



Episode 346 – Master Chris Natzke | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, good day to you. Morning, evening, whatever it is, welcome. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 346. Today, I'm joined by Chris Natzke. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host for the show. I'm the founder at whistlekick, and we make stuff; we make all kinds of stuff. In fact, as I am recording this, we have a huge batch of our first ever uniforms arriving, got the first box yesterday, three more boxes expected today, and they are awesome. I'm so excited. Now if you haven't checked out any of our products, head on over to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and I've got an exclusive code for you: PODCAST15. Here we are, it's nearly 350 episodes in, I think this is the first we've ever released discount code on the show. I think I was just spacing because every other podcast I listen to does this so why shouldn't we? PODCAST15, that will get you 15% off anything over there. Of course we also have most of our products available on Amazon so you can shop there, too. We do offer free shipping so it's not just free shipping on Amazon. If you want the show notes to this or any other episode, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), and you can sign up for the newsletter. We have other discounts available. Once in a while, we tell you more what's going on behind the scenes, just kind of give you some more context for the show through the newsletter, through the show notes, help you round out your life as a traditional martial artist.

Now let's talk about today's episode. I first met Master Natzke a few years ago through the Superfoot group, and he's a great guy, an amazing martial artist, incredibly flexible, and really kind. I think that's the number one thing that has struck me from my interactions with Master Natzke; it's just, he's such a great guy. So when I reached out to him and invited him to come on the show, I wasn't surprised when



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he said yes because he's a nice guy. He does this kind of stuff. But what did surprise me, unfortunately, was that we had this wonderful conversation and then through my own technical fallacies, I lost that episode. It did not record so he was gracious enough to try again, and it actually came out a bit better the second time. We got into some different stuff - some stuff that I was blown away with. He's an open and authentic person, and I'm sure you're going to enjoy this conversation. So here we go. Master Natzke, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Chris Natzke:**

Thanks so much, Jeremy. It's great to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Thank you. And you know, I'll be honest - I try to be open, I try to be authentic with everyone - full disclosure, this is round two because I screwed up round one. I didn't click the button. We had this great conversation and I didn't click the button. And I appreciate your graciousness and forgiving my mistake and doing this a second time around.

**Chris Natzke:**

You're very welcome. No worries.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'd love to say that was the first time that happened. With the old system, with Skype, it happened periodically; I think five episodes that recorded silence.

**Chris Natzke:**

Oh.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So that was fun.

**Chris Natzke:**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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But every one that we redid, with it everyone said yes, when we redid them, they actually came out better.

**Chris Natzke:**

Alright.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So hopefully we can continue that streak.

**Chris Natzke:**

Okay, so the bar's been set, is that what you're -

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The bar's been set, and you set it pretty high last time so

**Chris Natzke:**

Alright.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Alright. Of course, this is not How Jeremy Messed Up Recordings Radio, this is Martial Arts Radio so let's talk about martial arts. Let's talk about you and how you got started. What's that story?

**Chris Natzke:**

You know I actually started back in September of 1973. I was a short little chubby kid at the time and I became very enamored with a TV show that was on at the time called Kung Fu with David Carradine playing Kwai Chang Caine and you know, at that period of time, martial arts was really in a 04:03 stage in the United States. It's certainly been around for about 20, 30 years but this was right also at the just the beginning or the way it was beginning to crest and the Bruce Lee stage. And so I walked into my first community center program and totally fell in love with what I saw. And the interesting about is that was the time period where martial arts was basically done by a bunch of 20-year old men, and they work in occasional with female but very few kids are in the class. So I was kind of, you know, kind of a team mascot there for a while but stuck with it ever since.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Do you think they treated you differently because of the age difference?

**Chris Natzke:**

You know I think there was a... well, I'd like to think that I was pretty serious about what I was doing so after a while I was accepted pretty well, yeah. Yeah, I mean it wasn't an environment where I felt I was gonna be messing around nor did I want to. And I feel I was pretty well-treated and accepted in the group.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's good. You know I find it when a child, you know whether that's a very young child, teenage child, somebody kinda steps up and they're doing something at a higher level and their peers in that space tend to be much older. All they have to do is prove themselves and not only do they receive the typical attention that everyone would but everyone kind of takes them under their wing. And I've experienced that at times; you're nodding your head I'm... just you end up with instead of one instructor, everyone is looking out for you.

**Chris Natzke:**

Right, yeah. That's definitely what happened in my situation and again, it was a great, great experience for me. I was very, very much treated as one of them - one of the guys, if you will - and felt a lot of respect and felt a lot of safety and felt a lot of encouragement. So it's really positive for me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. And so here you are, you're participating, you're serious about it, and you're just kinda chugging along. But at some point, you know, martial arts became your life. What did that transition look like? When did you know that was going to happen?

