



Episode 82 – Mr. Michael Rowe | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello, everyone. It's episode 82 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest, Mr. Michael Rowe. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, and I founded whistlekick. I'm also your host for Martial Arts Radio. whistlekick, as so many of you know already, makes the world's best sparring gear as well as really great apparel and accessories, all for practitioners and fans of the traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners, and thank everyone coming back. If you're not familiar with our products, you should take a look at what we make. When it comes to comfortable sparring gear, that's something we do really well, especially with our sparring helmet. It's more ventilated, more flexible, and lasts a lot longer than the stuff our competition makes. So, go have a look at whistlekick.com. Now, if you want to see the show notes for this episode of any of our past episodes, that's all on a different website and that's whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. While you're over there, sign up for the newsletter. We offer special content to everyone that subscribes, and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show. We only send out a few a month so don't worry about us spamming you. You don't have to worry about us selling your information, and sometimes, we even throw in a coupon for you. So, check that out. As you know, we periodically check out the reviews people leave for us, and today's comes from BMC1128 on iTunes. And it says, awesome podcast. Great guests with inspiring stories. Great job by the host - thank you very much - and I'm a big fan of the Thursday shows too. Thanks for putting it together. Well, thank you for leaving that review. And of course, we appreciate all of you that leave reviews. Go ahead, check it out. And remember, if we read yours on the air, just shoot us an email info at whistlekick.com, and we can coordinate getting you some free stuff as a thank you.

Now, today's episode is with Mr. Michael Rowe, and he's a martial artist with about as diverse training history as anyone I've ever seen. With experience in Karate, Ninjitsu, Taekwondo, Hapkido, and a whole bunch more, and all that under a lot of different martial arts instructors. Mr. Rowe really brings a lot to the table. He's an insightful man, and his stories are wonderful. They're entertaining, they're honest, and they're real. So, sit back, and let's hear from today's guest. Mr. Rowe, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Michael Rowe:

Well, welcome to you too. I'm glad to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm glad to have you here. This is gonna be a lot of fun. We were just chatting before the episode started, and I've got a good feeling about this one. I think we're gonna have a good time. So, of course, I know a little bit of your background but the listeners have no idea - well, some of them hopefully do but, say, the majority of them don't know who you are. So, why don't you start off, tell us a little about who you are and your martial arts background and how you got started?



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Michael Rowe:

Well, as you said, my name is Michael Rowe, not the guy from Dirty Jobs, of course, as I always like to tell everyone, so they never get a misled impression. But I'm a simple rural American out here in the Midwest in Nebraska. Born, bred and raised out here in Omaha, Nebraska region. My martial arts background is... Well, it's kind of a 03:33 so-to-speak. But currently, I hold a rank in 03:37 blackbelt in combat Hapkido under Grandmaster John Pellegrini, and well as a 6th Degree Blackbelt in Taekwondo under various organizations that I've gone through as I've aged. Started in martial arts in 1980's, and I've done a variety of things throughout. I can go in-depth if you would like me to into how I got started. I love telling my martial arts origin story. It's almost...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, please. Those are always fun.

Michael Rowe:

It's almost as good as being, you know, Spiderman but not quite. Everyone that I know in my age 04:16 ever start martial arts. You know, they got intrigued by TV or television. I think it was the Kung Fu TV series. I kinda caught it in syndication. It was no longer first run when I first got it, but that whole wandering around the West, kicking and using your hands and feet versus guns. That always intrigued me. And I remember, it kinda became a part of my playtime all the time with my brother. We're always doing something unarmed combat-wise. And there was no real martial arts school in the farm town that I live in 04:55 of Nebraska. It was nothing there until about my 6th grade year. And we had one of these career day things where all of these people in business are around the area, came in and talked to us kids about what we could possibly be in our lives. You know, but usually we have the policemen, the firemen, construction workers, programmers and everything. And then there was a Karate instructor that came in, and he had just opened a small club in our town. And he gave a brief class - I think I learned how to do a front snap kick, and a high block, a punch, and how to yell. That was it. And it was like a drug; I was hooked right there and then. After that, of course, being in a small town dojo that he had. There wasn't a whole lot of people that are interested. It was like maybe a handful. So, he actually ended up closing after about six months. He went and moved somewhere else, and I think the Omaha, Nebraska which is still a bit of a dry for a 6th grader. I don't have a car. So, from there, I kinda just... I absorbed martial arts and I just loved them. I never really gave up my dream, but then I encountered high school sports - wrestling. And it was a lot like martial arts, as far as my mind was playing with. I mean, you 06:21 throw people around and wrestling around. It was very much like martial arts so I kinda went into that 06:28 And I wrestled in high school, I went to the State National Championships. I went... Developed a dream and decided I was gonna go to Iowa State University, and that's where I was gonna wrestle. And no one was gonna talk me out of it - not my mom, not my dad, not my high school wrestling coach. I was good but I wasn't that good. I can say that now, but back then I didn't. I was good enough. I went to Iowa State, and I tried out. I was accepted as a walk-on to the team. But I was behind two awesome wrestlers, Kevin Jackson and Michael Van Arsdale. Kevin Jackson was actually the head



