training. It doesn't mean that it has to change my mindset. So I think you Senpai White for coming on the show today, sharing your story and helping, if no one else, to inspire me.

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