



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Welcome, welcome, welcome! This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio and this is episode 350. Today, I'm joined by Sensei Jeff Doss. If you're new to the show, head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You can get show notes, you can check out the other 349 episodes and you can learn more about what we do and why we do it. If you want to check out our products, you can find those at whistlekick.com. And don't forget, you can use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15%. While we do offer free shipping and wholesale accounts with free shipping, if it's easier for you, you can also buy most of our stuff on Amazon with Prime Shipping. I think it's fair to say that everyone that comes on the show has something in common - passionate about traditional martial arts - and they share that with me. But once in a while, I get to speak with someone whose stories seems so parallel that I wish they lived closer 'cause I'm sure we'd be great friends. And today's guest, Sensei Doss, is one of those people. We're similar in age, we had similar upbringings in the martial arts, a competitive career, and now, we've found a way to make martial arts our career as well as our passion as well as our lifestyle. And it was on those points that I found myself nodding along saying yes, I understand this gut. Now that might now be your story so you might not be nodding along in the same way but I'm sure you'll be able to resonate with the passion that he expresses for his lifestyle as a martial artist. Let's let him tell the story.

Sensei Doss, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Jeff Doss:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Hey guys, how are y'all? Thank you for having me and excited for just a great show.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome, awesome. Thanks for being here, I appreciate it. You know, I've been following you online, I've got a pretty good idea of what you've got going on. The main thing I know about you, of course, is that you're a martial artist, you're a passionate martial artist and I think anybody that has even met you, I'm suspecting, knows that it's a huge point if not the focal point of your life. Is that a fair statement to make?

Jeff Doss:

Yes, it is. It definitely is. I've been involved for 30 years now --

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

Jeff Doss:

-- this month. So it's --

Jeremy Lesniak:

This month?

Jeff Doss:

Yes, this month. So, pretty awesome.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool, cool. Well, you know, we never put so fine a point on it in this show to ask people's ages but I'm gonna guess that that means you started pretty young.

Jeff Doss:

Yes, yes. I started when I was 4, I'm 34 now so, yeah. It's a pretty exciting just to keep going back and remembering some of those great experiences that martial arts has taught me so... I've been doing that a lot lately as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Really? In what way?

Jeff Doss:

I'm working on some different projects. I'm working on a podcast about some of the teams I was on when I was younger and different moments in sport Karate history and things like that as sport Karate and competition was a big part of my life. And that has been something... just kind of thinking all about of those details has been really cool to go back and think about okay, this was... I remember all of these things but what did I learn from them? And I think that's what's really exciting to do that. As well as I do, you know, Facebook live video five days a week with my show Morning Questions that I enjoy doing so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. Awesome. You know, you and I have a bit in common. We've got a morning show as well and we both started at four years old. I've got a couple of years on you, not enough to really make it different but one of the things I know is that when I started, when you started, it was uncommon for people to start at four.

Jeff Doss:

Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We didn't have the Little Dragons programs. We didn't have three-year olds running around using, you know, blockers to understand how their body works the way that we do today. So what was it for you? How did you get started at four?

Jeff Doss:

Alright, so it's kind of a funny story and... I was a big pro wrestling fan so my favorite wrestler was Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat and he used to come to the ring with a Karate Gi and a belt and all that stuff, and he did some exciting moves, you know, high flying and really good wrestler. And his focus was you know, family, respect, honor, and as a kid I was like alright, I gotta be like that guy. And so my parents tried to find a place for me. And when we went in there, I started for a week and they're like I don't have a class for him, and it was Master Lawrence Arthur who was the instructor there. And so he just pretty much said that hey I don't have a class for you. He tried to make it work, it just wasn't gonna work. And so I found like a [05:17](#) program with inside like a dance studio or something, and that that I did for a year. Two weeks after I started that, Master Arthur called my mom and said hey I got a class now for him; bring him in. She said oh it's too late, we already did that. What's funny about that is years later, that he ended up being my instructor and I got my first black belt from Lawrence Arthur, Master Arthur, years later. And



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so it's funny, I always joke with him yeah, you kicked me out you know. You know, you wouldn't accept me when I was younger so it's funny. And then my brother also started when he was four as well, too. And I remember they made a big news article about him in the area being the youngest to get a yellow belt and things like that. It's still, even at... I'm trying to think how old he probably... It was probably 91 or something - it was still rare for that age, you know, to do it. So it's just completely different, I mean, on how it is now. I mean I have classes where I have toddler programs, you know? So, completely different.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. And anyone that's ever taught kids that young knows that you've got to completely throw away your expectations not only of what you would teach in a typical martial arts class especially a traditional, you know, Karate, traditional Taekwondo, etc. program. But sometimes you have to throw away everything because three-year olds don't follow any kind of agenda.

Jeff Doss:

Right, right. And yeah, you just gotta simplify it. You gotta have maybe four or five moves that go and... I mean even this past year we did what we called Baby Ninjas, and so it's like a one to three-year old program with their moms. And you know what, I mean it's just great for them to learn how to use their body and the balance and things, and just to get them excited doing something that they feel cool doing, you know. And then it makes it easy when they get into that Little Dragon's program. They're like the best student because they already... they're not scared to get into the dojo. They're not, you know, which those three-year olds when they're trying to get into it, [07:32](#) So I mean, I know it's... some of you are like man, that's too young for this. And I'm like yeah, but it's not like I'm having them spar at one or two years old, you know what I mean? So you're trying... The earlier, I think, the better so...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I completely agree. Now plenty of people listening are familiar with those little dragon, that you know, three to four, three to five year old demo. But I'm gonna guess that statistically, most schools don't have that, even fewer are going to have anything for you know, one to three.