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coach for the Iowa State University Wrestling Team right now. So, he won an Olympic gold in freestyle wrestling. He was an NCAA Champion All-American. So, if you ever look back and go, oh, yeah. Well, makes sense why you didn't really get anywhere on the team. you were right behind somebody that was awesome. And we were in the same... We were both freshmen at Iowa State at that time. So, I wasn't going anywhere. But, one day, I've been working with coach, and he gave me an assignment. He said, do 1000 single leg takedowns on the dummy that was on the wall. And I had just finished 1000 on each side - 1000 on the left, 1000 on the right. I was a puddle of goo laying on the mat right by the door. There was nobody else except the coaches left in the practice room at that time. My eyes are closed, and I hear a Korean accent. Excuse me - I opened my eyes and looked up. I see this little Oriental man wearing, you know, martial arts uniform with a blackbelt on. I went oh, we have martial arts here? And he... I moved just enough so he could get in, and I talked to the assisting coach, Ed 08:23 at that time, and he said... I asked who that was. And he said, that's Master Park. He teaches the Taekwondo and Hapkido and Judo programs here at Iowa State. I said, really? Cool. Can you introduce me? Well, he's talking to Coach Anderson right now. He's the Judo adviser. So, why don't you go ask Coach Anderson to do it? And so, I did. And Master Park looked at me, saw a 167 lbs. I had to be as pale as a ghost by that time. I had already done 3 hours' worth of wrestling practice and look like something a cat 09:01 He said, you should try Judo, it will help your wrestling. I said, great. But I'm dead tired. I'm going like, when is it? He said, in about five minutes. Oh. Do I need a uniform? He just said, excuse me one second. He ducked into the small room off the wrestling area, came back and he handed me uniform. He said, here you go, ready to go. I was like, oh... My mind is going, like, okay. I was hoping to at least get a day as a rest and try to figure this out. But no. I went to an hour and a half of Judo. And that... I was hooked to Judo now. Three blocks of Karate, I was hooked on Karate. And hour and a half of Judo, I was hooked. I'm totally dead. I'm not ready to 09:51 myself often. I crawled down the stairs to go down in the locker room. And I hear his voice calling from the back of the room again. You're not gonna stick around for Hapkido? I looked at him, I was like... I just did three hours of wrestling, and hour and a half of your Judo, and quite frankly, I don't if I have... Yes, sir. I'm coming in Hapkido. Why not? Yes, sir. I answered myself. I took the Hapkido class. It wasn't quite as intense physically. It was... I mean, we weren't going at the same pace like we were in Judo who's a little... I got a little bits of breathing room. But I got done with the Hapkido class and I'm like, all right. And I guess, no more classes today 10:37 you're not gonna talk to me on this sticking around and do another hour or something. Well, that's good. You come back tomorrow and do Taekwondo? I went, oh, of course. I'm gonna come back. Who am I kidding? Myself? You know why I was thinking about it, because since I was in 6th grade, I've been dying to do martial arts. Now, I have a gentleman just throwing it at me. It was like, I couldn't believe. So, you know, all in one group 11:04 By the next day, I came in. He handed me a completely different uniform, because what the Judo or Hapkido uniform were the same. They all have those heavyweight Judo gis. The Taekwondo one was a little bit more lightweight. A little difference. So, I did Taekwondo and the next thing I know... I mean, I was there everyday of the week after wrestling practice, and swimming. I think that was the best shape of my life. If a person could really become Batman, I probably, physically-wise, can't handle with that part. I just didn't have the billions of dollars to have a Batmobile and the Kevlar uniform. Physically, I was at the top of my peak there, but I did eventually have to come and make a decision that my wrestling wasn't going anywhere. So, I dropped out of the wrestling team and focused entirely on Taekwondo, Hapkido and Judo at Iowa State. And I am so very, very glad I did. That's how I



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really got started in the martial arts. And eventually, Park gave me a love for the arts that has, today, not abated. It's still on a throw inside my belly, eager to share with anyone I have ever come across.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great. Now, how long were you overlapping? How long was wrestling part of your life as well as the other martial arts?

Michael Rowe:

About a year. About a year is all really. I started... I remember wrestling practice started August 24th of 1986 for me at Iowa State. September 8th of that same year is when I took the first martial arts class with Master Park. And I think it was May when after Iowa State actually beat University of Iowa for the National Championship. We took away the 10th one in a row from them [13:00](#) Well, I loved it. It was all right. Okay, I was part of this great team. I really recognized I was contributing very little to the team. I mean, I still love the sport and I still participate in wrestling. I just don't compete. I have little kids programs here in town wherever I've been a little bit still. But I've never been as in-dept as I was at Iowa State.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. So, I'm curious. During that time where you're practicing essentially four different combat arts, what were the benefits of training those different disciplines simultaneously and what were some of the challenges.

Michael Rowe:

Oh. Let me start with the challenges. Let me give you some wonderful challenges right now. There's a major fundamental difference between Judo and wrestling that didn't enter my head. I'm actually amazed it took me almost a year before I decided to give up one. In wrestling, you need to keep your head up almost all the time when you're on the mat. When you're actually grappling or rolling around the ground, you want to try and keep your head up to prevent you from getting turned over on your back and pinned. However, if you keep your head up at Judo, you're gonna get choked out so fast it's not even funny. In my first class, I came in. I've been there in Judo. I get partnered up with this little... I didn't move very fast. I'm 6'2", 167 lbs. at the time and here's a little female. She was about... I'd say she was 5' if anything. She was about 130 lbs. She wasn't lightweight but I still have [14:45](#) length. I've been wrestling since I was in the 6th grade. I thought, wow. I'll take it easy on her. And [14:55](#) did that kick in. My head is up, we're on the ground. I'm not thinking about being choked yet; this is my first workout. And next thing I know, I'm unconscious and I'm feeling slaps on my face and I'm hearing, you okay? You okay, Michael? I looked up and it was Master Park just smiling at me. My first introduction that Koreans think being choked out is hilarious. Master Park did it to me so often. Every time he woke me up, he had



