



Episode 354 – Mr. Tim Cartmell | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### Jeremy Lesniak:

Good day to you and thank you for tuning in. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 354 and today, I'm joined by our guest Mr. Tim Cartmell. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host on the show. I'm the founder at whistlekick and I love the martial arts. I love the traditional martial arts; it's kind of been my life since I was, well, very small. I'm still very small but I'm at least older now. Enough of that, it's getting silly. Let's talk about whistlekick. whistlekick, we make the show, we make uniforms and sparring equipment, and a number of other things to enhance your training experience. And you can find all of those items at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and many of them are available on Amazon. If you shop on [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), you can use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15% on everything. We've got a ton of t-shirts and just check it out. If you haven't been over there lately, check it out. We're adding new stuff pretty much every week. If you're new to the podcast, you might want to check out our show notes. Those are at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and we do a lot to add context each and every episode from photos and videos of the guests, links to their social media, their websites, and pretty much any time we talk about something on the show, we'll give you a link to it. Whether it's another episode that we've done or maybe just another website or a YouTube video — whatever it is. We try to give you as much as we can around the show notes to bring value to your experience listening to the show.

Today's guest has trained all over the world in multiple arts. He's competed, he has a school, he's lived the passionate, dedicated martial arts life that many others have. But here, today on the show, he goes in-depth as to his mindset and what he's learned — how he's bettered himself through that process. I



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found it fascinating, I found it relatable, and I've got a feeling you will also. So I'll step back and welcome him to the show.

Mr. Cartmell, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Thank you very much.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I appreciate you being here. We almost didn't make it. You were the second one on the docket for today and I had already had to reschedule the first one because, listeners, I live in the woods. I live in the woods of, depending on how you term your geography, Central or Northern Vermont and we had a wet snowstorm overnight and ended this morning, and power lines down and trees down and... It's been chaotic but this must have been meant to be because literally five minutes, maybe ten minutes, before the recording time, it came back on and I went, ha! Let's see if he's there, and he was there. You were there and I appreciate it.

**Tim Cartmell:**

It's a sign.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It is a sign. We're gonna run with it. Let's talk about why we're actually here, though. We're not here to talk about the parallels of living in the woods of Northern Vermont. We're here to talk about martial arts because you and I, and most of the folks listening, are martial artists so let's talk about martial arts. Let's talk about how you got started. What's that story?

**Tim Cartmell:**

Well when I was a child, we're pretty rough in [03:13](#) as kids. And I was kind of... you know, we wrestle a lot. My uncles taught me how to box a little bit so I kind of had a previous position to that kind of thing. And I can't remember where I first saw kind of Asian martial arts, maybe Karate on TV or something and I was merely fascinated. You know, there was kind of this whole systems of martial arts people trained in and you know, when you're a kid do anything Asian... it seemed very exotic when there are Asian. So I started asking my parents, I remember, when I must have been 10 if I could do Karate. That's the only martial art I've heard of. So, you know, went a couple of years, and then the Kung Fu series came on and then it was, you know, me and every one of my friends wanted to be like Kwang Chai Caine, right? So I started asking and I was probably 11, I think, and I started doing Taekwondo. And I did that for, I want to



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say a year, and then I switched. I found a Kung Fu school and I went to train. And I stayed in that system, at least, 'til I was out of college, and I went to Asia. So I practiced, it was Kung Fu San Soo and I started... I must have been 12 and I was about 23 when I left. So I practiced 04:34 daily from being a kid until that age.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, cool. So what kept you going?

**Tim Cartmell:**

I loved it. It was one of the... You know, sometimes in life, you find something, you know, like some athletics or a hobby or you know, kids want to learn to play an instrument and a lot of kids will play it for a year or two and be like, yeah you know I'm not really into it. And then you find something that, for whatever reason, who knows, I don't know, whatever reason, you really feel like you've found your niche kind of thing. And that's how it was with me and martial arts. Honestly, I never really analyzed it; I just did it. And it just seemed like something that I just would do, you know? Like it became a natural part of my life. So I like everything about it but I'm not really sure. I've asked myself this question. I still practice everyday now. It's been 40-something years. So for whatever reason, it was one of those things. I found martial arts and I just love doing it. I like everything about it and I just kept doing it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now here we are, 40-something years later. You're still training, as you said, everyday. That's something that continues to blow me away - the number of people who will train everyday. Because in our society, especially in Western culture, we tend to get bored. We tend to move on to the next thing, the best thing, the greatest thing, whatever, and we don't see a lot of personal practices that involve anywhere close to daily ritual especially when it comes to something challenging like martial arts, and especially when it comes to doing it for decades.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But martial arts seems to be an exception, doesn't it? Do you have any thoughts? You've been practicing longer than I have; any idea why martial arts seems to speak to some of us so strongly?