Jeff Doss:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did you come up with that?

Jeff Doss:



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I'll be honest, it was my nephew so... he's three now so my brother's son... And I was around him pretty much every morning and you know, just started little things doing high blocks with his hands and doing kicks and stuff, and he loved it. And he would just sit with me and watch me teach my private lessons and just be in awe. And so I would do certain things like you know, just getting his legs moving and stuff, and I realized like he was able to you know, walk earlier and his leg strength was better from doing different things. I would just put his feet on my chest and push me back, you know just simple things that you can do with your kids and not, you know, hurt them. And then we just [09:00](#) okay, let's see what happens. I didn't really expect for it to be such a big thing. I mean the first month, we had 16 babies in here. It was insane, it was crazy. But it was a good thing for the either parents or the grandmothers to do with them, and just fun stuff. We put some things to music, we did a lot of obstacle courses. We did a lot of things with them and their parents just doing different things together like them moving their arms in certain ways and stuff, and their legs and stretching and stuff. And then it kinda evolved into, you know, something else. So it's worked out pretty well and... I mean it's one of those things that's just... it's different, you know what I mean? And one of those classes, it kinda goes up and down but you just gotta expect that with business sometimes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. Now I'm completely fascinated by it. I don't want to dig too deep into it because again, the majority of our listeners are not school owners. The majority --

Jeff Doss:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

of school owners aren't even gonna want to have this kind of program but it sounds like... you know, we'll talk later about how folks can get a hold of you but it sounds like you are putting some of this information out.

Jeff Doss:

Yes

Jeremy Lesniak:

So if people want to [10:16](#) So we'll circle back around to that

Jeff Doss:



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Yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

Where I want to go not though is... you know, you started at four, here you are at 34

Jeff Doss:

Yes, sir

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you stop? Did you take a break at any point?

Jeff Doss:

No, I did not take a break

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, alright

Jeff Doss:

And that's what's crazy for me and

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah

Jeff Doss:

I think... Let's see. And I even have talked about that with some of my students and some of my instructors. And I told them that hey, like, you that have taken a break, that's a big deal and I need that in my system because you can relate to those kids that maybe are thinking about putting more than I can because I never really went through that. Like I just love... And you know, and the same thing of those that have quit and came back. So the only thing that I did want or maybe let's see... I did maybe take a year off of competition one time but I still was doing martial arts. And really, a year off for me was still doing five tournaments so that's just some people's big year tournaments but for me, that was like the least I've ever done.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow

Jeff Doss:

So yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

So there's something... You know, people ask me often, what is it about martial arts for you or why did you start? And you know, maybe you have kind of the same response. I don't know what my life was before martial arts so it's really hard to put it into context. It's hard to empathize as you just expressed. I don't know what it's like; I can't relate. I can try, intellectually I can, but I can't really relate to people who are looking at coming in as teenagers or as adults or looking at leaving

Jeff Doss:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

12:09

Jeff Doss:

Right, yeah. Exactly. It's just a different thing for me especially being from a small town like Rustburg, Virginia, where I'm from, 1500 people so it's small. There's surrounding areas and stuff, and we're outside of Lynchburg, Virginia which is a bigger city. The majority of people, you know, they do baseball, they do football - that's their normal thing. And if they're doing something with Karate, I think it's just another sport that they'll do four or three months or something, you know. And when they get in here, they realize it's much more than that especially when they like meet me and then meet my instructors, my students here that are kind of the same way. They've taken that same approach that I have as far as this is not just and activity or sport I do; this is a lifestyle. And it's a beautiful thing to see and it does inspire me that I'm doing the right thing when I see my students, you know, with that same mentality. So, pretty awesome.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely agree. Now you talked about competition, you talked about how much you've competed. I mean you kind of eluded to that. Let's talk about that cause I've, you know, just from the bit I know of you, it's really hard to separate martial arts from the competitive side for you. Is that fair?



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, it is fair. For me, I don't think I would have stuck with it as much without competition. It's something that kind of helped me just stay focused and have another purpose. But I was always really good at separating you know, the difference and you know, knowing my self-defense, knowing my curriculum, my forms, being able to learn new things like wrestling and grappling, and then also being able to focus on competition and like my forms and my weapons and my sparring. I've started really young with competition, as well, like everything. So five years old, did underbelt competition regionally until I was about nine, got my black belt really young at nine. Then I decided I was going to start touring nationally and at 10 years old, I started touring nationally. Even my coach at that time said I didn't have a chance and I'd be lucky if I get in the top 5, and I won my first five tournaments so it was kinda crazy. We were kinda like after the [14:54](#) from there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

Jeff Doss:

But yeah, I mean it was... from there, it was just... It was a way for me to have goals and keep me on track, you know. Like if I stepped off at all when I had a tournament every month and I didn't do mind training or I didn't keep my mindset right or didn't... It was a direct way for me to see hey, you're not doing this or hey you are doing this, that's awesome. You know, there is a way for me to track that. And once you get to that level, especially at that time, there wasn't really much once you got your black belt, you know? I mean there was your degrees and stuff but there were no other programs or things like that in martial arts. Now, it's a lot different. You know, some people have like the hyper pro programs, some people have an actual sport Karate team, some people had demo teams, some people have leadership programs, [15:55](#) instructor programs - I mean there's so much now that we have because we've learned that hey we want to keep our black belts. We want to keep people in martial arts. And for me, competition was that so... And I mean I can go on and on about competition. I've done a lot because of it. It's helped me... I've [16:17](#) for almost every circuit. I've won a lot and I enjoy teaching my students now to be champions as well so... As well as, I also put on a national tournament and I help with sport Karate leagues as well. So I've kinda take it to the next level - not just competing and being a champion or not just coaching and being a champion, and coaching champions but putting on events. And I have a national tournament called the Grand Slam Open that start usually around April. And then I also help run the NBL, the National Blackbelt League, and I also have a real big part of it in the Southeast. We have different events that we put on. So every tournament, I usually go to I'm the head coordinator, I have a lot of responsibilities to make the tournament run smooth so

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Yeah. And anybody out there that has ever coordinated a tournament knows how challenging that can be.

Jeff Doss:

Yes. It can be, yes; it can. And I learned a lot from that too cause I have to understand, and I think martial arts has taught me that too and just life in general, that I'm there, I'm doing a job and I can't take it like, you know, if we don't have the judges, if we don't have this or that, that's not my fault. I can only do what I have the tools to do. And a lot of times I tend to put it all on myself like this is all my fault blah, blah, blah. No, you're there to do your job; do your job and do the best you can. And have fun, don't look miserable.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right. If you're not having fun, no one is having fun.

Jeff Doss:

Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. It's... I attend a fair number of events. I don't so much compete anymore but you know, with our endeavors here at whistlekick, you know, I was at a competition in Connecticut yesterday.

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, yeah. I know the... I can't think... I can't think of his name right now but

Jeremy Lesniak:

Herbie Bagwell. Kyoshi Herbie Bagwell

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, Herbie Bagwell. Yes, yes, yes. Awesome guy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He's a great guy, absolutely. I'm hoping he'll come on the show at some point. I'm reaching out to him shortly. But you know, one of the things that is very apparent is that, as you said, you can't manifest



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

referees. You can't stall off you know, the air-conditioning dies or the heat won't shut out, you know, whatever. I've seen everything, I think

Jeff Doss:

Yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm sure you have, too

Jeff Doss:

Yes

Jeremy Lesniak:

But it's... I mean there... it's a perfect anecdote for martial arts - the actual in-ring competition aside because you do what you can with what you have.

Jeff Doss:

Right, right. Exactly. Very true, very true. Yeah, I mean... And you can't let it affect you because again, you also have a business side of it, too. And just some public relations [19:17](#) and the biggest thing is, you know, if things aren't going that well, you know what, get a smile on your face and make someone else smile because of something else. That's really what you need to do instead of just stressing about it, and how can I make these judges appear out of thin air. It doesn't work.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right, it does not. Now you brought up a piece that is rarely discussed when we talk about competition, is that it's a business move.

Jeff Doss:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

A competition that habitually loses money will not continue to exist.



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeff Doss:

Exactly, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, I don't know about you but I don't know too many people who are willing to just burn money over and over again.

Jeff Doss:

Right and ---

Jeremy Lesniak:

So can you ---

Jeff Doss:

Yes

Jeremy Lesniak:

Go ahead, go ahead

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, I mean I definitely agree and I think we see that far too often in Karate tournaments. I think competitors and family members and fans think that all of these promoters are making tons of money, and I know a lot of them are not. That's why there's a lot that have stopped doing tournaments over the past five years just because it was just... and I don't think it was just that it was they weren't making money but either the work they're putting into it was harder than what they wanted, you know? And they had to figure out what way was it worth it for them to put their time and effort into that. But yeah, I think it's a tough business because the event fees for you to rent a building are going higher and higher and higher every year. And then so in response to that, yeah we have to raise the prices on competition so that makes it tough. It's one of those things. I mean I think you see that with business and for us in martial arts, it's the same mindset. People... anyone who charges a lot is a make dojo or anyone who charges too much at a tournament is just trying, you know, they're just money-hungry. And really, I don't think that's the case at all because we're just trying to survive and make it to where we can make another year happen and make an event that is worth it for you, you know? There is a big difference in... as someone said the other day like Shoebox Karate Tournament and then the Professional Karate tournament where you just



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pop one up, put some rings on a gym and do everything by cash and hey, you know, that was it - there wasn't much to give away, there wasn't much to do, much planning. If there's some scorekeepers there, that's great, between the ones who plan it for a year. And sometimes the ones that plan it for a year, you know, it works out one year, one year it doesn't. It's just an up or down process and... I mean I love it; it was my thing. When I decided to do a tournament, I wasn't gonna do it small like I want... I mean I worked my way up but I had a five-year plan that I want to be a national event and that happened in three years because I put the work into it. And I wasn't just... I made sure that I had people in place that want to help me as well. So my mom was in charge of this part of the tournament, my brother was in charge in this part of the tournament, I was in charge of overseeing all of it and some of the other things. Then I had two or three other schools that would help with this or that, you know. It was just... it's more than just doing it yourself. And I think the earlier you understand that, the better it will be so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Completely agree. Let's shift gears from competition. We'll come back, we'll talk a little bit about you and your personal experiences with competition.