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a smile on his face. It had to be part of their sense of humor, I think, from the Korean Judo College. But that major fundamental was... Okay. So, I would wrestle from 3 to about 5:30. Judo was at 6. Okay. I would get into one habit, keep your head up. Keep your heap up. Get choked out about halfway through Judo. I 15:46 about keeping my head down, keeping my head down. Next day of wrestling practice, my head's down. I'm getting pinned again. Oh, get my head back up. Get my head back up. Two wrestling practices would go before I could worry about that, and then I'd have to get back in Judo. Getting choked out again; get your head down. That was a constant cycle. So, while there are so many similarities between Judo and wrestling, there was one fundamental area. It was almost impossible for a beginner in Judo, mind you, to get that connect - to go okay, this is where I'm at, I need to do this 16:20 this is where I'm at, I need to do this. And it took me a while before I probably got that dichotomy taken care of. In terms of... I found that the wrestling helped me out tremendously in terms of Judo and Taekwondo competition, however. I was very, very used to the concept. I mean, I've been competing in wrestling. Like I said, I started back in junior high, 6th grade year, and I've been wrestling. So, while there was no martial arts... There was a lot of similarities about strategy that would work very well in terms of being aggressive, giving way, push-and-pull and pull-and-push - that kind of thing - that was very fundamental in martial arts training. I had already developed a good understanding of ring management competition-wise, good sportsmanship - those aspects of the martial arts. Whether wrestling or Judo, Hapkido, Taekwondo, they were all the same. They all interact with very nicely. One of the things I found that I like about the various arts was they all kinda complemented each other in some way, shape or form. I developed a very good understanding and pretty much what I call five combat ranges - unreachable distance, kicking, punching, close combat and grappling. I got comfortable in all five of those ranges through the training, and basically these four combat as well sports and arts. So, I found is as a plus. It was just the fact that... Because I'm doing, fundamentally, or similarly like Judo, Japanese - everything else. Korean Taekwondo, Hapkido they have the same philosophies - and wrestling, a little bit of Greco-Roman and freestyle history concepts going there with some European. So, I thought I was getting, like, the best of all worlds.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, there's certainly a lot of diversity there. And that was one of the things that when you and I started talking - not just today, but as we started emailing and setting up this episode - it was the thing that really struck me. It was that you had such diversity. And of course, most of our guests have trained in more than one thing but your roots are deep in multiple things, and most people don't have that. And so, I can really see that synergy there in your origin story. And of course, I've got a little bit of foreshadowing with what we're gonna talk about as we move forward. But I think that the listeners are gonna see that varied perspective come through, and I'm excited to hear some of your answers to these questions. Let's move on to the... I'm sorry?

Michael Rowe:

Nothing. Go ahead.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh. Don't want to cut you off. This is your episode, not mine. So. Let's go on. Let's start story time, not that your origin story isn't a great story. I mean, it's actually pretty interesting for me and, I'm sure, for everyone else. But we're all about the stories here. So, I'd like you to tell us your best martial art story.

Michael Rowe:

That's... I listen to a lot of your episodes and I started, you know, try to think about this. I knew this was gonna be one of the questions you'd ask. And the best... It's so tough t to narrow it down. I have some good ones and some of them... I feel that all my best stories are the ones where I can at least put some fun at myself. But I think one of my best stories, [20:07](#) used to have... I don't know. I kinda got a little bit out. When I got out of competitive Taekwondo, I lost track. They used to have some kind of physical fitness, martial arts supershow that they had in Chicago. And I went to it back in I think it was in '91. I was there. I brought a few of my students. We watched the competitions. We were around going going to all these seminars, having a great time with everyone there. And I remember when we were in a hotel room, it was where the convention center was, and I think I was on... I was in the lobby and I was talking to some of the people that I had just met there. I was talking a little bit about pressure points and vital areas on the body - heel-and-sole techniques that I learned in Hapkido - and sharing some knowledge. And I'm talking to this fairly big muscular guy, and I'm telling, you know, [21:06](#) depending on how fit you do your abs and strength-wise, there's a [21:11](#) area somewhere from silver dollar to a quarter-size. No matter how hard you work, you'll never get your muscles picked up over it. There's a spot there that, you know, even with two fingers, you just drive into it; put even Arnold Schwarzenegger down to his knees. And I hear from behind me, in this - I can't do an Austrian accent - but I basically hear, really? I turned around and there's Arnold Schwarzenegger. I was like, oh crap. Here we go. Sir, how are you? I said, so just pushing you to put [21:46](#) on my knees in that Austrian accent that he has. I said, yes, sir. I'm fairly confident that even, yes, you, with just two fingers, I can make your nodes buckle or take a step back. And he said, let's try. So, well, he's wearing a suit so I had to approximate just in hindsight where his thigh was. I put my fingers right there, drove straight through. And he's got some strong abs, I can tell you that, and he had, at that time, it was still on very good shape. But I found the right spot right off the bat, and yeah. He took a step back. He ain't quite go to the ground, but he can hear him go, huh. And knocked the wind out of him. It was a time. I really wished I had the cellphone capabilities I had today because I will have that thing on video. It was...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

Michael Rowe:



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It was a great thing. And, you know, everyone's going like wow, really. It works. Like, yes. Just gotta hit the right spots. But that was one of the better martial arts.... One of my better stories that I tell people. You meet people, that's always important - when you gotta drop a name, look behind you first.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Especially at his event, right?

Michael Rowe:

Yeah. His event. Everyone had seen Arnold. He was still. It wasn't in his Mr. Olympic anymore but he was still doing a lot of those action movies at the time. He was still looking very fit. He was still in very good shape.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. Was there any kind of dialog with him afterwards? Did he want to know what you had done or...