**Tim Cartmell:**



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Well, like I said, it's hard to say. I think the art part is harder that, you know, people... there's a certain amount of, I mean there's the discipline to do it but people have discipline in a lot of areas. I mean getting up and going to work everyday require discipline, right? I think it's something that we do but I feel like... We all have these different reasons we're doing martial arts. You might want to learn self-defense, you might want to compete, you know, you might like the culture, you know, if you practice an art from another country. But there's something about the self-cultivation aspects that I feel people... I feel like if it becomes rote like you go oh, I need to workout everyday, I'll just do martial arts - you won't keep doing it. You know what I mean? Like you just said, you'll find the next exercise method or you'll try something new. But there's something about the art part where... it's kind of a vehicle for self-cultivation and once you start it... And you know, you could cultivate yourself in a lot of different ways but if you're inclined towards something athletic and you have that kind of drive to practice and then you see the benefit and you can see you'll never gonna master it, there's always room for improvement; I feel like that that's maybe one of the critical points. So if you say well I just want to be in shape. So you know, I get up every morning and, I don't know, I jog and I lift weights for an hour, I mean in shape. That's fine. But there's no, you know, unless you're a professional athlete or something, you don't really have an idea of constant improvement. So that becomes, you know, a worthwhile discipline but it's more of a chore. You know, people who love the martial arts and keep doing it, I feel like they have this idea of continual self-improvement. So you get, you know, you get an exercise benefit, you get sometimes a meditative benefit. If you practice, you know, in a group, of course, you have friends, you know, you have social interaction as well. You learn self-defense skills or like when I competed, you know, you're always looking for, you know, better technique or better ways to train. So there's a lot, a lot to it. And I feel like that self-cultivation kind of at least the hope or the idea of constant improvement might be the catalyst for that lifetime practice.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I can see that. I have a feeling we're gonna come back to it. This is a theme for your, but let's move on for the moment.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And let's consider your time in your training, your 40 however many years. And if you're like most martial artists... I would rather say every martial artist, you've got stories. You've got great stories - stories that make you laugh, stories that make you cry, stories that make you say I can't believe I did that, I was that dumb or anything like that. I know a lot of my stories have that heading; I can't believe that I was that dumb. But if I was to ask you for your favorite story from your time training, what would that be?





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**Tim Cartmell:**

Oh, wow. That's a tough question. I have a lot of stories. So I spent 11 years in China training besides the time I was here. And then when I came back, I started practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and I've done that the last 20-something years. So there's kind of... in my mind, I have... I mean they're not compartmentalized but I have like different areas, you know what I mean? There's like kind of... cause I haven't done the same thing the whole time besides... well I've done some of the same things, you know, but I've had whole different experiences. So you know, as a child, when I started training... At first it was... Like I said, I like the whole idea of these kind of structured exotic martial arts. But the underlining idea I've always had is I wanted to learn how to fight better like a lot of people. And you know, once you learn self-defense, it goes beyond that. Even to this day with my students, I know they all competed combat sport venues of different kinds but there has to be an underlying realism. So that's always fascinated me, like efficient ways to a body use. Like ways to develop your physicality and your personal kind of physical skill, and then like the most efficient ways of applying it. And there's different venues for that. So I've got stories, I mean, you know, as a child or when I was in my teens, that kind of thing, that kind of training. And then all the time in China and I competed. And then... you know, it's hard to say. I feel like it's unfair to, you know, if I talk about some teachers in my experiences and not others. And in my mind they're all equally as important at different times in my development. But my real training when I did Kung Fu, the style was self-defense based. We did forms, we did all kinds of like traditional exercises but everything was based on self-defense. So at the time, it was about those skills and how well they work for me. And then when I went to... I've lived in Taiwan most of the time, and Beijing part of the time and I practiced primarily Chinese Internal styles. But after a year in Taiwan, I started to fight in the Sanda, the Chinese kickboxing tournament. So I feel like I had... I got, you know, those kind of experiences where I had a realistic avenue of testing what I learned which I found fascinating. And then I came back like I said, and I started competing in a submissions grappling and Jiu Jitsu things. So I can't come up with one story but now you know my background, if you have any questions about any particular time, I can probably come up with a story.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, you know, you're talking about competing in, I think you said, full-contact kickboxing. I mean that's generally, when people talk about kickboxing, it is full-contact in China.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, some folks that we have that listen will understand what kickboxing looks like over here, the majority just based on numbers, haven't participated in any kind of full-contact competition. But when



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we talk about it in other countries, I have no idea what that looks like. So are there any stories from your time competing in that country?

### **Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah. I went to Taiwan and I trained. I practiced first in an art called Xing Yi Quan which is one of the kind of big three Internal Chinese martial arts in a fight school. And you know, I had a background, obviously, as a kid but I never competed. The Kung Fu I did as a kid was it's geared completely towards kind of, you know, self-defense, things in the street and that kind of thing. There was no competition. So I was there about nine months training and my teacher just told me one day he entered me in a tournament. And in all honesty, I totally didn't want to do it. I felt like I hadn't enough training. But it was interesting; their idea was you know, you've trained almost a year, you need to go fight. Which had a big influence on my subsequent coaching. You know, competing is not for everyone but, you know, if you're, especially if you're younger and you're doing something martial, by definition, you want to see if you can fight it, right? So anyway, I went to compete and I got like, I don't know, 4th place. I got beat up pretty bad and it changed... that one experience, though - fighting under those circumstances for that kind of pressure - had a huge influence on my subsequent personal training and to do this day on how I coach. So this is an interesting thing. Sometimes you have this kind of seminal experiences in your life that at first, you know, it's out of your comfort zone and you think, oh, you know. In your subconscious you might think, that would be a great experience, but your rational mind is like, this is gonna be tough or you have an ego involved and you think, what if I lose, and that kind of thing. But sometimes, you need to pull the trigger. And for me, it kind of changed my life. So [14:57](#) after that, when these situations would come up, I'd be more likely, you know, even if I was nervous about it or my ego got involved, I would be more likely to say, that's exactly what I need. So after that one experience, I did okay but I didn't win. And after that, I had a very, very clear idea of what I needed to do to improve and even my mindset - everything. And so I went back to train and then I competed for the next couple of years and I never lost. I won every subsequent tournament, and I don't feel like I was a talented. There's just a lot of people that I beat. I feel like my initial experience and the way I reacted to it kind of was the catalyst for my entire kind of change of point of view in training. So if I could offer advice to anyone, that would be it as well. Sometimes, you need to get out of your comfort zone and do things like that. And when you lose, I lost my first tournament and yet it was kind of a life changing in a way. So that was a good experience. So Sanda, in Taiwan at the time, Chinese kickboxing, there's amateur and professionals. In Taiwan at the time, you could punch, kick, knee, elbow and throw, and there was no ground fighting. So we're just kind of like, you know, pretty much all in stand-up fighting. So there's rules, obviously, but it was fairly realistic and it was full-contact. And we have to fight several times in a day back then. Like if you fight, you advance, you know, from like quarter or semi-quarter, semi, all the way to the finals. So it was a pretty good test of endurance and just kind of mental toughness. So that's kind of like the biggest experience I've had. And I have a lot of like remarkable teachers. I talk about this a fair amount, there's a real demarcation now between people. They want to do combat sports so they want to practice MMA or any kind of combat sport. And then people who do what they would term traditional martial arts. And people would sometimes feel like they're almost opposite ends of the spectrum like they're opposite in polarity. I think that's totally not true. And I feel that people who do