Jeff Doss:

Yes, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But when we think about you and your life, cause you have lived a martial arts life from four to thirty-four with no gaps in between... I mean the first couple of years of anybody's life is really just walking around like a bubble head. You know, we don't have a lot of experiences that really kinda register that we remember. So when we think about those 30 years and we think about martial arts, what's the best story that you could share with the listeners that comes from that time?

Jeff Doss:

Let's see. Man, there's so many. I mean I can get through into a lot of different ones as far as why it's kept me where it is. And a lot of that too is my faith as well, just... I know it goes hand-in-hand and I just feel like this is what I'm meant to do. And even with... I think for me it was after college, kind of figured out what I wanted to do. And I always would say, I gotta do something different than Karate. I gotta do something different from Karate. And I went in at Radford University and I graduated in Sports Administration. I want to work within the Athletic Department and do that. And actually, my main thing was to work my way up so that way, I get to appoint within 10-15 years to where I had contacts to make sport Karate a big deal. And my first job after college was working with [24:57](#) Department and I just hated it.



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really?

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, it just wasn't... just where I was at, just the people we're interacting and just the mindset of this is as good as it get; you know, don't try doing that, no one will like that. And that just wasn't me. And so I found an old bar in Rustburg, Virginia that I could turn into a Karate school so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did you say and old bar?

Jeff Doss:

Yes, an old bar. Yep, and old bar that ---

Jeremy Lesniak:

Up here in Vermont, we have old barns that might turn into a martial arts studio but a bar, okay

Jeff Doss:

Yes. So a bar that have been sitting for about three years without anything going on and we decided just to make it happen. And so we've been here for over 10 years now and that for me was going back to like who I was [25:52](#) Martial arts isn't just something that you can fall back on. It is what you do and it is who you are. And you know, it's kinda... Again, yes, it's like my business story but it's really my martial arts story because it's me realizing that this is who I am. And that... once that happened, and it was just great for me cause I felt like I just stopped limiting myself on a lot of those things. And even to this day, I've... still, the same thing. It's like push yourself no matter what. You can do anything you want to do. And again, you get the things from people around town - no one needs Karate, no one needs that, it's not gonna work, it's just too small a town, blah, blah, blah. No, if you have that determination, that passion for it, you can do anything. So it's been exciting to see that, yeah. I mean just turn something from again, like I said, a bar into a place of growth. And that's what we've done here and looking forward to do the same. I mean there's just so many things that martial art... I think that for me, is that's story. Once, I opened my school though, I got better. I mean competition wise... What's funny was that I was a great competitor for years and years and years - consistent one of the tops ones - but I didn't become one of those people that you know, were the best at the tournament. Like, you know, always for grand champion, until I opened my school. And I think that that was great for me because it put me into a point of martial arts is my life, and to where it's... you know, just the routines and the things I'm just doing this, doing that. And the more



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

you teach, the better you get. I mean I think it's really exciting to see that, actually. And some people don't realize that, they think oh I don't get to train as much or [27:59](#) you know. But when you get to understand what... how to make not just one person better but multiple people better in their own way in different ways, then it's pretty easy to do it with yourself cause you know yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a great way to put it. And of course, anyone that's ever had their own school knows that, well in one sense, your personal training tends to suffer because there are only so many hours in a day.

Jeff Doss:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You are getting better cause you're teaching fundamentals. You're always teaching the basics, that foundational information. And the analogy that I like to use is you can only go so high with a certain foundation, and the more time you spend with that foundation as it gets stronger, broader, however you want to look at the analogy, the higher you can go. And that's what happens when you're teaching because you always have novice students.

Jeff Doss:

Right, right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So you've always got to be working on that stuff. And here, you're articulating that, you know. Is it fair to say that when you opened your school that you're spending less time on your training personally?

Jeff Doss:

I think so cause I was at that time where I was working at like a recreational facility, and so I worked there. I was just getting out of college, I was still kinda... I call it like the college hangover - trying to figure out what to do, you know, and still trying to be young at a certain... You know, enjoy the time that I was doing... and just not sure of what was next. I was still going to tournaments but I was going without much training and that was... I saw the flaws in that. The ones I engulfed myself into what I was doing it was like hey man, I have, you know, just open mat here all the time. I can train in whatever I want. Now the bad part is when some people... it's not bad part cause it gives [29:56](#) to it but some people open schools saying well I have a... I'm gonna do this that way I have a place to train whenever I want. And that's great as well



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

but you gotta also understand that the whole... the point of this is that you need to use that mat time to help yourself grow so that way, you can help others grow. Not just to make yourself grow and that was it, you know. The more you grow and the more your martial arts gets better, then the potential for all your students to get better just double, triples, quadruples, whatever... how much you grow, your students are gonna... the same thing's gonna happen so

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely agree, absolutely. Outside of martial arts, is there anything that you're passionate about?

Jeff Doss:

Let's see.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is there time?