**Chris Natzke:**

Well... and I shared this story with you last time and I often times share this story any time I do any kind of public speaking because this was a real pivotal moment in my life. So I started in my martial art training, as I said, in '73. And about three years after that is when I met the man that I still consider to be one of my main instructors today, that was Grandmaster Jae Kyu Lee. And Grandmaster Lee had recently come from Korea and his school was basically 30 miles east of where I lived. I live in Southeastern Wisconsin, [06:57](#) area and so I would have to drive in 30 miles one way just to train with him. And it wasn't as it is today where there's a martial arts school on every corner. It wasn't that way at all so of course, it was a pretty, pretty long drive but I was there three or four days a week, training with him. And one of the first days I was in his class, I was seated in the back of the room with my legs spread



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wide, I was stretching, getting ready to go. And he walked into the room, I'm right under the deck as you always [07:25](#) this amazing powering presence, and pretty soon I realized he was looking directly at me. And before I could move a muscle, he had come and sat down in front of me and he put his right foot on the inside of one leg, his left put on the inside of the other, he grabbed me onto my belt and with one push-pull, split me out to 180 degrees. And like I'd like to joke, joke I got from Grandmaster Bill Wallace, anyone can do the splits once - that's the first thing I learned. But the second thing is that he looked at me deep in the eyes and he said to me, I will make you a champion. I will make you a champion. Now when you're 13 years old, it has a huge impact on you. And I literally flew home, [08:09](#) home telling my parents what he had said and I truly believed it. And it was really the first time, I think, in my life when I had a male role model who I really love, respected and admire, claim greatness for me. And it was a really powerful moment for me. It still stays with me to this day.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We did talk about that the last and the part I was struck, and I have to say I'm just as struck as you're saying it again here today, the use of that word - champion. That's not a word that gets thrown around. I mean in some spaces, you know, if we're talking about professional sports, if we're talking about very high level competition where there is some determinant of a successor. But when we talk about a champion, we don't tend to talk about that in the context of a 13-year old at a martial arts class.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah. But you know I... This is my own interpretation of this but it has incredibly served me throughout my life so I'm gonna stay with it. Here's what I... often times share with audience is you know, my initial reaction to that was oh I'm gonna be a champion in the ring; I'm gonna go to the Olympics; this is gonna happen, that's gonna happen. And I didn't have my fair amount of success in the ring but what I really came to realize as years went by is he was really talking about being a champion in life, right? That's what his real goal was and you know, for me it comes in three areas. It comes in, you know, having a really powerful vision, the world you want to create; the other way is champions know how to move through obstacles with grace and with confidence; and then finally, and what I was taught from Grandmaster Lee is that real champions live a life of service, you know. They take their gifts and they go out and they give back. Those are the three things that I took from that and they still stayed with me to this day.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know when we think of those three things, the service component is something that seems to happen for a lot of folks kind of later on in their career. And just the things that I see you doing on your social media, it seems like that's the focus of what you're doing. Am I accurate there?

**Chris Natzke:**



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It's kind of what I feel is my work, right? You know, I was given a gift which I've just shared with you throughout my entire life where I had people that were really looking out for me and really serving me. And I've been very blessed with a lot of things that have happened in my life. I've had my challenges as well but I really think that a life worth living is when we give back a tremendous service. Because that's what our legacy's going to be, right? You know, whatever role we play, whether it's spouses, sons, daughters, parents, instructors, it's like Maya Angelou says you know, people will... they won't remember what you say or what you did but they'll remember how you made them feel. And I think when we are able to take our life's gifts and turn them into service to others, and then we empower others to do the same, that's how we move our world ahead. That's how we make the world a better place.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So well said. Now you've mentioned Grandmaster Wallace, how did you meet him?