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combat sports, if they find the right teacher and a relevant material, there's a lot of really good things you can learn from traditional training that maybe a combat sport athletes discount when they first see it. I see it with my own students, you know. So now I'm the head instructor to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy and I teach Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Submissions Wrestling, and I coach some Pro MMA fighters and other grappling coach. And it's hard to convince these young like super athletic kids that some of these practices have many benefit, because it doesn't look mainstream and you know, at first glance they don't seem to be super practical. I understand that. So my advice as well is, no matter what you're into, it's good to look at different things. All the traditional sport fighting, come from traditional martial arts originally, right? I think there is a lot to be said for it so I have like eternal gratitude to all the teachers that I had for all the different aspects of the training. So when I was in Taiwan as well, we did some fairly hard, it was hardcore training but the internal has a whole different... they approach the training from a different stance as some of the other styles, like what people call the harder styles. So that was also... I had some teachers that have been through, you know, a lot of stuff, and they fought a lot. They've been to the war, and they can do incredible... like people don't believe me sometimes when I tell them like the kind of things they could do. So a lot of these things are possible if you have the right training and you put in the work. So I would... just as a take-away from all that training and my competition experience, it's not a good idea to discount things that have been around a long time that people have been doing because they wouldn't have been around that long if they didn't work. So that's kind of my full-contact experience. After a couple of years, I stopped fighting and I went to train... I went to Mainland China and trained. And I trained with... It's fortunate to find some very, very famous, older - they're all gone now - but older masters that have been around from the early 20th Century when they trained. So that was also interesting. There's very few people that train in old school to that level anymore. So I was fortunate to see what they're actually capable of.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now when that word is kicked around - old-school or traditional or however you want to slice it - people have different ideas of what that means. I started martial arts in the early '80s. And from my understanding, my instructors came from a fairly old-school kind of, I don't know if I want to say hardcore, but at least a heavy tradition and some difficult training and I experienced that as a young child. But I've heard stories from other people that make what I went through seem trivial, and then I know other people who look at the training that I went through and think, who would ever even go through that? So when you talk about, you know, that old-school level of training that you experienced from these great masters on Mainland China, what would that look like to the rest of us? What would we see?

### **Tim Cartmell:**

Well first of all, we have a lot of time, you know? When I was in Asia, I worked enough to make ends meet but I train a lot, hours and hours a day because that's what I was there for. So one of the things is the sheer volume of time that they put in. So nowadays, I mean, you'd have to be a career martial artist or a professional combat sport athlete, I think, to have that much time. So it's not really fair actually to