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, yeah, that's the thing. Let's see. I'm trying to think right now as far as, you know, I have about four different things that I am involved in. All of them have to do with martial arts and things. Like I said, I'm still a big pro wrestling nerd so I do... if I have any time to listen to a podcast or something, sometimes I listen to something like that. I'll listen to a lot of different business things and martial arts things. So those are kinda like my things. I really enjoy spending time with my family. I've always been a fan of music so I enjoy doing things like that. And then going to the gym and working out separately from my martial arts is something I enjoy as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What could martial arts school owners and competition promoters learn from professional wrestling?

Jeff Doss:

All right. So

Jeremy Lesniak:

You sound like you had that cued up and that was...

Jeff Doss:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Listeners, this is not... we did not discuss this. I had a thought, I just had a feeling.

Jeff Doss:

So for me, there's different things. So as a competitor first, especially as a forms or even as a fighter, I think doing intros is very important. I think we need to do that in all of our finals, all of our grand championship competitions. Intro, music, something that get every hyped up. You know, we've seen how the UFC has grown as far as on that part from that and I mean even the other night, having smoke during the Conor McGregor entrance and stuff that you wouldn't see before. That is... I think it's the same thing. I mean that just gets people emotion, they get that entertainment level. You know, it just does something; it elevates it. For me, that was what I want to do. I want to do great martial arts as competitor but innovative and creative and do something that people... People are always wanting to watch me because they didn't know what I was gonna do. And so I would come up from underneath the stage sometimes and I would hide behind the judges and then jump over their heads before I walk in to do my form - things like that. And you know, I do the... I broke... Sorry, I used to hit my head... over the head with a water bottle, right? And then... before I enter. That was my signature thing when I was doing forms, open forms then it became maybe I'll just make the water bottle bigger and bigger and bigger. And you know, I had a big jug at one point. At one time, at one tournament, I got one, a big like water container thing, an empty one and hit that over my head. Just crazy stuff [33:49](#) I would break a board over my head, things like that. Because I feel like if people aren't watching, like you could have the best form in the world but if no one's watching you then it doesn't matter. It didn't exist, you know? It's kinda like in this world that we live in now - if you don't have it on video, it doesn't happen, right? It didn't happen.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah

Jeff Doss:

[34:08](#) that you've gotta get people watching you and that's... pro wrestling is the perfect, you know, comparison to that. Now as far as tournaments, I think... yeah. The way we sell things, the way that we, you know, creating superstars, I think that's very important and the... When I started my tournament, I wanted to have set fights and set things like that. And I found different people that say hey, I want to make you the start of the tournament this year. And that was really cool to see because some people take it in one way that oh you're showing favoritism to this person. And I don't really see it that way. I see that hey I'm giving you someone here that you can aspire to do. And then guess what, next year maybe this could be you. It's a goal to go after. So I mean... there's so many things that you could do from it. I do think



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

that forms competitors, especially creative ones, need to watch more pro wrestling cause I think that they would get more the showmanship, a part of it, the intensity, the facial expressions, selling, you know. That type of thing I think they can learn a lot from.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree. And you know, this is a subject that is so challenging; it's so nuance. Because on the one hand, what we see from your extremely traditional, as you call them often, shoebox tournaments

Jeff Doss:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is that even the people there to compete are bored 97% of the time.

Jeff Doss:

Exactly

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then you've got another... some would call it extreme where you have smoke machines. And I will guarantee there are people that cringe when you said that you jumped over the referees to enter the ring because that's not traditional.

Jeff Doss:

That's right, that's right. It's not traditional

Jeremy Lesniak:

And there's certainly room for extremes and there's certainly room for middle ground but one of the things that we've brought up on the show, one of the things that I am incredibly passionate about is finding ways that competition can appeal to people beyond the competitors and the people that are there in the seats because they love them. Right? If we look at

Jeff Doss:

So true, so true.



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nearly every competition, near every martial arts competition, I suspect on the planet - but I can't speak to those, I can speak to the ones in the U.S. - everyone that's there is either competing or loves someone that is competing.

Jeff Doss:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

I mean that's it.

Jeff Doss:

Yeah. There's no outside audience

Jeremy Lesniak:

And when we talk about any economy, I'm gonna get a little bit nerdy here for a moment, when we talk about any economy, if the money that is going around in competitions is only for martial artists, it can't grow. We'll never have these grand, you know, fifty hundred thousand dollar prize [37:11](#) that could have if he developed a product - a competition product - that appealed to people so much that they were coming even if they didn't check one of those boxes, even if they weren't a competitor or loved a competitor. Somebody say you know what, it's Saturday; let's go watch the martial arts competition because I went to one last month and it was an amazing day and I paid \$10, \$15, \$20 to get in and I sat there for eight hours and there was too much good stuff to watch. Until we can get to that point, we won't grow. The only ones that win when I hand you \$10 and you hand it back [37:47](#)

Jeff Doss:

Right, that's right. I think part of it... some of it is like we grew too fast - we're not too fast - but in a certain way like... I think we've divided our divisions up way too much. At a point, I remember when I was younger, there was seven forms divisions for juniors and that was it. Now, just for forms, for black belt forms, there is probably... I don't know international tournaments, probably 50, maybe more than that. At NBL, it's probably 30, maybe more. But when I was younger, it was seven divisions. Now you had your 8, [38:35](#) 9-10, your 11, 12, your 13, 14, 15, 17, [38:38](#) divisions, that was it. And there was 20-40 in your division every time. It was easier from a competitor, I mean a spectator, at some point to understand that - okay, this is that division. That's it and watch these 40 people go at it all; oh man, this is awesome blah, blah, blah. I mean I remember being at the battle of Atlanta and there'd be tons of people on the floor. There'll a lot