**Chris Natzke:**

So you know, he was... I have to admit, and I told him this many times, he was my hero growing up. So you have to remember in the early 70's, there wasn't the videos that we have access to, there wasn't YouTube, there wasn't anything. So I basically... I got to see him. I'd already been following him in martial art magazines and then I was babysitting for the next door neighbor one night and my mom calls me up and says, you need to turn on the television cause the thing called The World Professional Karate Championships are on. So I'm 11 years old, I flipped it on, and soon came Bill Wallace - wasn't called Superfoot at the time, just Bill Wallace - and he was the Middleweight United States Representative and ended up winning the World Title and he was absolutely the star of the entire tournament. And that's where Joe Lewis won the Heavyweight Title, Jeff Smith the Light Heavyweight Title, Isaias Duenas won the Lightweight Title. But Wallace, by far, just outshine anyone cause he was the one person that could kick and do it so effectively. And I remember at 11 years old, looking at that going one day I want to kick like him. So he was just my hero and I really did my best to emulate my style after his. And I think it was in 1985... no, actually 1986, I got a call from one of my buddies. I was living and working in Chicago at the time, and called me up and say hey Bill Wallace is coming for a seminar up in Appleton, Wisconsin. You need to come check it out. So I couldn't say yes fast enough, was married at the time, I had a one-year old son, and drove off and met him and we've been friends ever since. I emulated his style, I think, close enough. I was [13:12](#) nowhere close to his, fast as he was but I have the flexibility and technique so I think he gravitated toward me and I was his assistant during the seminar. And then afterwards he came up and say, hey we're going to have dinner, come join us. And so after that, our friendship was formed and that real love, admiration and respect that continues to this day.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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He's certainly a good man and that invitation to go out to dinner. You know I remember the first time that he invited me out for dinner, there was nothing better than that moment, that realization that not only does he realize that you're a human being and that you are on the same plane as him and he can speak to you but inviting someone to share a meal, I think that is... there's something really special about sharing a meal with someone.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, well... and you're right. I think I've shared this the last we talked, you know of course I got to know him very well throughout the years and get to travel with him and head him out to Denver several occasions and what not. And one time in particular that really had an indelible impact on me, I was competing in the National Taekwondo Championships in '98 and '99, and during one of those years, before the tournaments I reached out to him and said hey, you know, I'd love to come work with you, I'm getting ready for this tournament. And he said, well hey I'm gonna be doing this swing up in Northern California - he had been living in Southern California at the time - he said, why don't you come on out, we'll get in the car and we'll drive up the coast and you can do these seminars with me and we'll train. So I flew out to Orange County, we got in his car. You have to be a fan of all these music if you're gonna drive with him, which is something I had to learn to do but... So we made the 8-hour drive up and so we were 15:00 these schools in the San Francisco Bay area, and this one in particular really impacted me. He taught this seminar and 15:10 two, two and a half hour seminar. He was in a smaller school but it was owned by a man who... it was a family operation and he... we had a potluck dinner that he put on afterwards. And right after the seminar, right after Grandmaster Wallace delivered the seminar, he could've certainly shook the guy's hand, collected his check, and walk out the door but that's not at all what he did. He stayed for the potluck and literally sat with the school owner and for like two hours, and just talk with him. And there was this guy that was probably in his thirties or forties but he was hanging on his every word and he looked like literally like a kid in a candy shop going oh my god, Bill Wallace is in my school and he's talking to me. And I realized, that's what also makes him really special; it's the ability to connect with people. I mean he made that guy's night, probably made his year, and I thought wow, he didn't have to do that; he chose to do that. So that was really powerful for me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And for me, watching him interact with others is probably the greatest business lesson I think anyone could ever learn because not only is he there and he's giving the time but he's actually present. He actually cares. And if you've seen him bump into, I know you have but of any of the listeners have ever seen him bump into someone that he met maybe five or ten years prior, there's a good shot he'll remember them.

**Chris Natzke:**



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That's absolutely true. And it's scary but it's true. In fact, another little known fact about him is I've had an occasion of pulling out old martial art magazines. And I'm talking about, you know, from the '70s and '80s, and you know, open them up and have a tournament where he's featured and he not only remembers the tournament, he remembers all the matches and what the scores were and what he hit people with in order to win the tournament.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Chris Natzke:**

He's like a martial arts savant, you know

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I think really he is. You know, one of the things that I'll say to describe him and then we'll come back and talk about you more, but it's important for listeners to know that so much of his influence has created you, has made you who you are so I don't feel bad us [17:26](#) a little bit. I believe everyone has the thing that they could do better than anyone else but most of us don't find it. He clearly did.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, absolutely. That's very special. I am very blessed. Like I said, I've been blessed to have some great instructors, mentors, friends throughout the years and he's definitely at the top of the list.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. Now when you think about your years, your time training, your time as a martial artist, all these stories that you've got, what's your favorite story?

**Chris Natzke:**

Well I'll tell you what. This is going be... This is gonna be a martial art-related story but it's going to be one that isn't necessarily about kicking and punching.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's okay.