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compare, you know, like if you do martial arts as a hobby and even if you train, you know, four or five days a week for an hour or two, you can't compare it. Because these guys just... and I did as well at the time, you know, we trained hours a day. We trained, you know, up to six hours sometimes a day. So that's one thing. Now obviously if you have a method and your stuff is legit, if you train that much, you're gonna get good at it, you know. And if you have a lot of talent, you're gonna get really good at it. So one thing is people have to understand is, they have a lot of time; they were training a lot. So the traditional training that I did with them, from the internal perspective, there's a lot of emphasis to put on specific ways to kind of cultivate and generate power. So there's a lot of emphasis put on your alignment, kind of your structure of alignment, your posture, you know, how you old your body and certain movement patterns. So there's a lot of standing in the beginning, you know, holding different [22:21](#) in Chinese, like holding different positions; a lot of it. We do quite a bit of that, and it's torture, actually. In all honesty, too, I'm not really sure if standing as long as we did is even necessary. Maybe it's partly just mental, I feel. Because you know, it's a grueling thing to stand in these positions for so long. So that was part of it - a big part. And then, you know, endless repetitions of basic movements was another big thing, so not very exciting at first. But it ingrains these movement patterns so they become fundamentally first nature. And then, you know, you go on from there and then forms - practicing traditional forms - then you take the technique out of the form. And the one thing they have that I feel would be a benefit to a lot of combat sport athletes is you can kind of breakdown martial training. You have solo training, obviously, so you gotta condition; do your forms, do whatever your strength training, all that kind of stuff, and then there's training with a partner. So training with a partner can range from doing cooperative technique training all the way to full-contact sparring. And I find now, what I see in a lot of schools, a lot of academies, traditional as well, there's not enough time spent in what I call like the mid-range of training so what you'll get is... for example, a lot of say a Jiu Jitsu class, which have limited time, you'll teach a student a technique and they'll practice it on each other with absolutely no resistance. So you know, say you learned how to do some kind of joint lock and you'll practice it, I'll practice it. We'll go back and forth till we get the idea, you know, maybe learn a couple of techniques, and then bam, you're sparring. And then it's 100% resistance right off the bat. So I feel if there's time constraints, that's really the only logical way to go. But if you have a little more time or you can schedule a time better, one of the training methods that we did - traditional training methods - they have between the not the completely compliant training and the 100% non-compliant, full sparring training. In between that, there's various training methods and levels of force that we did a lot. And I feel like this is a missing link in a lot of people's training. For example, you know, everyone knows in Tai Chi have things like pushing hands, right? So pushing hands is an example that everyone would know. It's not completely cooperative but there's parameters. You're basically testing each other's sensitivity and balance and you know, your frame and power. But since it's not full-contact, no one's getting hit or throwing down hard. You're a little calmer and you have more time to, you know, focus on certain variables, such sensitivity. So that would be an example. Of course you have to go beyond that. If you're in a martial art and you want to fight and you never practiced really fighting, you're not gonna be very good at it. It's like any other endeavor. You gotta approximate your [25:18](#) as closely as possible. But there's different ways to train to get there, right? So that would be one example. Or there's different levels of sparring. So sometimes, when I practice Xing Yi Quan in the school, we would have drills like, you know, I'm only allowed to punch, you're only allowed to throw. So you've got





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to be able to defend yourself and take me down without hitting me, and I have to practice hitting you and and not let you take me down, or maybe I can only kick and you can only punch. So these things are kind of intermediate - not completely cooperative, not completely full sparring - 25:56 but they force you to work on variables you might not work on. For example, if I really like to punch, you know, and every time we spar full-contact, I'll just try to punch you, right? So my grappling is lacking. So I'm forced to work on my grappling. When you say, okay all you can do is grapple, he's gonna punch you, that kind of thing. When I practiced in 26:14 there was a long or quite a big range of these practices, and I feel like they really maximized the training time. So that was a big part of the training, like different levels of these drills. Or you know, it Jiu Jitsu, it has its counterpart. You might just drill a position or you might drill where, you know, no matter when you were sparring but all I'm allowed to do is arm-bar. So these kinds of drills, I feel should be practiced. This should be most of the partner training. And then, you know, full-contact, 100% sparring needs to be done but maybe not as much as some schools do it. You know, maybe some of these intermediate drills would be with help then improved a little bit quicker. So that was traditional training. And not that modern training doesn't have that kind of thing but you know, that's where I was first introduced to it. So a lot of alignment work, a lot of basics, a lot of holding positions, a lot of repetitive single movements, a lot of form repetition, and then drilling techniques, drilling techniques, and then these other practices. So that's basically how it went. And then, you know, like I said, my school expected you to fight, you know, go and fight like go and compete, that's it.

### Jeremy Lesniak:

Right on. I do want to speak a little bit to what you brought up with the transition, the often rapid transition from very light, we'll say slow or no resistance in partner techniques, and then taking the largely into free sparring and often heavier sparring, you know, heavier contact. And it's true. I see a lot of schools that don't have that transitional work, and I was lucky enough that I grew up with some of that and anyone that has had me come to their class from teaching anything combat, really, that's actually where we spend most of our time. And I just want to point out and I'm fairly certain you'll agree but because it's an important concept; it is the lack of this training in that middle space that holds people back. Because what do we tend to do if we're put in... The more intense the situation, the more likely we are to fall back on the things we're most comfortable with. And that doesn't give people the opportunity to improve the things that they're just kind of figuring out. If you're throwing a kick at their head at anything approaching at high velocity or power they're not gonna be experimenting with the technique that they just learned 20 minutes ago.

### Tim Cartmell:

Oh, absolutely correct. Yeah. I think, too. It comes in handy, this kind of parameters, putting parameters or, you know, limits on what people are training. It's like the curse of blue belts in Jiu Jitsu. So people will train for a year or two and they'll have decent skill, right, in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu for example. But then what happens every time they spar, they go right to their best game and that's just... that's all of it. So you know, say the guy's favorite is guard. So every time he goes to spar, he pulls guard. He might end up on top, he might sweep the guy and might get on top but he really, really likes to be on his back. And you



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know, some people never go on... like a lot of my guys who wrestle, they never want to go on their back because it's foreign for them. So you need to make them do it. You need to work once you have a game, as well, not only with beginners. Once you're decent and you know, so you're winning like that. So your brain, of course, likes success so it's gonna keep going back, to the back but it's gonna slow down your overall training. So you can end up, like in Jiu Jitsu, where the guy who is... you know, got a brown belt guard and he's got a barely, you know, a white or blue belt kind of top game. So you have to tell someone. My coach did it with me. They're like okay, for the next six months, you can't go on your back. I'm like, what? You know, what am I... So I'm forced to do the up. So those kind of things, even they're just generalized like that. They don't have to be... you know, you don't have to go what are the specific drills? You can just... I'll tell you what, it's a general rule of thumb. You want to get better at what you're doing? Practice what you're not good at the most.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Completely agree. I've said it almost in those words here on this show. We're birds of a feather when it comes to that stuff. Now when you think back, well you talked about China, you talked a little bit about being here, but we're talking mostly about good stuff and good memories. So let's flip it a little bit. When you think about the times in your life that have been really difficult, I'd like you tell us about one of them and how you were able to lean to on your martial arts, however you'd want to define that, to get through?