Michael Rowe:

We talked for a little bit. I think he had another... He had this schedule, but we spent about 10-15 minutes talking about, at that time, my martial arts background and what I was doing. And how it's going [23:36](#) We talked about Master Park a little bit. He had met somebody that actually knew Master Park very well. And it's like, the martial arts and fitness world, I thought, that was a very small place. The seven degrees of separation seems to me like a little bit more like five degrees. But there's... It was just amazing. We had spent some time. He encouraged me tremendously. I'm going to take another step towards wanting to teach full-time after that meeting. And actually, shortly thereafter, it did become a possibility.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How cool. Because of course, if you can demonstrate what you're doing is effective even on someone like him, then... I mean, it's gonna work on anybody.

Michael Rowe:

That was the idea.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a lot of confidence there.



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Michael Rowe:

A lot of people thought about it. It's like wow, it worked on Arnold. Wow. Of course, granted that he was standing still. Actually, it was more like a challenge. I don't think [24:39](#) maybe 170 lbs. I was still a strapping little skinny guy, mostly muscle myself. But compared to Arnold, I was kinda small.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Probably a little bit of an understatement there. Of course, he was ready for, probably, not gonna let you get away with it easily.

Michael Rowe:

He was all... You could feel his abs were all tensed and everything. It's like, go ahead, go on. You do it. I go, okay, sir. And he, huh. He was about, I'd say, 6 inches from actually putting his knee on the ground. But he stopped himself. It was... I felt proud of myself at the time because I would say... I can't remember which one of his movies - [25:24](#) Compared to him, I looked like a really small guy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. You're like Danny DeVito in Twins.

Michael Rowe:

It wasn't... Weight wise, yes. Height wise, it was equal.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. So, let's roll back. Let's jump into some parallel timeline where that day, that career day where that gentleman comes in, that doesn't happen. You don't get to experience martial arts in that way. You don't get to really feel your passion for it, and let's say you don't go to Iowa State or Master Park isn't there, and you lived your life without martial arts. how do you think it would be different now?

Michael Rowe:

Well, I'd be a mess. I really would. I think I would be a total mess. I probably would actually be... I was totally unfocused as a youth. I had no focus. I was the first kid in our school district, actually, and pretty much the [26:41](#) that was diagnosed with then Kinetic Brain Disorder which is now known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. People didn't really know how to deal with me very well. Learning different learning styles, the teachers worked very big on me. If it hadn't been for martial arts bringing me more into focus and learning to put that energy to better uses through mental control and physical



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control that the martial arts gave me, I don't know where I would be otherwise. I mean, I worked... I think I would have started trying to get to college still. Wrestling was good but I didn't... It wasn't quite the same level of focus that was taught to me when I got into martial arts training. So, I probably would have still gone to Iowa State. 27:37 If I never would have met Master Park and never would really got into it, I'd probably still be a programmer analyst. I was one for about 10 years. I majored in Computer Science at one point, and I probably would still be unhappy somewhere in the back of my head, and not knowing really why I feel like it. But I probably would still be a programmer in computer science world of IT guy. I was fairly good at it but it wasn't where I have found my greatest gifts. But I probably would never have found those gifts without martial arts. 28:15

Jeremy Lesniak:

And of course, you know, we could kinda hear you, I don't want to say struggle, but really consider piecing that answer together. And I genuinely believe that the people that end up in the martial arts for their lifetime are really destined to be there. I mean, I can't imagine my life without the martial arts. I mean, your answer is very similar to what most other people have said as guests on the show. That there's something that martial arts brought them that they needed - whether it'd be confidence or, in your case, focus. And thankfully, you found it.

Michael Rowe:

My parents say so, too. I went from being... Actually, I went from barely being able to graduate high school. I graduated - that's about all I can say. I mean, I'm by no means not an intelligent person. I did well on the ACTs. Every test they ever give to me is great. But my focus, before I got to college and into martial arts, was horrendous. My mom and dad would scold me. We were just glad to graduate. We weren't sure but, you know. Since then, I went and got... I have two Bachelor's Degrees. I have a Master's Degree now. Education-wise, I'm much more focused on the aspects that allow me to study and learn things more, and more importantly, let me teach more. I'd like to... I had heard it once. I think it was a TV show from a medical doctor - you see one, you do one, then you teach one; that's the best way to learn something. And I found that the martial arts techniques and everything, that is simply the truth of all aspects of learning. It's any skill, any bit of knowledge, you learn it. You see it being done, and then you teach it. And have I not have the martial arts of teaching, then I don't know where I'd be. I know I wouldn't be as happy as I am today.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. And of course, that's the important piece, right? Is being happy with life and feeling satisfied and fulfilled.

Michael Rowe:



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Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's roll back. Of course, we're back to reality here and you do have all of your martial arts experience. And I'd like you to think about a time that maybe didn't go so well. It could be a day, a year or whatever it is - think about some challenge that you had to overcome and how your martial arts training helped you do that.

Michael Rowe:

That one's really easy, actually. I'm a Naval Reservist. I've been deployed to the Middle East three times, and my second tour of duty, I went to Iraq. I did detainee operations. And the best I can say is that I came back not as happy, not as... Early signs of PTSD and anxiety disorder. I wasn't teaching regularly anymore. After my second deployment there... The individual I was helping around the school for a friend of mine, and I was teaching. And then after the second deployment, it just wasn't working out for him. Because it's just a small business, he didn't have to keep my position open when I was gone. So, he just really found another person to help him out run the school. So, I wasn't teaching anymore. And I kinda slowly fell into a bit of a small downward spiral. It wasn't until I started teaching again, it was the sharing of knowledge, and seeing the things that were important and bringing that focus and drive back from where I had before. It was no longer there for a while. It brought me back after to always be able to find that good angle, so-to-speak. It's like when you're fighting, there's always an angle that you can take on somebody to overcome them. There's no one that's unbeatable. I think that was that philosophy that allowed me attack most of my anxiety and traumatic stress that has allowed me to function on a daily basis again. I'm much more [32:54](#) person to be around. And, you know, granted that took about a year's worth of [32:59](#) getting back into teaching. Like I said, I quit teaching for a while and slowly getting back into the saddle.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you've had the opportunity to train with some pretty great people. Of course, I know some of the names that I'm pretty sure are gonna come up as we move forward. But I'd like you to think of someone other than your direct martial arts instructors that was really influential, important in your martial arts upbringing, and tell us who they would be.