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

of people watching and I have talked to people in my area. They're saying oh, have you ever been to the Battle of Atlanta? I hear that was the tournament. I heard this, this, this. I'm like, are you in martial arts? No. I had a cousin but I watched it in this and that. And I think that kinda had something to do with that. I mean I know we've tried to divide things up and I also agree with dividing things up by style and everything else. But we've almost hurt ourselves to be able to get TV involved. If we have so many divisions where it's just like all right, well let's just watch the [39:41](#) And that's kind of the way it's become, right? I don't really want the outside people from the... that aren't involved in martial arts to come during the day. I'd rather them just come to the finals. That's kind of sad, actually. I mean I know we should push our finals in our shows and that's what's that for. But we've kinda done that out of necessity because we don't really know how to present the daytime in an exciting fashion besides than just this is the way it needs to be done to get done on time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right

Jeff Doss:

Do you get what I'm saying?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I do. I do. One of the things that is often discussed as a point of pride is how early a competition finished.

Jeff Doss:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you know what, I don't think there's a bigger indicator that something is wrong than, you know, event is done early. Not [40:37](#) It's not a thing that you have to do - it's a choice. And if it's not a full-day of entertainment that you are kicking people out from, you're probably doing it wrong. And we're all doing it wrong

Jeff Doss:

Right, yeah. We all are

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I'm not suggesting that anyone has it right and you know, everybody needs to copy that model but I think we need to spend more time looking at how we can diversify what we offer so it is more probably appealing.

Jeff Doss:

Yeah and I think some of it, too, is hard to understand. I think they can get behind, honestly, the open forms and stuff because it's exciting and similar to like a, you know, skateboarding and VMX and stuff. They got popular for a while. And I think that, you know, is exciting to some [41:31](#) for them and the weapons and stuff. And even I think breaking is pretty easy for someone to understand - hey they broke or they didn't. Oh man, look at this guys he did forty... And I think depending on who you're watching doing traditional forms, you can tell if that's good or bad, you know? Sparring is different, tough. It's because, especially right now with MMA and kickboxing and boxing, you hit someone, knock him out or you hit them more, they won. It's different... that whole thing of having good technique and scoring a good point and things like that are different to someone who is not within the sport, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right. And we're not gonna solve it today

Jeff Doss:

No, no, no.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you know, it's something that we'll continue to work on because the business model here for whistlekick is pretty straightforward - if it gets people into martial arts or keeps them in martial arts, we're gonna work on it.

Jeff Doss:

That's awesome. I love it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you. Let's bring it back to you. We're doing a great job of talking about you and it's spinning out and talking about martial arts in a more board sense and that tells us a lot about you and your personality. So let's pull it back. Let's talk about you and let's talk about something on the other side of the spectrum. We've talked a lot about the positive aspects of your life, let's talk about something you went through



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

that was difficult but something that your martial arts experience - however you define that - allowed you to overcome.

Jeff Doss:

So all right, we've got several different ones. I actually talked about it on my show this morning right before I came on here, what is your life changing moment and [43:23](#) what was one of those? For me, my first big one was after... In 1995, I was 11 years old, I won my first NASKA title. I was super excited. And then I had a rough end of that year as my grandma, grandpa, and great aunt all died in a car accident. And that just changed my life because I have never gone through that type of you know, trauma or loss right before Christmas time - just a lot of different things. And for me, you know, my martial arts and my faith that I was doing this for a purpose pulled me through because... you know, it gave me something else to think about and to focus on instead of just the negative. And that life does go on after hard times, and that just because that was a tough thing and that I lost those people, doesn't mean that I have to be lost, you know? And doesn't mean that I have to always dwell on that situation. I can you know, have those tough times that happened to my life and using the fuel I need to move forward. And so that was... I had a lot of help with that. I went through a lot of different things cause I'd get into these stupid little habits and stuff that I'd do. And so when I'm nervous or stressed out, you know, like biting your nails or chewing on your lip or something stupid like that. But I would do that as I learn how to get through those types of things from that experience. And just, you know, for me there, I think I got more into martial arts after that. Because I just knew it was helping me. I just tested for my, I think, my 2nd degree black belt as well, like right a week after that. And that was a really tough test. I even kinda broke down and just you know, overreacted on some things. I remember my anger and my... was not right and was not respectful. But my instructor knew what I was dealing with and he let me come back in and say all right, are you ready now? Yes sir, apologize, you know. And again, I think those moments sometimes... you know, even though that was a disrespectful thing for me to do to get upset with my instructor because he's pushing me too hard, sometimes those are what you need though. Because you don't understand, you know... you gotta have those moments first before you move forward. So that was one of the things for me. Another one that I guess I'm not necessarily proud about was in college, I'm just going around the... I'm not gonna say the wrong crowd, just typical college stuff. And I got alcohol poisoned in being stupid and really, a life changing moment for me to... I was not really focusing on my martial arts. I was not focusing on what I need to do. I was just trying to figure out the new environment, the world that I was in. And so that really pulled me back into saying okay, reassess what you're doing; let's think about it. You know, a lot of prayer, a lot of just going and doing martial arts by myself. I think that was what was hard because I didn't have a school. I didn't have that community, I didn't have people around me that did martial arts. And that's where I think I kinda started, you know, losing that. So when I got back into that environment of training with people and doing things, it really, you know, brought me back. And not just brought me back but helped me move forward. And so... I mean I think that's what's really cool about martial arts - it's that it is a... it's not kicks or punches. It is really learning how to grow yourself inside and out.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I like that. That's a great way to put it, for sure. Here's a question for you - if you could train with anybody, any martial artist that you haven't, anywhere in the world, anywhere in time, who would that be?