### **Tim Cartmell:**

I mean it happens all the time, right? Life's like that so there's... it's up and down. I mean, you know, I think it's... instead of a specific incident, I feel like... The thing is the training and the kind of constant blows to your ego, and you know, the injuries I've had. You know, you have a lot of injuries when you train in a little bit harder level. And you have to do a lot of that stuff. And I think what happens is that, it just becomes part of your nature; actually part of you and your psychic. It will be there all the time. So, I mean, it could be... everyday we have, you know, something's not gonna go right, you know what I mean? So I feel like it becomes part of your nature. And then it's just gonna be there. It's just part of your training. And then, you know, how we handle things... I feel... Some people might make it more violent, for example, it's not a magic, it's not like a fantasy for, you know, people are gonna be Zen-like stoic, take everything in a stride. It depends on, I think, maybe your original personality and your makeup as well. But for most of us, if you have a discipline that long, you've trained that long, especially if you're doing things that are challenging or sparring with people that are stronger than you, competing at a higher level or even any level, you start to understand that there's gonna be step-backs and blows to your ego. And then what you need to do is get over it and then improve, whatever that motivation is. So I think I was kind of... it's gonna be kind of the best example but this is true to me. I was fairly violent as a kid and that my reaction would be to tend towards, you know, aggression, I think. And over the years of training, I feel like it was very beneficial; part of it was just the discipline of training but part of it was, you know, you get ass kicked a lot. Or when you're training, you start to realize, you know, there's always someone stronger than you, always someone more skilled than you and it's probably a good idea



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to be polite in general. So even from that aspect, and yet very young, I learned that. I was like you know, it's not a good idea to be overly aggressive or to kind of look for trouble. There's always, you know, you can get in real trouble. And I feel like it's kind of like the Yin and Yang of that whole education. And then along with the discipline of training, I feel like you know, you'll get a different perspective on things and that becomes a part of you. So whatever happens, it's just a natural reaction now. And part of it is your temper by the training and the knowledge that, you know, there's no reason to cause any trouble.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know, we're hearing a bit of a theme for you at this... willingness to accept where you have the opportunity for growth. And not just an acceptance of it but almost an embracing of it. And it's something that I've found when I spoke to folks on the show. It's something that is more common among the folks who have accomplished the most, who have gone the furthest. When I think about the people in the business world that I look up to, they're often talking about their failure and what they learn. And the folks who maybe have done some things, maybe have some admiration from others who stay guard at about what they failed at and focused only on their successes, they don't seem to go this far. What do you think about that?

### **Tim Cartmell:**

Well I think that's true for the most part. I think, you know, you have to constantly check your ego. We all have egos and you have to have an ego, right? But you have to... I think a lot of it is people... In my experience in martial arts, for example, I've known exceptionally physically talented people who train and you know, they go to the academy and they go dominate when they spar but they'll never compete. Now this is an example; competition is not for everyone. It is not necessary for development. But just an example, and the reason they'll make every excuse in the world, though. And the reason is, they're just afraid to lose. And it's like, that's a chance you take, and everybody loses. And then at a certain point of their personal development in that kind of style, because it's you know, say it's a combat sport, they're never really gonna get it everything out of it they could have. Because their ego hold them back, you know what I mean? So I feel, whatever it is for you - I'm using competition as an example because that's what I know, kind of - but for example it could be learning the next difficult kata, who know, anything that... if you have that fear of failure, I feel it's what holds people back. And you have to be sensible. I mean, you know, there's a limit. You have to understand your limitations but if you're not feeling sometimes, you're just not trying hard enough. You're not trying in a high enough level; you're not challenging yourself enough. And if you're always doing really well and you're always winning or whatever, you need to go a little beyond that, right? Or it will be hard to have any kind of personal growth at it, so you're gonna fail. That's the way it is. And then you gotta see how you take it.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**



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My favorite quote on failure is from Michael Jordan. And I don't know if you're at all a basketball fan, I was a big basketball fan back when I was in high school, back in the '90s. And there's this quote, and I pulled it up while you were saying it because I think it's so poignantly speaks to what you're saying—"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career; I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take a game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life, and that is why I succeed."

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah, you got it up. Exactly. You know, even with that level of talent, right? So, you know, that's Michael Jordan.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Tim Cartmell:**

So you have to keep practicing. And I think, too, one of the important things is also you'll see in people of that level, no matter how good they get, they feel like they could be better. So it's like that... you know, you don't want to rest on your laurels kind of thing either. And it doesn't matter your age or your kind of inborn level of talent. It's for you, right? It's personal. So it doesn't mean you have to be the world's greatest basketball player. So you look at your own level of talent and your goals, and then you set goals, right? That you think are attainable. But they have to be above where you are now.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When you look back at your time training, you already kind of eluded to how you would answer this so I'm gonna shit it a little bit. You mentioned that the people that have been involved in training you that you consider their contributions fairly equal, that you needed all of them. So the question that I normally ask is who is the most influential but I've got a feeling that that question isn't gonna be a simple one for you to answer, and maybe doesn't take us in a good direction; that might be unfair to you. So I would say if there was one of them, cause you mentioned a number of them have passed away, if there was one you could have had, you know, another few weeks with, another chunk of time, somebody that you thought had lessons waiting for you that you didn't get to learn, who would that be?

