



Episode 374 – Sensei Liam Murphy | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, what's going on? This is episode 374. It's whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, and I'm Jeremy Lesniak. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Sensei Liam Murphy. If you want to find everything that we do, the best place to go is whistlekick.com, and you can save 15% if you want to hook yourself up or maybe just support us. Use the code `PODCAST15` gets you 15% off. Everything for this show, including photos, video, transcripts, all the other episodes, those are at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com - 100% for free. Because that's what we do. We give away all the good stuff, and hope that maybe someday, you'll give something back to us. That's our business model. We like it. It's friendlier rather putting a paywall up on all the good stuff.

Now, today's guest is a die-hard Karateka - Karate practitioner. Sensei Murphy is steeped in Shotokan. And you may guess from the name, he is of Irish descent. In fact, he lives in Ireland. And if we dig really far back, we're pretty sure that we're related. I've got some Murphy blood running through me, but that's not what we talked about. We talked about martial arts. We talked about how it's changed his life, and where it's taking him. So, sit back - or don't if you're standing somewhere - have a listen, and hear his story. Sensei Murphy, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Liam Murphy:

Thank you very much for having me, Jeremy.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a pleasure to have you. And as we were just talking about, folks, you know, one of the things that I don't talk about on the show too much is my history, my lineage. But I have some Murphy's in my past as well, and it sounds like if we were to really track it back, we could probably prove out that we're related in some small way.

Liam Murphy:

Probably somewhere along the line, yeah. Probably. We'll have to do a DNA test when all this is over.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. Love it. It's be the first DNA test conducted for martial arts purpose, at least on the show if not anywhere.

Liam Murphy:

That's it. We can do a live reveal.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's be fun. Well, as much fun as that would be, probably much more so for you and I than the folks listening. So, let's talk about something a little bit more fun to the broader public, and that's martial arts. And specifically, how did you start?

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. It's funny. I just kinda stumbled into martial arts, really - probably both literally and figuratively. I don't have a story about, you know, being bullied when I was a kid or seeing a Bruce Lee that inspired me to go and join the martial arts club or anything like that. I really did just kind of joined a club out of curiosity to see what it was like. And I was lucky, I guess, and that the instructor there [02:47](#) who's now a 5th time with the JK and still very much in touch with him. He was a really good instructor, very open. And I just kind of like what I saw, and kept going. I guess, the more interesting question in some ways, you know... People start martial arts for all different reasons whether it's because they're bullied and they want to defend themselves or because they want to compete or because they want to get fit or because there's nothing good on TV on a Tuesday night, they want to get out of the house. But, I think, what's really interesting is sometime is why people continue training in the martial arts. So, after the first few sessions when they realize, hey, this is a little bit difficult, and they realize that they... You know, they'd have to put some effort in, there might be some sacrifices involved. But why do people continue training beyond that initial oh, I went along because I saw a movie or I went along because my friends was on it? And for



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me, the reason, I guess, I continue to training rather than just, as I said, kinda stumbled into a Dojo. Originally, I like the feel of the movements. Like when you're playing football or basketball or badminton or whatever, your body tends to move in a certain way and you get quite used to that. But suddenly, when you're in a Karate classroom, martial arts class, your body is being challenged to move in different ways that it's never experienced before, and to expand in different ways in rotations, spin and turn and pivot. Ant that kind of new physical expression, I just really, really like the feel of. And that kind of brought me along to a certain point. And then, after that, I realized her, the more you practice at this, the better you get. And that was a very close, very obvious correlation between hey, if you put in the practice, you're going to improve. And martial arts in particular, I think, have a very structured way of helping you to improve in that. If there's particular kick and if you want to do the kick well, you lift your knee here, you pivot on your foot, you extend your hips. And suddenly, the kick starts working. And if the kick's not working, you figure it out - I gotta lift my knee more, I gotta pivot more. So, it gives you a very clear way of improving your techniques, and that appealed to me as well. So, if I saw I wasn't doing something well, I was able to analyze it, break it down. Look at the instruction, figure I had to do it, train more, and hey presto, you start to improve little by little. So, I think that's kind of... As I said, I don't have an inspiring story about getting into martial arts. But definitely, there were things about it that appealed to me to continue training. If that makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It sure does. And while we certainly have some inspiring stories that have come on this show that were those the impetus for people training - you know, dramatic events and bullying and whatnot - those are at the majority, at least in my experience. So, I think, when someone talks about, you know, a more run-of-the-mill interest and then kinda shifting that question from why did you start to why did you continue, I think that makes a lot of sense. Because, let's face it, a lot of people try martial arts, very few stick with it.