Michael Rowe:

Wow, that one's a tough one. Other than my martial arts instructors... I've had some really close connections with all of them, but if I had to pick somebody that's not a direct martial arts instructor of mine, a teacher on a regular basis, I would have to say... One that was most influential actually was Master [33:56](#) who was a... He was my senior [34:00](#) advisor on one of my deployments. And he's actually



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the one that kinda got me back into starting thinking about teaching while I was in Iraq. He said, you have so much information and you're helping people with it. Why are you not sharing it on a daily basis? And he had such a way of looking at me, I could best could say, kinda tore away my last bastion of insecurity. What makes me special in my mind, you know? I would say before I talked to him, he said, you're just as good as Seagal or Chuck Norris or anyone else. All they have is that they have been in the movies. You have just as much information, a love of teaching for everyone here. And he helped arrange a lot of place for me in terms of working with military and our allies in Iraq, in Kuwait, and even some people from Great Britain. Israel had come and worked with me a little bit while I was in the Middle East. And he, I think, really took away that last 35:16 of me thinking, I'm just a little guy from Nebraska. I'm not that important. But he made me see that I do have information. I've gather it from all over the world with various instructors from my Hapkido instructors, Grandmaster John Pellegrini, my arnis instructor is Brent Frank. Taekwondo with Master Park, the late Grandmaster Edward B Sell. What makes me special in my mind, you know? I have all kinds of knowledge and from various sources. And sometimes, it just seems that it's too many to name. I mean, I've studied from the traditional arts - Taekwondo, Okinawa and Karate, the Filipino arts, arnis. He brought it all together. He said, you have something to give. And I think that's been the most influence I've ever had.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, prior to him, prior to those discussions, that encouragement was instructing something that you... I've got a feeling it's something you had done and you enjoyed doing, but it really sounds like there was a light switch moment there.

Michael Rowe:

That was a light switch moment. I did start teaching... I had always... I rent my first club part-time in Iowa State University back in 1988. And then, you know, I went to seminars all over the world that I could go to anytime I had money and got anywhere. I go to places. I started teaching... I had my first club in 1990 in Elkhorn, Nebraska. It was small, fairly successful. It was just Taekwondo because I could not afford... I was a poor college student paying tax along, so-to-speak. I couldn't afford decent mats. Hapkido was out. Judo was out. So, what's that leave me? Taekwondo. And it was pretty successful, and I always have a good time. I really enjoyed it. I was a budding computer programmer at that time. And then in Taekwondo times, I read a little ad in the back of the magazine - John Pellegrini is looking for a full-time instructor for one of his schools in Florida. And I'm looking at that like, the name is kicking my butt, ringing a bell. I remember in 1988, I went to the National 37:38 Taekwondo Championships, the senior nationals down in Miami, Florida. And after I had some time there, there was a seminar and this gentleman, Master John Pellegrini, was teaching a slight variation of Hapkido. It wasn't quite the traditional Hapkido that I was learning, but it was very similar. He was calling it Combat Hapkido. And I saw that he's hiring. And it's like, well, this is a good time as any. I'm barely making a living as a programmer at this time. Y2K is just becoming kind of a thing. You know, no one's talking too much about it. They're saying there might be some problems coming in the future. And I went down at Grandmaster Pellegrini's school, and interviewed. Next thing I know, I'm packing up all my belongings



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into a Nissan Sentra and a u-haul trailer behind me, and I moved to Florida from Nebraska. And I found I loved it. And now, I'm given opportunity to teach Taekwondo and Hapkido. I loved it. I tremendously loved it. But eventually, I did moved back to Nebraska. I'm a Cornhusker at heart, I guess. While I liked Florida - it was enjoyable - but I also got a job offer. Because Y2K was now becoming more of a thing around 1995. And so, I got a pretty good offer. I come up here, and the offer then follows through. And 39:10 I don't have any money to move back to Florida and start teaching again. So, I just opened a club, start having a good time. I developed a club in my town. And by the time I got after a nice level, I got married and then I gotten divorced. And I kinda had to close the school, and I got gun-shy at that point. It's... I had a downfall and it wasn't until I told Master 39:40 opened my eyes again and got my 39:45He kicked my butt back in the gear.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good. And it sounds like it's good that he did. I believe there are people that are destined to teach. Of course, I feel that everyone has something that they can share, even the newest white belt. When you work with them, there's something everybody can learn. But I think that there are some people whose true path through the martial arts really is around teaching. And it sounds like you're one of those people. And so, I'm glad that he kicked you on the butt, so-to-speak.

Michael Rowe:

So am I.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And got you out teaching again.

Michael Rowe:

Very glad for that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good. And, you know, it's funny. When I hear about schools closing down, it's not the majority of the time, but there's a fairly substantial commonality of divorce coming through that. And, you know, we certainly don't need to unpack that, but I just wanted to point that out. That, if there's anybody out there listening who's found a divorce or the end of a significant relationship having a tremendous impact on their role in martial arts, you are not alone.

Michael Rowe:



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Definitely not alone. There's a lot of us out there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. So, our next question is around competition, and you mentioned having attended a Taekwondo Championship and meeting Grandmaster Pellegrini there. Did I get that right?

Michael Rowe:

Well, I met him after the tournament.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, okay.

Michael Rowe:

But, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. So, obviously, you've been to at least one competition. Have you had the opportunity to participate in competition?