**Chris Natzke:**





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So one of the things that... Let's see, back in 2004 and 2005, I was one of the first participants in the program called The Ultimate Black Belt Test. It was put on, and it may have just [18:34](#) but with Master Tom Callos, who's a great friend of mine, started this program back in '04 and '05. What he did is he brought 30 Master instructors from all over the world together to do this black belt test that wasn't something that we did on a weekend. We actually did it over 13 months. So during that time, you know, we had to log things like 52,000 push-ups and 52,000 crunches and spar a thousand rounds and do a form a thousand times. So it was pretty commanding in that way and then we did things like we had to do body [19:13](#) and we had to create a thousand acts of kindness and 10,000 random acts of kindness within our martial art community. And then we also had to do days of empathy, so we had to spend a day being blind, being deaf, mute, and being in wheelchair. So that for me was an incredibly impactful program. It was not only a martial art program but a life coaching program which I absolutely... It was an amazing experience, I absolutely loved it. So anyway, I took that and I created my own version... of that for my students who are black belt testing. So of course, they don't do it over 13 months, they do it over four months and they're not professional martial artists so the requirements are a little bit less. But everyone who goes through our program, the final four months before they test, they have to do 4,000 push-ups, 4,000 crunches. They have to spar, you know, 120 rounds. They have to run 40 miles. But that's not what I'm most proud of. They have to do 400 random acts of kindness. I must speak a little bit, the kids, the juniors, have to do only 300 but they have to make it up the difference with 100 home chores so parents love me, right? They have to mentor someone for 10 sessions, they have to eat clean for an entire week so no sugar, no processed foods, no alcohol, you know, getting the 10-year olds off [20:43](#) but we make it happen. And then the final one they have to choose between this day of empathy - being blind, deaf, mute or wheelchair. So I have one student, his name is Josh. And Josh has been with me since he was four years old, came in as little ninja, little you know, bushy red hair, freckles, you know, glasses. And he stuck with it and now he's 10 years old and he's gonna get ready to test for his junior black belt. So he's going through the process and he has to choose his day of empathy and he says, I know what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna spend my day in wheelchair and the reason is because he has an Uncle Jimmy. And his uncle Jimmy was a Vietnam vet and for as long as Josh has known him, he's been in a wheelchair. So he calls up Uncle Jimmy and he says, hey Uncle Jimmy I'm gonna be testing for my black belt. I'm gonna be doing a day of empathy and I'm gonna spend a day in wheelchair and I'm gonna do it in honor of you. And uncle Jimmy pauses and then he says, well you know Josh, I know you too well. If you spend a day in the chair, all you're gonna be doing is mess around, flying down the street popping wheelies. If you're gonna do this, you're gonna do it right and you're gonna spend two days in the chair. So on the second day, uncle Jimmy drives up in his customized van and lowers the hydraulic lift and Josh rolls on and uncle Jimmy drives Josh and his dad to Craig Hospital here in Denver, and takes him to rehabilitation ward where Josh gets to see a man who's a new [22:13](#) breathing through a tube in order to move his chair. So as you might imagine, that was pretty impactful for a ten-year old to see. So he comes back home and he's supposed to write an essay and he's supposed to turn it to me but before he turns it to me, he sends it to uncle Jimmy. And Jimmy reads it and he goes wow, this is really good. And he sends it into the headquarters of the Disabled American Veterans Association. Well they read it and they go wow, this is fantastic and they published in their national newsletter. So now all of a sudden this is spreading all around the country; this kid's in Denver, 10-year old, testing for his black belt and people are like wow, Denver. Denver? Our



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National Convention is in Denver. Let's have him come speak. So now here's Josh in front of 250 disabled American veterans reading his paper. So as I'd like to say, at 10 years old he wasn't only a junior black belt but he was a published author and a keynote speaker.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow.

**Chris Natzke:**

And what I love, to just close this out is, I'm friends with Josh's family and I literally just saw it on the internet, on Facebook, he turned 22 last week. But I had dinner with him and his family about six months ago and he still talks about that experience. He still talks about that experience. So that's what I think the martial arts can do - is when we are helping people understand other people and they have that sense of empathy and then they realize that to those to whom much is given, much is expected and then use their power to make the world a better place, then we've done our job as instructors.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I love it. I love so much about what you just said. Now there may be some folks listening who are hearing this and are thinking, you know, gosh maybe 20 years ago, parents would have supported this but I don't... you know, how do I get somebody to do 4,000 push-ups and yeah, I can get the parents on board for the chores if it's a kid but just this general feeling that this is too much.

**Chris Natzke:**

Oh let me tell you my friend, I'm laughing because I think the last count I've had - we've been doing this since... well like I said, probably 2005 is when we started doing this. I think I've taken about six to seven hundred students do this process. We actually have our organization, has an online program where would they log all their reps and I just did another black belt testing two weeks ago and everyone did it. And everyone, that's just what our expectation is. And we tell people, you know, you're not gonna take your test on a day. You're gonna experience your test over four months because we know that when we do that, those lessons are gonna stay with them. And the other cool think about that is we've logged over 250,000 random acts of kindness during that period as well. So it's a quarter of a million acts that have hopefully made a ripple effect in our Denver area and beyond. So we pre-frame it, we tell people this is what it is and it's not easy but nothing is if it's really worth something. And I always tell students, they're gonna remember earning their black belt. And quite honestly, we retain a very high number of students afterwards, as well. But we're very active in helping them understand what the next levels are and you know, just what a great thing it is that they accomplished.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I love it. I love what you're saying and I fully believe that people will rise to the occasion. Wherever you set the bar, that's where people are going to get to; my anecdote for that is gold fish.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yup.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Gold fish will grow to the size of the bowl you put them in and I've always found people to be very similar.

**Chris Natzke:**

And the other thing that we do in that process is every one of the students is assigned one of the black belts instructors as their mentor. So they, and not only I'm talking more of the younger students now but the older students receive mentorship as well. And so they have someone who's gone through the process before them. And they're helping them through the entire, you know, 16 weeks and making sure that they're on track and helping them. And you know, as I explained to the students when we kick things off, it's not the mentor's responsibility to get through it; it's their responsibility ultimately as the students, as the candidate, but the mentor's there to help them. And it actually bonds the school together because now you've created this big brother, big sister kind of relationship and so the new black belts have a mentor built in to help them throughout their continued progress in the school.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You kind of set me up for this question that I wasn't planning on asking but it's become such a subject on the show lately, I'm gonna ask it. We've set up martial arts through our explicit and really, our implicit marketing that black belt is the goal. And in so many schools, once people reach that first degree, Shodan, whatever you call it, they fade away. And they fade away in such great numbers. But you mentioned something that makes me feel like you addressed that, you don't present that as the goal. So maybe for the school owners out there listening, you could speak to that for a moment.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, absolutely. I'd be happy to, cause I think it's one of the more important concepts of a vibrant school and a vibrant association. Because otherwise, what's your incentive to get students the black belt if you think they're gonna, you know, leave your program? So I think it's like anything. What you want to do is you want to always have built into student's mind what the next steps are. And one of the things that we talk very... we talk a lot about within our program, within our association, is black belt basically means the mastery of basics. So we are... it's already in their mind that they're getting to a certain level,