**Tim Cartmell:**

I'll tell you but you're right, though. It's not because like any one individual was... everyone else kind of helped me a little on this and one person was kind of like the guy. Like I said, it's... and I'm not just saying it; it's true. I wouldn't be... whatever level I'm at or learn, you know, what I learned or had the





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accomplishments, whatever I've had, if it wasn't for my main teachers. But just as an interesting person, I had a teacher in Beijing, Liang Ke Quan, who was an old master. He was born in the Qing Dynasty, so. He trained with this very famous master growing up and he had this kind of super colorful story life. Like when the Japanese were occupying, he had a platform fight. You know, you go up on a [39:58](#) like a big platform and fight, and he was just a 19-year old kid and he beat kind of a famous Japanese fighter and he got well-known at the time. And then he fought in a war. He fought, of course, against the Japanese. And then after the war, he fought on the side of the Nationalist and of course, the Communist won. And he was a fairly famous guy then, as a soldier as well. So they imprisoned him for about 15 years and then they let him out but they made him stay at the actual prison he was in as janitor for the next 15 years. So it was like 30 years, basically, of being incarcerated. And you know, later on, when he was older, he was a famous teacher in Beijing. So he would tell me stories about his life... just the experience that you got, I mean it's like, if you saw it in a movie, you'd be like no way, one of those kind of things, to all the things he'd been through. So he was one... I don't know, he was just so interesting. And like to this day, sometimes, you know, I have my first-world problems and I'm complaining about some, you know, trivial, meaningless thing, I'll think about... if you think about guys like that, like all the stuff he'd went through and then you're like, it's not so bad. But he... he's done a lot of stuff and then he'd talk about the fights he'd had, and he was... you know, he had a couple of like challenge fights in the '70s and just kind of whip people. He was one of those guys. He trained old-school back in the day and his whole life was about martial arts and all the stuff he'd done in the war. And he tell me about the times he thought he was gonna die. He would say things as a matter fact like, you know, we were pinned down and we had no reinforcements and we ran out of bullets so I was waiting to die but then I didn't — that's how we we're talking. I'd be like wow, what kind of, you know, the life you had to have where those kind of things don't even seem very dramatic. So he was one person that... not even the martial arts part that, you know... It would be interesting just to spend time with someone like that, just to see how... just to talk about their life view and then all the things I can learn. That's a whole different generation, a different time, and I think there's no one like that left. So he would be, you know, if I could bring one back, he would be the one. Just to be around him as a person, I think.

### Jeremy Lesniak:

And if you could add one person to the list people that you've trained with that you haven't - anywhere in the world, anywhere in time, any style - who would that be?

### Tim Cartmell:

I think my main Brazilian Jiu Jitsu teacher, you know, I still see him. He's [42:51](#) He's fantastic. And I've had a lot of really good teachers but I trained for a time with Rickson Gracie who is, I mean probably the greatest grappler of modern times. So going to his classes, and Rickson's still... he's kind of semi-retired now. He doesn't teach open classes as much. He teaches seminars, still. I mean he... and I would like to in the future if I had an opportunity, I would train more with Rickson. So he'd be one person that comes to mind



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. Yeah, an absolute legend and you know, BJJ is one of the disciplines that I've trained in the least. I think I've got three months to my credit so I can... I've done enough of it to appreciate it and to understand the difficulty, and further appreciate those that are passionate in their training for it. But you know, man, I watch guys like that, I get to see some video and we've even been blessed to have some incredible BJJ practitioners come on the show and you know, when I watch a video of them, just blows my mind. It is poetry in motion.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yep, yeah, yeah. So Rickson's the... not only kind of the best at doing it, kind of fighting or grappling. It's just his... he has a whole different look on it. And the way he approaches the art is... I mean if depends on kind of what you like and how you learn but for me, it's completely fascinating. Just to see the though process and how he approached it. So yeah, that will be Rickson.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's lighten it up a little bit. If we talk about martial arts movies, you got any favorite in there? Are you at all a fan of Kung Fu flick?

**Tim Cartmell:**

Oh, yeah. Of course. I'd still have to say my all-time favorite is Enter the Dragon. Because when I was a kid, that's when Bruce Lee was making his movies. So I just... it's probably a bias now from just being a child. But I think you can't beat Enter the Dragon as a martial arts movie.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's fantastic. Now, testing the theory, is that the first Bruce Lee movie you saw?

**Tim Cartmell:**

No, no. When I was a little boy, The Green Hornet was on. And I can vaguely remember, I was very small, but I can still remember though, we watched The Green Hornet. Nobody cared about The Green Hornet. We went to see Kato kick somebody in the face. So that was my first, I remember, Bruce Lee. And there was... his early movies came out and you know, they're all great. Even his earliest movies were good but when Enter the Dragon came out, I was a little bit older and it was kind of Western [45:47](#) and that the whole... So that's gotta be my all-time favorite martial arts. And there's a lot of good movies. I remember the original of Shaolin Temple came out, the Jet Li movie, I thought was really fantastic. You



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know, as a kind of traditional Chinese martial arts, I think that's gotta be my number two. So those are my two favorite.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice. Yeah, the theory that you're one of the few who breaks it, is that the first Bruce Lee movie you see is your favorite Bruce Lee movie.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah, I know. What was the first one that... I forgot the name. When he goes to Thailand and he beats up the drug bust guys. That was the first one I saw. Like the Chinese Connection, was it, or Big Boss. Whatever it was.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

They blur for me, I'll admit.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah, that was the first one but yeah. Nothing gonna top Enter the Dragon.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, no. We did a whole episode on it. I'm sorry, I cut you off.