Jeff Doss:

That's a hard one. I'm sure most people will probably say Bruce Lee

Jeremy Lesniak:

They do, they do.

Jeff Doss:

That's a tough one for me. I'm gonna go in another way because, again, in my wrestling and stuff, and I like a lot of catch wrestling and... as far as we do a lot of that in my self-defense is... I'm gonna say Gotch. Frank Gotch was the father of what they call catch wrestling, and did a... on how to do these missions and the takedowns and things like that. And so I think that would really be cool to learn from someone like that, that does something different than what I normally do. And that way, I can just improve on that, as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

All right. Yeah, I've heard that name,

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, you have to look him up

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm gonna have to look him up, for sure. You know, catch wrestling is cool stuff. I've talked to some people... I've never done it but I've talked to some people who have done it and it sounds almost like this missing link that we could include in what most of us define as this kind of realm of traditional martial arts. That would be a pretty big... I look at martial arts as like a trivial pursuit pie

Jeff Doss:

Yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

You had wedges, you had these pieces in that kind of round out - that's why I like that analogy - your skill set. And it always seemed like catch wrestling would be a really big piece.

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, yeah. It is... because it goes back to even like Greek and Roman times of wrestling and things. So it's pretty cool to see that, you know, that there is other martial arts besides just the Asian types, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right

Jeff Doss:

And I think we forget about that. Another one, one more though, would be... I would love to have trained with Funakoshi so that would have been awesome as well. So as Shotokan practitioners will think that would have been awesome

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. You know, it seems like the more time we spend as martial artists, the more we learn about people that we want to train with.

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And it's similar to how I look at the show. When I started the show, you know, I had a certain knowledge of martial artists. And if you go back, if you look at the early episodes, you'll see that it's a lot of people from the Northeast because I live in Vermont, I grew up in [50:29](#) went to college in Massachusetts, right? So the people that I knew were primarily in the Northeast. And I had people that ask me, well how many episodes are you going to be able to do? How many people do you know? And my concern was right along there with them. Am I going to be able to keep this show going for a few years? And what's happening right now is you know, we're recording this episode, it's not gonna go live for over a month

Jeff Doss:

Right



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because there's a backlog and there are so many people I... just this past weekend, I got to know several people that oh man, they need to come on the show. And the challenge now is not do I have enough people. It's how do I decide between all of these wonderful martial artists on the show? And that's kind of the same thing, you know. As you get to know about wonderful martial artists, who do you train with?

Jeff Doss:

Right, right. Exactly. It's really... And I think there's so many different ways to do it and to think about it as well but... you can learn something from everybody, you know? I think sometimes... you know, that's why I think it's important to have open mats and let other schools come in with you. I think some people are still in that mindset of school versus school, and that's my competition. And I'm really against that. There are some schools that feel that way about me and feel that way about that, and you know what? That's their opinion, that's okay. But hey, I think we can all work together because really, the key thing is to get people involved in martial arts and that's it. That should be, you know, your main thing. We're more competing against the other sports or actually the other activities that kids and people are doing than we are each other, you know? So I think when we start thinking in that mindset, we need to understand something from everyone. I could call [52:43](#) on the phone and ask him for some advice on this kick, you know. And even though I think that my kicks are really good and I know all the stuff I need to make someone a good kicker, I could still ask him for some advice on that. Because he may have something different than what I'm doing that may help me and vice versa. Or Raymond Daniels or someone in California or someone in another country. We gotta put that ego aside and understand that we can all learn from each other.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fully agree. And here's how I explain that to people who don't... who aren't on the side of the table that you and I are. Would you agree that fast-food restaurants, these juggernauts understand business and marketing? And they'll say, yeah. Okay. Where do you find every Burger King restaurant? Right next to a McDonald's.

Jeff Doss:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If they get it, if they understand it, I don't think there's a better example.

Jeff Doss:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

That's right. That's right, so true. I mean there's different flavors, different things that people like but it all comes back to martial arts, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So let's talk about you and what you've got going on. You mentioned at the top of the show that you're working on a podcast, you mentioned that you do a Facebook live thing, I think you said everyday. So tell us what you've got going on and how people can find you online.