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they're mastering their basic skills with their training. And this might sound like a cliché but their training can really now begin once they get their black belt ranking. The other thing I think that schools have a difficulty with, and association, is they make their curriculum very bottom-heavy. It's like 28:44 used to say, they overwhelm their white belts and they underwhelm their black belts. So there's all this curriculum that the lower belts learn and then you get the black belt and you get to learn a new kata, right? And so what we do our best to do it we have a pretty dynamic curriculum that black belts get to learn and incorporate other martial arts systems and styles. So when they come in, now they're learning new styles, new martial arts that keeps them going. And the other thing around that is either right before or right after someone gets their black belt, we sit down then we actually have a conference and we paint the picture to second degree black belt, and there's a path through that. And then every six months, they have intermediate testings again so it's keeping them on track just like you would any student. And so we have a curriculum that's over way, in that realm, of all the way to third degree black belt. So by the time somebody graduate to first degree, take a week or two off, let your body heal but come on back because we're starting another rotation and we've got you on your road to second degree.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. When did you implement that?

**Chris Natzke:**

I've been doing our black belt testings like that for you know, 10, 15 years. Because I realized as my school is growing, just like anyone you know, you have people tell oh well I was gonna get my black belt, now I'm done. Or they got their black belt, they started training and they're looking like this is it? So I wanted to make sure there was really something that encouraged them to come back. And it's not just curriculum either in terms of martial art curriculum. We also have a very strong leadership program as well. So the trick is for young students, we're teaching them leadership skills, helping them become assistant instructors that then become, you know, our instructors that we eventually hire. So we've got this bench going on but those are invaluable lessons. I mean whether or not a student of mine ever worked for me, if they stayed with me from their preteens and into their teens, I viewed it as a challenge of mine to make them as employable as possible, right?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah

**Chris Natzke:**

They had inter-communicative skills, they could deal with adults, they could deal with kids, they have great personalities, they had confidence. Whereas if they didn't work for me, they could go down the



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street and work for whoever and just be awesome. So I always took a lot of pride in that and then the leadership team members, of course they were differentiated by specific uniforms but they were held to a very high standard because they were the product that we produced, right? And so I'd always want to be able to have a new person walking in my school. I bring over a leadership team member, just introduce him, and you know, show how they have great respect and great ability, make eye contact and have that discussion. And then when they walk away, tell their mom see that young boy there, Anthony? He was just like your son when he came here five years ago, and that's where your son can be in five years. So you create this culture, right? Because you're not just developing great kickers and punchers, you're developing great human beings.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Very, very well said. Alright. Let's talk about some of the road blocks, the stumbling points in life. Martial artists, we've got a great toolbox to pull from. We've got physical discipline, we have, hopefully, mental discipline, all the various things, the five tenets and all that something that you know. Maybe the karate listeners out there don't know what I mean there but that's okay. When you think about some of the challenges in your life, I'd like you to pull one of them out and tell us how your martial arts allowed you to overcome.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah. Well I think we may have spoken about this last time. I lost my brother when I was 17. He was 11, he died in a grounding accident and it was a time in my life where within my own family unit, things were very, very difficult. My father was alcoholic as I was growing up which is probably one of the reasons why I gravitated so much to my martial arts instructor because he was playing that role model for me. And it wasn't that my father... I didn't love my dad nor did I feel that my dad didn't love me. It was just that it was difficult for him to really be there and play that role for me because of his addiction to alcohol. So my martial arts instructor really, really played that role for me. And so what it did for me is it kind of set the stage of what it meant to be a man, what it meant to be a father. And I knew I shared this story with you last time, kind of digressed in this but I remember very distinctly after one of my classes with Grandmaster Lee, I was about 14 years old, I'd already earned my junior black belt and he used to have little conferences with students after class. Saturdays were always the big training day so I'd drive in and we'd have our big, big workout and then we'd all sit around this desk and talk. And people would begin to weed out because they had to go but I would always be the last one there. And I could always understand him totally even though his English was very poor, for that reason I could always understand him. And on this one occasion, it was just two of us and I asked him a question. And you know, when you're a teenager, a child, I think sometimes we ask questions of adults that we already know the answer to cause we're either curious, we want affirmation or we're trying to catch him on something. I don't what I was, why I was asking the question but I did. And so as many of your listeners might know, the word for instructor in Korean is Sabongnim. That would be the equivalent of Shifu that they would have in Chinese and Sensei they have in Japanese. But in Korean martial arts, in Korean language, it's Sabongnim. And so I asked him directly, I said sir, what does Sabongnim mean? And he