**Tim Cartmell:**

I just said I know every line in the movie.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, nice. I won't test you on that. I'm sure you know more than I do. Yeah, we did a whole episode on that, just kind of dug deep. And this might be a good time to let listeners know, if you're new to the show, we do have links and show notes and everything over at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and any of the stuff that we talk about like this, there will be more material. Now is Bruce Lee your favorite actor? Martial arts actor? Or is there somebody a little more modern?

**Tim Cartmell:**



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Yeah, I'd have to say probably. You know, when I lived in Taiwan as well, Jackie Chan was kind of in his prime, you know? I love Jackie Chan as well and I think his movies were... specially the movies like through the kind of late '80s, early '90s, his Chinese movies are very much for Chinese audiences. You know, there's a lot of humor in them and that kind of thing but they're great. I mean they're great entertainment. And that level of, you know, his stunts and the things... You know, Jackie Chan is like, you put him in a room and he looks around and he can just creep. You know how he can create such fantastic movement is also great. So I would say... I mean as just an actor for martial arts, it might be Jackie Chan, my favorite. [48:02](#) I thought were great.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think when people talk about Bruce Lee, they talk about Bruce Lee for his creativity, his fluidity with his choreography and just his on-screen presence. When they talk about Jackie Chan, they're talking about not only his combat skill but his ability to string humor through his fights even if they're not funny. Somehow, there's this playful element to him that I think we all appreciate.

### **Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah, exactly. That's why he's... He's still good. I mean he's Jackie Chan

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

He's Jackie Chan, yeah. And then the final of our, let's say, cultural questions, how about books? Martial arts books? Any in your library that you might recommend to the folks listening?

### **Tim Cartmell:**

Oh yeah, I've got a lot of martial arts books. I mean it would depend on what they're into, you know what I mean? I mean there's hundreds of books. There's lots of really good books. It depends... I mean books, it's hard to say. There's like the classic books that were written by the masters and then there's books on history and philosophy, and then there's how-to books. I mean I couldn't pick. If you would depend on what someone's interest was and you know, they want history, they want technique, they want, you know, whatever and what style, that'd be hard to say. There's so many.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's pick one. Even if it's not going to be relevant to everyone that would be listening. The one book that comes to mind that kind of came out of nowhere for you, that you said oh, you know, I'll read this. And then you put it down and went wait a second, I wasn't expecting to get that out of it, or to get much out of it, or this has completely made me look differently at X. Any surprises?





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**Tim Cartmell:**

It's hard to say. You know, I'll tell you... Nah, I mean it's kind of like asking me about my favorite teacher. In my mind, there's too many different variables, I guess, to look at it. If you ask about a specific style of something, maybe I could. But I don't know. I mean I've read literally hundreds of martial arts books. I really couldn't say.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, that's fair. That's fair. Now let's talk about the future. We've talked a lot about the past. Let's put our eyes forward. You're still teaching, right?

**Tim Cartmell:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You're still training? Everyday.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Clearly, you're still passionate about martial arts. You can teach but the moment your training... I mean when someone's training everyday, they're training because they love it.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't know, I can't think of a cause or reason where someone would be training everyday for decades and doing it despite their dislike of it. That wouldn't make sense.

**Tim Cartmell:**

No.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So the question then is why? When you look forward, are there goals? Are there things you're trying to accomplish? Is there a next level? What is your why?

**Tim Cartmell:**

It's like we talked about in the beginning. I mean the basic level, it's how you stay in shape, because this is what I know. I don't lift weights and I don't run and I don't do... I just practice like, you know, the things that I do. And most of it is martial arts based. There's that. And then, I'm a coach. I mean I'm a professional martial arts teacher. So my duty is to be the best teacher you can be, right? I mean for your students, that's only... Like you just said, say you're good at martial arts, you51:49 and you're retired. And now you teach because you're well-known or you teach whatever and you just kind of phony it in, you should get another career, right? That's not fair to the people that are coming to your classes. So I try to streamline my training. I teach a lot seminars. So I have these... It's been fortunate for my development as a teacher so, you know, you say you have only so many hours with the group. You're never gonna maybe see some of these guys again. Like how can you convey useful information that you feel like they can with them and put it to anything they do? So I look at it from that point of view. And then of course, my on-going students, you know. You want to make them as good at whatever it is as quickly as possible. And of course, the student has to do the work but you've got to give them the tools to do it. And then I also feel as a coach, every person is different. People will learn in certain ways. Some people, you have to show them. Some people, you have to do it on them, some people can watch. But, you know, we all have individual needs, right? And I think it's the job of a teacher to pay attention to everyone and try to, you know, within the time constraints and the class, to help up on as an individual. So from the teaching perspective, I don't think you can ever be the very best teacher. You gotta keep streamlining your process and, you know, getting better at teaching. And the only way to do that is if you're good at it. How are you going to teach something you're not good at? You don't know, right? So I try to improve my... And as you get older, too. Physicality will start to drop off, right? You're not gonna be as fast when you're whatever age, you know, '80s when you're 20. But there are other elements you can improve upon, I feel. So I look a lot like that. Like in my own training, you know, I try to keep the physicality at the highest level I can keep it but then there's other variables. Like how about sensitivity, how about making every technique as efficient as possible or you know, you seek out instruction when you don't know something - that's the self-cultivation part we talked about. I feel like that improvement is exciting still for me. I feel like I can improve in whatever area and that's exciting for me. Then I try to, you know, kind of use that information ability in teaching my students. So it's kind of like you're a parent. You see people get something and it doesn't matter what level. I had a student one time, middle-aged guy. He worked heavy construction, he was super strong. And for the life of him, he couldn't back roll. I don't know why, for whatever reason. And like, we worked on it, we worked on it. And it took him... I don't know how long it was, it took him maybe three or four months. And he back-rolled and then the whole class started clapping. It's super satisfying as a teacher. And then you know how pros win an MMA fight, that's what was happening when I got him to back-roll. So you know, you want to kinda help people out with whatever they need. And that's my profession part. Because now, I