Michael Rowe:

Oh, yes. I participate very much when I was at Iowa State. I was a member of the 1988 and 1989 National Collegiate Taekwondo Championship Team for Iowa State University. I actually went to a Senior Nationals in 1988. When I went to the Senior Nationals in 1988, that was the first year for the Olympics. It was gonna be a demonstration sport in Seoul, Korea. And I was extremely excited for it. They brought me in. They had things going on, Master Park said, you should go. I went in till I was in [41:57](#) I did a pretty good job there, and I did fairly well overall. I could take competitions all throughout the mid-West area. And I will say, I was... I hate [42:09](#) but after I came back, I was regularly first or second place. Everywhere I went, it was pretty much... That was gonna happen. And then I competed on a higher level, and I was very happy to find that the challenges were there. I never really made the team. In '88, I got beaten basically by an injury against from the Army's representative at the tournament. I got tore my Achilles' tendon and kind of took me out of that tournament, and I didn't have much to go for after that. Despite my ego a little bit there, I finished that match, basically. Because while I was with the Navy guy and he's an Army guy, I can't let him just win it. But I fought well. And then '92, I went to my last Senior Nationals for the Barcelona games, just hoping to go that division. I was in heavyweight. Found out that, you know, even a heavyweight, they'd still move around like they're [43:09](#) it seems like to me.



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They were moving very, very fast. And eventually, I got to the point where I realized, I was more like the original enterprise and I'm fighting the people that were [43:19](#) - much faster, much more agile than me. So, I went to coaching and just referring for a while. But after I got affiliated with Combat Hapkido, [43:30](#) Hapkido realm and self-defense. So, I kinda moved more and more away from competition.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. Well, good. Now, if you had the chance to train with somebody that you hadn't, who do you think that would be?

Michael Rowe:

Someone I hadn't.... Alive or dead?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Either one. We'll open it nice and wide for you.

Michael Rowe:

I'd pick - kind of a tie in my mind - between Sensei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, or Ip Man, Wing Chun practitioner [44:12](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Michael Rowe:

Bruce Lee. I had a chance to train with basically, Osensei's... OH, let's see - great grandson. I was in Japan recently. I worked at the [44:30](#) Dojo, and that got thrown around by Goshu and Shiva, and that was fantastic. I'm just trying to imagine what I could have learned from their founder. The power that he was [44:47](#) have. I would love to experience that. Then again, it's very similar to Ip Man. I have heard amazing stories from people who have worked with Bruce Lee, and who talked about his instructor, Grandmaster Ip Man just as much. I think those would be one of the two people I would really love to have to spend some time with.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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And certainly, Osensei has come up on the show. I don't know if Ip Man has been mentioned as an answer to this question but certainly has come up in conversation. Because, yeah, two absolute legends in the martial arts. And one of the things that struck me is, you mentioned both of them as their reputation, not only for their skill but for their... The quality of their character. And I kind of had a little bit of a mental tangent. You know, I talk about tangents, and your proclivity for them. What I didn't tell you is, mine as well. Which is why it's good for me that the guest carries most of the weight of the show. I just have to poke you once in a while with a new question. But I'm wondering, as I think of Mas Oyama and so many of these other people that founded styles that carry on today, I don't know if any of them were people have said bad things about their character, and I'm just having this thought. I'm wondering if it was that just the way history has been written or is there something there. I don't know.

Michael Rowe:

I'm sure that it's pretty much how history has been written. Because, you know, we're all wonderful human beings but we're all fundamentally flawed somewhere. Whether it might be maybe we smoke or curse too much; everything that gets remembered almost always seems to be the good things whenever we've had a good influence on people's lives. I've known instructors that, you know, they always preach very highly. That smoking is bad for your health, that it was never good. But then sooner or later, some [46:59](#) that instructor might be get caught that they're smoking. That seems hypocritical, but it's not so much that... They know what the problem is. They know it's not good for them, and they're trying to get the idea to their students - this is bad for you. If I was not what this bad habit, what else could I do? What more could I be doing? If I had better [47:20](#) capacity, or if I had a stronger heart - we all have our little things that are our downfall. But I know every single one of us.... I'm sure Osensei had his little... I know he was very well-known for his anger that it would explode at moment's notice. But then, it would subside rather quickly. So, everyone has their little thing but, you know, character-wise, everyone remembers them for the really good things that they know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sort of an adaptation of History as Written by the Victor.

Michael Rowe:

Yes, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When it comes to combat history. So, you mentioned Ip Man, of course, and most people's experience with Ip Man would be from the movies that have come out, and not just the major ones that were released that most of us know. There were all these films profiling him that have come out in Hong Kong



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over the last decade or so. So, I'm wondering if some of your experience with him comes from those movies? Are you, at all, a martial arts movie fan?

Michael Rowe:

I am a martial arts movie aficionado. All the good ones, all the bad ones.

Jeremy Lesniak:

An aficionado, okay. So, you're taking it up a notch.

Michael Rowe:

I'm taking it up a notch. I mean, everything from the bad - Five Fingers of Death stuff, the Chinese Kung Fu Theater that I... I think you've experienced it on television very well until I was a teenager because we didn't have cable in Nebraska until I was about 15. That's when, I think, cable first came out. And I got some of the West Coast channels, and every Sunday then, there was Kung Fu Theater. It was terrible acting, terrible lip syncing, and nothing was right. But I just love the action - the flying, the wire work. Even though you can still see some of the wires in special effects they have compared today. The stuff that come out today, everything Jason Statham, Seagal stuff, Chuck Norris's movies, Bruce Lee. I pretty much... Anytime there was a movie and it's got martial arts on, I'll watch it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you have a favorite?