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paused and then he looked at me and said Sabongnim means father. And I was like woah, and I just remembered that hitting me right in the heart. And even though I don't think he was saying that because he was trying in anyway, shape or form that were, you know, take the place of my dad. What he was saying to me is when you play this role of an instructor, that's the role you play - of course if you're a woman, you'd play that motherly, that maternal aspect of it but that's the responsibility. And if you're going to choose into this work, you need to play that too. At least that's the way that I took it. And so it was just such an amazing way for me to kind of you know, set my own path. And so going through that challenge, not really having a dad at home that could provide that for me but finding that in my martial arts instructor has helped me to come through so many, so many challenges. Because it was always that I knew that I have that behind me. It's like he had my back; my instructor had my back and he was guiding me on that path. And yeah, so that was probably the greatest challenge that I've been able to overcome.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Powerful. Powerful stuff. Now you are an instructor and are a father. What qualities do those two roles - parent and martial arts instructor - have in common? And what would not be in the inner section of that Venn Diagram?

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, yeah. I must say I've set this up about martial artist instructors playing that fatherly role and I do have two boys who I'm extremely proud of. Their age 33 and 29 now. My 33-year old stayed with martial arts all the way until he went off to college so he got his third degree black belt. My youngest son who is now 29 still actively teaches and he's a fourth degree black belt. So they basically grew up in the studio. And in fact, it's interesting because I remember after I went through divorce and the boys and I were out, or maybe it was after that had finalized, and we were out together for an evening and I had always carried this guilt that oh my gosh, the kids were always at the school. They always had to be at the martial arts school and I know that their childhood was not a normal one. I was never at home at night because I was always teaching. And we went out to movie together then we went out for some coffee and we're all sitting around, chatting and I said you know guys, I need to get this off my chest. I said, this has been on my mind for several years. I said, I know it wasn't easy growing up at the martial arts studio. I know that you were always there and that I wasn't home at night, the way most dads were, and I said I just want to say I'm sorry because I know that must have been tough on you. And I remember to this day, Jeremy, them looking at me like what are you talking about? And looking at each other and then my youngest turning and looking at me and saying dad, what are you talking about? We loved growing up at the martial arts school. It was like the best. We have all of our friends there, all the instructors were big brothers and we got to see you every night. And I was like woah, and so I had this huge weight lifted off my shoulder. Now, that being said, one of the big lessons I learned is there are times that you need to differentiate between being dad and being instructor. And I had Grandmaster Lee tell me this at a very early age; he said, don't teach your own kids. So my boys are very different and my oldest, if I told him to punch harder, he would noodle his arm as much as he could and look at me



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and roll his eyes like what are you talking about? So I actually gave him to one of my staff members to teach and he did really well. My youngest son would run through a brick wall for me. So you know, I just had to know how to deal with those two personalities but they both have their own powerful experience through it. But you do have to know as a parent when to push and when to maybe advocate someone that responsibility to some of your staff.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've seen so many people that have a similar set up. They raise their children in the training space, in the dojo, dojang, whatever you choose to call it. But it doesn't have that sort of outcome.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sometimes, the children come to resent martial arts, sometimes they come to resent their parents, and I think you hit the nail on the head. You didn't teach them.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah. Yeah, I mean I need to know when to pull back. There were times with both boys that I would, you know, interject and whatever and I would be part of their training but for most part, I wanted them to have their own identity. It is difficult enough when you are the child of the Master Instructor, if you will, to... This may be a bad comparison but it'd be like being a kid in a school where your parent was the principal of the school or being part of the church where your mother, father was the pastor of the church, right? There's some real pressure that comes with that. So I think I was pretty conscious of that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's something that I've discussed with a number of martial arts school owners who are raising their children and teaching them themselves. I grew up with that. I grew with a husband and wife who taught and they had two children and they trained, and I was similar in age to both of them and it was challenging not only for the two of them and for their parents but for those of us around them.

**Chris Natzke:**

Sure, yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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And I think all too often, the parent/ instructor has a hard time making that separation. And you know, it's... I've observed, you might agree, it is difficult for people to maintain multiple distinct relationships.

**Chris Natzke:**

Right. And the other thing that I would add to that is know where you want to head your relationship inside the dojang but then make sure that you're playing the role of dad or mom, if it's appropriate, outside when you're at home. Right?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah

**Chris Natzke:**

Being able to shift gears, if you will. And I'm not saying I was always good at that. I probably was a little bit less developed with my first son and I learned my lesson and was able to play that role or those roles better with my second child. But I think that's really important, too. They're not looking for an instructor sometimes you're a coach though before dad, and you have to know when to play the different roles.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, absolutely. Now if you had the opportunity to train with anybody - we're taking a hard left turn here

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Anybody in the world, anywhere in time, who would you want to train with?