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retired from competition now so it's all about, besides my own personal development, now it's more about my students.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Makes sense. It's a great why. We progress so much, I would even say more, when we focus on serving others. I don't know about you but when I started teaching, my skill progressed...

**Tim Cartmell:**

That's true.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

... rapidly.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The more you focus on other people, and I can hear this, you're talking about training others when you said that it at kind of the top of the show and you're talking about working the grappling side with some pro MMA fighters. I mean there was a bit of joy that came through in your voice. I can hear how much that resonates for you; how important that is.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, like I said, if you're only teaching because you know martial arts, you're making a living, I feel like that's not really the right reason. So you really... Here's the thing, if every teacher made at least some of their students better than them and then they did the same thing, the whole art is on the upward spiral of getting better, right? You don't want to hold back or you don't want to keep anything. Or sometimes teachers get a little bit jealous, you know, of their students. It's like that's a weird thing. If you teach someone and they practice hard and they do well, just from the pure ego standpoint, you get a credit, right? So I don't understand why everyone doesn't want their students to excel.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I don't either. 56:38 when we talk about people that hold back knowledge or anything like that. I can't empathize with that; I don't understand it.

**Tim Cartmell:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now if folks want to reach you, if they want to find you online - social media, websites - what do you got?

**Tim Cartmell:**

I have my website. It's [shenwu.com](http://shenwu.com). And then the academy I work at is ACE Jiu Jitsu. So it's [acejiujitsu.com](http://acejiujitsu.com). You can look this up. I teach in Southern California in Orange County. So if anyone's ever in Southern California and want to come by and train, they're more than welcome to come.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome. Great. Now, I appreciate your time here today. You've been really open and you know, I've had a good time talking and I'm sure the listeners have as well. But if I could trouble you for one more thing, what final words would you share with everyone today?

**Tim Cartmell:**

I think just to reiterate what I talked about before. I think no matter what you practice, it's a good idea to be open-minded, you know what I mean? And you know, if you're interested in martial arts in general, it's good to be interested in any information and look at other things. I think cross-training is a good idea for most people. I feel that you also need to be clear on... even sometimes people practicing martial arts a long time, they don't seem to be completely clear on why they're training or what they want out of it. And I think they love martial arts and they have a vague idea of why they're doing it. But I think if you can focus your training and energy towards more specific goals, it will help expedite the whole improvement process. For example, do I want to compete or do I do this? Is it only self-cultivation? Do I do it for self-defense? All perfectly valid reasons to train. And I think sometimes, you know, you just have to be clear on those kinds of things. And then you have short-term goals and you have your long-term goals. And not that you can't do other things or train for the reasons, whatever. But I feel having a clear purpose is invaluable in maximizing like your training time and taking advantage of your talents. And the last thing is, we said before, whatever you're doing, you need to sometimes, in whatever format, it's a good idea going out of your comfort zone a little bit and test yourself. And you





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know, it might be harder at the time, but I feel in the long run, you're gonna find that it was one of the, you know, some of the best things you could ever do for your own development.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Quite often martial artists will get themselves into camps. You know, this is better than that or this is the right way and this is the wrong way. And I didn't hear any of that from Mr. Cartmell. What I heard was a genuine openness to training in many forms with many kinds of people, and a realization that whatever element to his training he lack the most, that was the place for the most growth, the most opportunity and the place that we was going to focus. It's something that I've been conscious of myself, something that we've talked about on the show so it was really refreshing to hear it expressed so articulately. So thank you for that as well as the multitude of other insights that you shared with us today, sir. I appreciate your time. I appreciate you being on the show.

If you want to check out the show notes, head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). You can find them all there, episode 354. There's some good stuff there, trust me. Check it out. Don't forget, you can find all of our products at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). Use the code PODCAST15 to save 15% on maybe our new luminary uniform or one of the variety of types, styles of protective equipment that we've got. Or if you're listening to this in the future, that code's still going to work and we've got a ton of other stuff. Oh, and you can use it on the shirts and the hoodies and all the other good stuff we've got. You can use it on anything, and we do free shipping. Enough trying to sell you, though I do appreciate those of you supporting the show in that way. If you want to reach us on social media, we're @whistlekick - Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram. And you can email me directly, [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). We'd love to know your suggestions for future guests. I always appreciate that. That's all for today. Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.