Jeff Doss:

All right. So I am... yeah, I do this show now called Morning Questions in the morning, just a quick kind of thing to bring it back around of... it's kind of a mindset show but also we'll talk different topics with martial arts life, everything. But the main thing is I've been doing a lot of different audios and classes with Michael Bernoff. And the biggest thing was that we gotta start making statements about what our life is and we just start asking questions. The answers are in there. And so I was like you know what, what if I do a show just like that? And we just have different questions that we ask ourselves and how do we find those answers, you know. Cause the answers are in you, you just gotta keep asking the right questions and more questions. So that's kind of how that [55:15](#) It's not too long, I do five, ten minutes at the most. I don't, you know, it's about around 8 o'clock, 8:05, depending on where I'm at and the traffic at school and everything. But... and it's just been fun just to connect with different people through it. I mean I have some loyal listeners that will make sure they're always watching and then some days I'll have different ones. Then I have people that watch it later on. And you know, it started out of something for me to just let people know who I am and be vulnerable. It's not just me being this great person. I mean that's not what I want people to... I always [56:00](#) bring to back to myself on some way that I can improve and learn from what I'm talking about, and it usually comes from something that I did wrong that I need to learn. So that is what I do on Facebook. My Instagram is SushiGrandSlam and same thing, I kind of put different things up there with that. We did a kick challenge earlier last week, two weeks ago with a lot of us that are over 30. And that we're gonna make kicking videos and that's gotten kind of crazy. I mean from that video, I mean I've gotten so many different messages about doing some more videos and more shows and seminars and stuff. So you never know. If you just put your heart into something, people are gonna notice so that's exciting. And then yeah, let's see... I have all my different pages that I have on Facebook - Grand Slam Martial Arts, Jeff Doss Grand Slam Open which is the tournament page. I also have the NBL, National Blackbelt League page on Facebook and Instagram. So I have a lot of different ones

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're all over the place

Jeff Doss:



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Yeah, I'm all over the place. I am trying to... I just started doing just a short little podcast I do that's called Kick of the Day. And I'm currently working on a longer episode right now that is about Team Elite. Team Elite was my first big team that I was on in 1996 till 2004. And it's spun into... it was Team Elite then it turned into CJB so it was a really big team that I was a part of so I was kind of gonna go through the different parts of that story because... I mean we had some of the top fighters and forms competitors in the world on there, and just to go through what... You know, I was 12 years old, what that perspective of a kid through that time and my growing process. And I was a team captain, also my mom ended up becoming manager of the team so I know a lot of different things about the behind the scenes stuff that maybe people would like to hear, and who was on the team and what they were like in person and what they were like during that time when they were growing and becoming stars. We had [58:34](#) when he first really started coming out on the national scene, and to really tell people what he was like then, how he grew to that point. And Anthony Price on his last year of competing, what kind of a veteran and leader he was. I'm excited about doing that and that's kind of how I've been really reminiscing and figuring out, man I learned a lot in those days. I'm definitely blessed to be able to... from a small town, be able to travel and see the things I didn't, interact with the people that have different cultures and different cities. I think that's what's really cool about Karate, is because it's universal. Everyone can relate to martial arts and it doesn't matter what language we have, what religion we think; we can connect on martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I couldn't agree more. And folks, that was a lot of link so don't be afraid [59:37](#) we'll drop those in one of the show notes

Jeff Doss:

Yeah, yes. Sorry about that

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no. Please, don't apologize. whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. If anybody's new, we'll have links to all that stuff that Sensei Doss has going on so no need to jot onto your arm with blood while you're on the treadmill or something ridiculous like that. But I appreciate you being here today and I'd love for you to send us out with one final thing, the way we always ask our guest to send us out, some parting words, some bits of wisdom, however you want to think of it. Send us out.

Jeff Doss:

All right. So two different things; one thing I want to talk about and send out is that I heard this message the other night, I think it goes for all of us instructors and I read this in a book, The Five Levels of Relationship by John Maxwell, great book, so I suggest you guys to get that, and it talks about a teacher that was you know, she taught math. And she realized that math... it wasn't that she was teaching math,



Episode 350 – Sensei Jeff Doss | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

she was teaching kids. And that's what she said. She said, I teach kids, not math. I think we need to understand that when we do, as instructors, that we teach kids not martial arts. When we try to go into just teaching martial arts, they're not getting it the way you do. They need to... or they are able to learn it. So I think we need to understand that we have to go outside of our realm and do something a little bit different and learn different things. And then our martial arts brings us back around and help us. So as far as a teacher, that is one of the tips that I think we all need to kind of think about especially if you're teaching students or kids, same thing if you're teaching adults. You're teaching them so you need to relate with them. And the last thing is just don't give up, guys. Martial arts is just an amazing thing. It's helped me so much, has blessed my life and... I mean I just... I couldn't do anything without it. I know that it's put me in a whole another level in life and the confidence that I have because of martial arts. As a young kid, a small kid, being able to just have learned that... have that courage to push through anything that's put in front of me... There's nothing like it. So thank you guys so much for having me and hope to talk to you more. And you guys can chat me out on Facebook or Instagram and I will respond to you and talk to you anytime.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not easy to make martial arts your life and it's even harder to make martial arts your career. But here we have a man who is fighting tooth and nail to do that. I have no idea how successful he is financially because we don't talk about that stuff; that's not my business. But I have every understanding of how impactful he is from his social media, from the scope of competition that he puts on, and of course, from his words here today. Thank you Sensei Doss for coming on the show, for sharing so much of who you are with the audience today. And I hope someday soon, we get to meet and maybe even train together.

If you want to check out the show notes, hit whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. While you're there, sign up for the newsletter, maybe head on over to whistlekick.com. Shop for a shirt or some gear or uniform or whatever, and you can use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15%. If you want to follow us on social media, that's @whistlekick - Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram. And you can email me, jeremy@whistlekick.com. I thank you for your time. I thank you for sharing your ears with me today. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.