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah you asked me this question last time. You know it's... I think for me I would have loved, in the early days, to train obviously with the Bruce Lee's of the world and Chuck Norris's. I've had the chance to train with Dan Inosanto, he's an amazing person as well. There's also something for me about the, you know, although I'm sure it was very, very challenging training, but what would it have been like to be, since I'm a Korean martial artist, what would it have been like to train in the early days before it was even called Taekwondo. You know, like my lineage within Korean martial arts is the Chang Kwan. And so I don't





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know if you're familiar with it, Jeremy, but before Taekwondo was created in 1955, there were nine separate schools of martial arts in Korea called Kwan, and they were basically colleges of martial arts. And each one of those Kwans had a head instructor, a Kwan Jangnim, if you will. And the person that was the head of the Chang Kwan, which is where my instructor's lineage is from, was named Nam Suk Lee. And so it would have been kind of fun to train and have that experience in those early days of that. I think it would also... I've always loved the eclectic nature in learning different styles. I think learning from somebody that was really adept in Muay Thai, I think that would be fun as well. So yeah, I know I've given you a schmorgis board there but those kind of thing in the early days I think would be great. It's like when you look at Bruce Lee now, you watch a video and he's still amazing. But you know, you look at what people were doing or what they're doing that from that athletic standpoint and people are doing 5-40s and 7-20s and things, but to be at that place where it was so outside of the norm and so over [44:26](#) what was going on, that would have been really, really fun to be around.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Undoubtedly. You know I think there are people who pass on martial arts and people who advance martial arts, and Bruce Lee absolutely advanced martial arts. But to speak to you schmorgis board comment, most people can't pick one. People open their minds say well, you know, just in case I'm ever brought into court and given the opportunity to train with this one person, I better make sure I say a few names because I don't want to miss out. But certainly, certainly great choices and yeah, Dan Inosanto, I had another interview earlier today where we're talking about him on that episode. He's an amazing man.

**Chris Natzke:**

If I could put my little plug in, I've had the opportunity to meet him in about two or three occasions here in Denver. I had a local instructor that would bring him in; he doesn't bring him in anymore but brought him in for about two, three years and I would always stop by and say hello cause he actually did a seminar at one of my students' schools and I just have to say I was so amazingly impressed with him not only as a martial artist - I mean, incredible. And I've trained with him at his [45:37](#) I guess he would say, Chinese word for school in Los Angeles, I did that several years ago with a group of other instructors. But did not only see how adept he was but when I met him personally, and just like I said with Grandmaster Wallace, he took the time to greet me, to interact with me, and how I watch him interact with others, just the masters' master. Just a gentleman, humble but as skilled as [46:04](#) as you can be, I was blown away. Blown away.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. Let's talk about competition.

**Chris Natzke:**



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Okay

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know, I believe by this point in our conversation last time we talked a fair amount about competition and it hasn't come up at all today. So tell the listeners about your experience with competition and your feelings about it.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah. Well my... I was a competitor during the high school years and then I went off to college. I was a football player in Northwestern University. I went to college on a football scholarship so I had those four years where I really didn't compete. And then got back into competition after my football eligibility was done, and was on the Illinois State team for Taekwondo, and was getting ready for nationals in 1985, and my first child was born premature. So he was born like right when the competition was so I didn't go. And then I got into my work life. I started a career with Proctor and Gamble right out of college and went into being married and having a child and having a career. And so I continued to train in martial arts but I wasn't able to put the time and energy I felt necessary to compete. So that kind of went on [47:26](#) several years. And then, in the late '90s, the United States Taekwondo Union opened up a division for an older group of people. And you know, it's kind of funny but like the division was 35 and above, something like that. So I thought you know what, I still keep myself in pretty good shape. I'm gonna go for it. So in 1998, I got back into competition and won the Colorado State title for that division and then went on, and I got all the way to the finals in 1998 at nationals, and I lost in the finals. Pretty disappointing and thought you know what, well good shot and then I decided... actually it was my former wife who was like you know what, you came this close, you gotta go back and try it again. And I thought, you know, it's one thing to be a competitor when you're young and you don't have many responsibilities but when you have a family and a business and you competed the same time, that training takes a lot of time. So the fact that she was encouraging me, I really view that still to this day as a blessing. So I went back in 1999 and happy to say that I won the heavyweight championship for that age group - black belt heavyweight ages 35 to 40 or something like that. And I think that officially I was never scored on in that tournament. The only time I got scored on, so here's my little [48:57](#) I was fighting this guy who's about 6'4", I'm about 6' but I fought heavyweight cause I knew I could bulk up a little bit to [49:07](#) and I may not be as big as them but I hope to be faster and I was more flexible so I could utilize those skills. And so I hit this guy and scored a point, I looked at the scoreboard to see if I had scored and he came around with a crescent kick and he just touched my chin. So I was like [49:26](#) So anyway, but then, in a clinch, he fouled me twice by punching to the face and he got his point taken away. So technically, I never got scored on but that was the only point they got scored on me. And I got him back because this I think a funny story as well, I was, you know, I'm mixing up with him and his buddies were around my wife at the time and saying, our buddy's gonna take your husband, etcetera, etcetera, and you know, giving her a hard time, good-naturedly. And she said no he's gonna kick him in the head, and as soon as she said that, I did spin hook kick, hit the guy, he's a 6'4" guy at the side of the head, give him a standing eight count, and won the match so there you go.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's a very real life Karate Kid moment.