Michael Rowe:

A favorite?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, or a couple of favorites if pinning it down to one is too hard.

Michael Rowe:

Well, I have memories strongly tied to The Karate Kid. My mom and dad would probably gonna find out about this, if they haven't figured it out by now, might as well. I had borrowed the family car while my mom and dad and brother went to the rodeo. On opening night of The Karate Kid in Nebraska, I drove the 50:10 even though I wasn't supposed to take the car and went saw The Karate Kid. That was, I think, the first time I've seen martial arts. I would say that it's not about vengeance or competition. The Miagi



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character, I thought, was a very touching and put teaching into a new light. Something that I hadn't seen in... I've desired to emulate kind of somewhere with everything that I do as well. So, I put Karate Kid right up, the original one. But [50:49](#) getting over it is so, so good. The guy's name...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ralph Macchio.

Michael Rowe:

Macchio, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Michael Rowe:

My wife had a crush on him. So, I don't know why I forget his name.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think, most younger women did back then. And of course, you look at him now and he's in his early 50's, and he barely looks any different. He's aged, depending on your perspective, either very well or very unfortunately.

Michael Rowe:

Yeah. I think I saw him on a couple of episodes of How I Met Your Mother. And it's like, wow. He's still got the [51:23](#) the face there, you know? Poor guy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And he's still on the shortlist for guests that we really want to get on the show, too. So, if anybody out there listening has a tie with Ralph Macchio, please help us out.

Michael Rowe:

Other ones, you know... I like martial arts movies. I'm a big Jackie Chan fan, actually. My first date with my current wife, we went and saw a Jackie Chan movie. I don't think she knew who the heck he was. I think she just wasn't really... I was supposed to have a date with someone else that night, and she



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cancelled on me. I called up my... It wasn't my wife then. I had a date cancelled. You want to go see Jackie Chan film with me? She said yes. And I think she was just glad that we asked, and then I saw it kind of... Anytime Jackie Chan puts on a movie, I [52:21](#) with good times with my current wife. So, we go see all his movies.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, that's fun. Do you remember which one it was?

Michael Rowe:

Operation Candor.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And of course, we're gonna link all these and everything in the show notes - whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for anyone that might be new to the show. Cool. So, you mentioned a few actors and I'm wondering if you have a favorite amongst them or maybe another name that you didn't mention.

Michael Rowe:

My favorite actor was Jason Statham, Transporter series. He's got a style of learning to work some... It looks a lot like [53:05](#) fast acting combat Hapkido, joint manipulation throws. He's very adaptable, takes whatever is around him. Very similar to what I teach with my students, you know. Jason Statham's kind of right now at the top of my list at the moment.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. And of course, he's been mentioned quite a few times as an answer to that question. And it's interesting because he does have... You know, I've done the research. he's got a little bit of a martial arts background. But it seems like it's been exclusively for the purpose of his acting. And he just gets it. He's tremendous.

Michael Rowe:

It's just a... I mean, how they utilize them, you know. Granted, I know, the magic of Hollywood can make almost anyone look good. But everything in it, you know, he shows off and does in the movies seems to always be, you know, taking advantage of your environment around you whenever possible. And that's exactly what I'm teaching with combat Hapkido system that I mostly work with, what Grandmaster John



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Pellegrini taught me. It's about utilizing what's in the moment and what's around you so your best abilities. That's kinda what I like about him. I like Jason.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Michael Rowe:

Excuse me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, sure. Now, how about books? Are you at all a martial arts text reader?

Michael Rowe:

Oh, yes. Indubitable, so-to-speak. I have about 20 foot lockers in my basement for martial arts books.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

Michael Rowe:

I can't seem to get rid of any of them. I can't part with them. I just... I have a reading library for my students. Basically, they can't get a hold of a book. I say, okay. Well, here's a copy of mine. Bring it back to me. I read, you know, things. I got a few that I'm working on slowly. Google Translate is a wonderful tool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Michael Rowe:

I'm slowly translating some things I got in Korean and Japanese, utilizing that. It's not perfect, but I'm getting a lot of good information as I go through it. It's taken a lot of time to learn technology, utilize those keyboards to put things in.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Sure. Now, I'm curious because you're the person who's indicated that they've done anything like that on the show. What is it about these texts that either you'

re intrigued with or they are answers to questions you're hoping to find - what's motivating that work?

Michael Rowe:

I look at it that way is that, some of my martial arts, their origins are other countries other thoughts. Coming from an Aristotle way of thinking, Socrates methods, using the Socratic method beyond questioning, asking. I have a certain way of looking at things as a Westerner in the United States. I have a certain way of communicating things. And I found, as a teacher, that when I sometimes communicate some of my Western ideas to people with other thoughts - whether they were Japanese, Korean, Iraqi, Kuwaiti - some things don't quite come out right in my English. And [56:29](#) work hard and try to find the closest fitting word in Japanese, and they seem to get it better when it's... When they get it into their language a little bit. But I think, even better is when some of them have come back to me, like, maybe a year later or when their English got better and they understand the nuances of a parable a little better. As I dig in there, I will mix some of the translation. I go and I scratch my head. They're using parable because they're being writing for an audience that is a native speaker, someone who speaks Korean or reads Korean, at least, or Japanese. So, they use parables and they'll translate them directly, may not make the most sense until I dig, dig, dig and try to find something that makes more sense. What's that purple belt? And I have to find that purple. People or Japanese in nature know the Ronin, the 47 Ronin story rather well. It's when the story is better known now among Westerners, but still, there's references to some of their.... Some things that they have a parable to. You may as well be saying, monkey scratches his head. You don't know what the heck it means.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, sure. Does your... Is there any kind of a theme to your book collection or is it just martial arts?