**Chris Natzke:**

It sure is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Scores the point and fouls, had it taken away and

**Chris Natzke:**

It was a great experience for me but was really interesting is once I did win, that tournament in '99, I was complete. And that was Boynton Beach, Florida. The next year the tournament was in Colorado Springs like an hour and a half south of me and I would have already been seated in the tournament having one year before and I was just complete. I didn't even go to watch the tournament. I was done with that chapter in my life.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's talk about that a bit more because that's not something that typically happens. People tend to hold on to those athletic achievements. They tend to find them as human being. People that compete as a martial artist tend to compete a lot.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, yeah. Well you know, I have to say first of all, I listen to my heart cause I just felt really complete within. And I have to say I never really got involved in martial arts just to compete. I love the physical aspect of it, I love the spiritual aspect of it, the mental aspect of it, I love just the activity and I love teaching. And at that time, in '99, I would have had... my school was going on five years - by 2000 it would have been the 5th year - and by that time, the school had grown to over 500 students so it was a pretty busy place to be. And so yeah, I just said you know what, I've got a staff to take care of, I've got plenty of students to take care of and that's where I focus my energies.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It makes sense.

**Chris Natzke:**



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Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It makes sense and I think there's a lesson in there for anyone listening, for any goal.

**Chris Natzke:**

Well the other thing too is I think the question we need to ask, and this is not at all to say anything against competition, if people love that aspect by all means do it and do it for as long as you can, I think the question that comes is you know, that I was asking myself was where do I really want to make impact? So if I go on and win a national title, now I can use that as my way of maybe getting notoriety and then that enhances my ability to make impact. And so that was complete, and now I can work and make a greater impact on my students, I can do that by being there and teaching and helping them through their own growth process.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You said it better than I was trying to so there we go. Thank you. Let's talk about the future.

**Chris Natzke:**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's talk about what your goals are, what's getting you up in the morning?

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, yeah. I don't think that we've shared it on this recording yet but I owned my martial arts school from 1995 until 2013 and sold it to a good friend of mine because at the time, I realized that I wanted to play a different and bigger games. So I really have been focusing the last five years on a career in inspirational speaking and life coaching. And so I do a lot of that, wrote a book in 2013 - so help promote that. So what really gets me going is I've got, you know, numerous opportunities to coach people on a one-on-one basis. I'm still very active in martial arts. In fact I'll be teaching in one of our schools tonight so my students still have me come in on average of once a week to teach class. So that keeps me going. But yeah, I've got my speaking, my coaching, I have a corporate program that I do call Discover Your Breakthrough You board breaking experience. So I actually teach corporate leaders how to break a board by at first identifying the looming belief and then identifying the breakthrough area in your life and cave into that process. And I'm also in the midst of developing an online program, a self-leadership



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personal development program that I call Mind of the Champion - eight weeks to creating a life of power, purpose and passion. And that's scheduled to be out in January.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. And if people want to find you, if they want to find you online, social media, any of that

**Chris Natzke:**

Absolutely. So my name is Chris Natzke and my website is [chrisnatzke.com](http://chrisnatzke.com) and they can also check out the board breaking experience that... Let me do that again, they can discover the board breaking experience at [breakthroughyou.org](http://breakthroughyou.org).

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome. And of course, we'll have those links as [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) for everyone so you can check those out over there. This has been great and I don't know how you feel, I think we did do better this time.

**Chris Natzke:**

Yeah, and we talked about some different things, too. Kinda fun.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, good stuff. You set the bar high last time so didn't clear by a lot but it was definitely better.

**Chris Natzke:**

Alright, good.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now one last bit before we go, parting words for everyone listening. What would you tell them?

**Chris Natzke:**

Well you know I think that we have a very unique opportunity as martial artists and martial arts instructors. Just by the story that I was sharing, I mean there's often times that we don't realize the impact that we can have on people, sometimes we never do. But for those of you who had better out there in doing martial arts understand that there's a real great opportunity, and I would say



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responsibility, for those that we teach to help make this planet a better place. And you know, like we always say is that champions don't need to be told what to do; they just need to be reminded. And that reminding is not just by giving them a reminder, it's also reminding. So we always have the ability, whatever we're going through, we may not have the choice of the situations we're in but we always have the ability to choose how we respond to them. So those I guess will be my parting words.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think it's pretty hard to come away from any interaction with Master Natzke, feeling anything but inspired. He's an incredibly positive person and he's just as positive in person as he is here on the show. So thank you sir for your time twice and I hope to see you soon. Head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), check out the show notes. We've got some photos, we've got the links, the various sites that we talked about today. And don't forget [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), use the discount code PODCAST15 to get some gear or a uniform or some shirts, sweatshirts, all the great stuff that we've got going on over there. And if you want to find us more on social media, we're @whistlekick. And my email address, the one that comes right to me is [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). I thank you for listening today. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.