Michael Rowe:

I have martial arts, I have theology, I have science. My book collection is just vast. I don't... I'm just an avid reader. The best thing I ever had, the greatest gift in my opinion that some people haven't got - they go, oh it's definitely books. I've got a nook before my second deployment to Iraq. And one of the things that kept me from going completely crazy over [58:29](#) deployments was reading. But they started taking up space. They fall apart. And my nook...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.



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Michael Rowe:

I had... I'm thinking anywhere [58:38](#) wherever I can get battery charged was limited, too. But I had pretty good electrical outputs wherever I went. Having that, I have in the space of a little notepad, I had over 300 to 400 books with me. My collection looks digital library gets into places - ridiculous. But I mean, I'll read anything from How to Prevent Hacking. I still do things in the computer world, science, anatomy, physiology - I just love to read. Sometimes, it makes me have to take a step back and kinda figure out what it is I'm reading. Because I'm sometimes definitely reading over my head in some things. But I've got a good library full of books from all things.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, if I was to pin you down for a single book recommendation for our audience, what might that be?

Michael Rowe:

Living the Martial Way by Forrest Morgan. I'm getting it backwards now. Forrest Morgan, he's a retired lieutenant colonel. Living the Martial Way - it talks about things like strategy, developing a concept of doctrine, and how... finding honor for what you're really talking about, having... You always heard [1:00:10](#) I have to defend my honor kind of thing. And he kinda goes into just talking about that myth, so-to-speak, and how it should go. A better overall method of training, incorporating traditional training methods with modern training methods, concepts like [1:00:30](#) and intense summer training, intense winter training, you know, environmental training. It's a really good book to be reading.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, cool. And I'll make sure we find that link to it, again, in the show notes over at the website. Now, do you have any goals or anything that you're working towards for the future with regard to your training or the martial arts in general?

Michael Rowe:

Well, right now, I'm in the middle of developing... Starting to opening a school again in Nebraska [1:01:02](#) little martial arts program, build a whole nonprofit organization to teach self-defense to students in the area as well as develop a fully self-defense program that's called [1:01:18](#), help everyone... Excuse me. Help everyone appreciate and respect diversity as well as a program for teaching educators self-defense. We really tie our teachers' hands in what they can and cannot do to protect themselves from unruly and sometimes aggressive students. And I've been working out the program with some teachers - my sister-in-law is a teacher, I have several friends at work with education field. They've expressed that some of the stuff that I taught were really, really well, but we have to work on modifying things to liability and parents don't end up suing the school and things like that. So, those are



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some of the things I'm really working on developing right now. In terms of programming, I'm still working on teaching a curriculum of Hapkido to children all the way from starting age 4, all the way up to 84. I've got a development in those areas, and I'm working on trying to get some self-defense videos that will complement Grandmaster Pellegrini's stuff. Hopefully, they'll approve with some of the things I'm getting to work on in the future. A lot of irons in the fire, so-to-speak.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. You know, that seems to be true of many of our guests that people reach a certain level and realize, hey, it's time for me to make that this stuff that I figured out is out there for other people. And personally, I appreciate that. Now just of you but of everyone, because the more that knowledge is out there that we're sharing with each other, the better we're all going to be as martial artists. And the easier it's going to be for those that start martial arts in the future.

Michael Rowe:

And it's what's all about - sharing our knowledge. I was taught by a couple of my teachers. Without my students, who would I be? I mean, you can't be much of a teacher if you don't have students.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I took a pause for a second to write that down because that right there, that is an amazing quote, and one that I don't think has come up before. So, thank you for sharing that. That's cool.

Michael Rowe:

Glad to be helpful.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've been tremendously helpful. This is a great episode. So, this is kind of your commercial time. If there's something you want to promote, if you do seminars - whatever you've got going on, let us have it.

Michael Rowe:

Well, like I said, I'm starting to open up a school. I'm starting to get out there to do teaching seminars. I do self-defense seminars as well as Taekwondo sparring seminars as well as some traditional and improvisational weapons seminars. I'm just getting started but everyone's more welcome to take a look at www.alphaomegamartialarts - all one word - alphaomegamartialarts.org. Check out how our school's



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doing, what events we've got planned going on, as well as the upcoming seminars we have coming and that we are hopefully gonna be doing in the near future.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. And we'll link to that. As you have other things that pop up in the future, please, don't hesitate to reach out and we'll make sure that we either update your show notes here or put stuff out to our listeners over social media.

Michael Rowe:

Oh, I appreciate that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I appreciate you being here. And as we start to wrap up, do you have any parting advice for everyone listening?

Michael Rowe:

The biggest bit of advice I can get out there - whether you've ever started in the martial arts or just started, I'm gonna be honest, whether you've been doing it for years - always keep a beginner's mind, strive to learn. Because everyone out there, you can learn something from somebody else. I've learned things from my 13-year old son, things from my 10-year old son. It's... We can learn from anybody, and if we keep remembering that and recognizing you don't know everything, I think this world could be a better place.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for listening to episode 82 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, and thank you to Mr. Rowe. Head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes, including links to everything we talked about today. If you liked the show, make sure you're subscribing or using one of our free apps. They're available on both iOS and Android. For those of you kind enough to leave us a review like BMC1128 did in the intro section, remember, we randomly check out the difference podcast review sites like iTunes, Stitcher and all those. And if we find your review and mention it on the air, be sure to email us for your free box of whistlekick stuff. If you haven't left us a review yet, please do help us out and leave one. Those reviews are a lot more important than you may realize. If you know someone that would be a great interview for the show, please fill out the form at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com or if you want to shoot us a message with a suggestion for a Thursday show or some other feedback, there's a place to do that there, too. You can follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram - pretty much everywhere you can think of - and our username is always whistlekick. Every



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