Liam Murphy:

And I think what's interesting is, the reason that people continue training is usually very different to the reason why they started training. So, they may have started training because they just want to get in physical shape. And then suddenly, they realize, hold on. There's competitions here; these competitions are kind of fun. Or maybe they started because they wanted to compete, and then after a while they realize, hold on. There's kind of real self-defense applications to some of these kata moves; this is kind of interesting. That's why they continue training. And, for me, that's one of the things that's really interesting about Karate, is there's so many different aspects to it. That if you find yourself a little bit bored with a particular aspect, there's always something else that you can look at. There's always some... You know, if you're getting a little bit bored with the competitive end of things, you can start looking at it from the physical expression and its perspective, or the physical well-being perspective, or the self-defense perspective. And if that starts to get a little bored to you, you can look at it from a different angle. So, it's that continually and evolving journey, I think, is what's really interesting and why people continue rather than just why they start.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I wholeheartedly agree. And when you talk about the different things that you can train - whether you're talking about training for competition or training for self-defense - if you were to make a list of all of those things, and then if you were to make a list of all the ways that you could train for those things, it blows my mind that people ever say that they are bored in martial arts.

Liam Murphy:

Absolutely. Totally agree with you. And from the point of view of an instructor, you're never stuck for something to teach because there's so much out there to do, expose students to. There's so much out there to keep them interested.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Liam Murphy:

As you said, so many different ways. There's so many different channels and so many different approaches to each of those channels. The possibilities there are endless.

Jeremy Lesniak:

They are. And as much as I kinda poke at the folks who say, I'm bored, with their training, I think a lot of that comes back to the instructor. And as an instructor, I'm curious of your thoughts on this. I've seen a a lot of instructors - unfortunately, I've trained with some of them - who know how to teach a few things in only one way each. And they become bored, and thus the students become bored.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. And I think that can work if you happen to strike a core with a student and you're on the same wavelength as the student, and they picked it up very quickly. But if the student isn't picking it up, they need a different way. They need to explain to them in a different way, or they need it broken down in a different way. And I think that's what a good instructor can do. If they can break down a technique in such a way that appeals to how a student is going to respond, is gonna be most receptive to it as opposed to this is how I teach, so this how you have to learn it. It should be a case of how are you gonna learn in? And then I'll try to figure out a way of presenting it to you that you can take it on-board and work with it.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Right. What is the job of the instructor? It's to share that knowledge. It's not the job of the student to come in and learn.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. But...

Jeremy Lesniak:

There is a responsibility. It's not a job.

Liam Murphy:

Exactly, yes. And I think, there's a responsibility on the student's part to be receptive and to try their best and to take on-board what the instructor is saying.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes.

Liam Murphy:

But I do think, also, as you said, there is a responsibility on the instructor to be aware that not every student is gonna pick things up the exact same way. Not every student is going to be physically talented enough to see what the instructor is doing, and immediately replicate it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Totally agree. Now, let's go back a minute. You talked about the contrast between your early martial arts training and what I would call more conventional sports. Were you involved in those more conventional sports, and finding something was missing? You know, what's the...?

Liam Murphy:

I would have been involved in kind of organized sports probably up to kind of early teenage years, and then would have continued but on a more casual basis. So, it would have been, you know, kind of playing football with friends on a Saturday afternoon rather than getting heavily involved in organized leagues and that kind of thing. But football, I mean soccer...

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Right. I think most of us in America, when we hear an accent such as yours, when we hear football, we translate automatically. At least I do.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You probably guessed it whilst I'm talking about... Well, I had referred to as American football, but yeah. And, you know, other sports. I would have played a little bit of basketball at school and so on; a little bit of athletics. But there was nothing there that really captured my imagination, I suppose you'd say.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. And I find that that's pretty common. I enjoyed other sports but... Especially the team dynamic. Just never really jived for me, and for... I haven't said this on the show in a while but longtime listeners might roll their eyes. They've heard this quite a few times. What I found in martial arts was that it gave back what I put in. And I hadn't found anything else up until that time that did that.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, exactly. That's something I kind of alluded to a little bit earlier when I was saying I suddenly realized, hey, you practice this and you get better. And there's a structure to how you practice in order to get better. So, it was that very direct correlation between the effort you put in and the product you see at the end. I think that's what kind of... definitely one of the things that attracted to it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. Alright. Now, we've got a bit of context for you. We've got your early days. We know a bit about how you look at martial arts and look at the world. Let's talk about stories - story time if you will - because that's my favorite part of Martial Arts Radio, is getting people to tell their stories.

Liam Murphy:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If I was to ask you for your favorite story, what would that be?

Liam Murphy:



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Yeah. You know, there's one. I would be honest, I wasn't there, and I'm kind of glad I wasn't there. Because I'd imagine it was kind of an awkward silence at the end of it. But my... It was a very senior Japanese instructor visiting a bunch of clubs here. And after training, they've gone out for dinner with some of the local club instructors and the Japanese instructors said to one of the local guys who's quite proud of his kata. He asked him, you know, what's your favorite kata? So, he answered with whatever it was - Sochin. And the Japanese instructor said, ah, Sochin, Sochin. And how long have you been practicing it? And he very proudly said, for 10 years, Sensei. And he said, ah, for 10 years. And how often do you practice it? He goes, ah, everyday, Sensei. And the Japanese instructor went,, ah, everyday. So, everyday for 10 years, you've been practicing Sochin wrong. And as you can imagine, there was a combination of tumbleweed, crickets, people looking at their watches, looking at the ceiling, looking at the floor. But the reason why I like that little anecdote is because it really strikes home that... Well, it's not just about the amount of time you put into training or the amount of years you put into training. It really is about the quality and the [12:49](#) that you put into what you're doing, as opposed to just turning up in training and going home and turning up again in training and going home. You really improve by being more thoughtful, more present in your training than that. And it's like, you know, the saying practice doesn't make perfect; practice makes permanent. It's perfect practice makes perfect. But sometimes, people just throw volume at their training and assume it's gonna take them somewhere. But it's gotta be volume plus quality - that's what's gonna move you forward.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. That's such a beautiful story; a beautiful anecdote. And I've got a feeling that we may have ruffled a few feathers there, and I'm quite okay with that. But I'm also thinking, and we may have turned on even more light bulbs so I'm hopeful.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. I always say whenever I'm teaching a class, I always say it. I honestly don't mind if you don't agree with me. If I'm saying something and I'm teaching something, I'm trying to explain a concept and you don't agree with me, I'm 100% okay with that. But what I do want you to do is take it out. So, if you don't agree with me, that's absolutely fine. But I'd like you to be able to say, you know, I don't agree with you because I think it should be done this way. And now, a major thinking. And that's kind of my objective as an instructor, is to get you to think, not necessarily just to copy what I'm doing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I wish everyone felt that way. Couldn't agree more. It's a good story. Did you say there was more than one?

Liam Murphy:



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No, that's just one that I [14:19](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, yeah. Another little one was when I was training and maybe it shows kind of some cultural difference when I was training in Japan one time. We were doing a [14:29](#) going on on one of the guys. And accidentally, made contact with his opponent and bust his knuckles on his teeth. Nothing major, just kind of cut across his knuckles. But he continued training, and we continued the [14:40](#) Now, everybody who he partnered then, he was accidentally smearing the blood from his knuckles. So, by the end of the class - it wasn't a particularly tough class, it was just this guy who was bleeding all over the place - he looked around, and looked as if there was a blood bath. Everybody was covered. So, he stood up in front of the class, realized what had happened, bowed very apologetically and offered to launder everybody's suit for them. But nobody took him up on the offer. But I was just wondering, if that were to happen in a class here and I doubt if the guilty party would be offering to wash anybody's suit.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Probably not. I mean, first off in at least in the United States, tends to be that the moment blood pops up, that person is removed from the training floor because of concerned with blood-borne illness.

Liam Murphy:

Sure, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Even moving past that, even if I remember back to my early days of training, people would become apprehensive because they didn't want to have to put that much extra time into cleaning their gi.

Liam Murphy:

I know. Yeah. At that time, it was a Saturday. It was a young guy and he was excited. He just kept going and he didn't kind of realized what has happened until the end of the class.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It's good stuff. Now, how about outside of martial arts? I mean, are there things that you engage in, things that you're passionate about?

Liam Murphy:

You know, not really. No. Anything else that I engage in outside of martial arts, I do it on a very kind of casual basis just to relax, to chill, to not think about it. If I were to start thinking about something, I would start to be... it would start to be less fun, I feel like. So, kind of... Martial arts, I put a lot of energy, a lot of energy into. And then everything else is just kind of yeah, I can take it or leave it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I get that. Now, one of my favorite things to talk to people about are the ways that martial arts has helped them in their lives. And I don't just mean in giving you some exercise and maybe a group of people to socialize with or things to challenge you.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because I think we all had challenges. But I'm always interested in the way people take martial arts out into the real world. So, if I was to ask you about a time in life where maybe things weren't going so well and you had to use something that you learned in martial arts - be it physical or non-physical - to move through that challenge, what would that be? What would that story be like?

Liam Murphy:

Sure. I think it would probably come down to an attitude rather than a particular incident or a particular incident or anything like that. And I'll just kind of put this in a little bit of context. When I was in Japan, my... I taught in there, in a high school there. And the vice principal of school invited me around to his house for dinner one time to watch a football match with his son. And the course of the conversation, it emerged to that he came from an old Samurai family. And he was obviously very proud of this. He started giving me a little bit of a family history. And it turns out that his family was on the losing side of some battle way back when. It lost their Samurai status. But they had, at that time, an ornate sword in the family that they weren't willing to give up. When they lost their Samurai status, it meant that they wouldn't have had the right to hold a sword. But they weren't prepared to give up the sword. So, they hid it. Now, if the family were found hiding the sword, you would have been, at that time, executed. But they they took this risk and they continued to hide the sword and passed it around from generation to generation for hundreds of years. And it wasn't until the Meiji Restoration in the late 1800s when the Samurai class



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basically lost their privileges that they were able to bring their sword out into the open again. And at that stage, it had been in hiding for hundreds of years and prior to that, had been in the family for hundreds of years. But now, it was out in the open again. And he sent his son upstairs to get the sword to show me. And he brought it down, it was in this beautiful, very plain wooden scabbard. And he clicked it open, and he pulled the blade, happy to show me the blade. Then he showed me the certificate, the authentication - its origin and its maker and how old it was and everything else. He was showing it to me to explain his family heritage and how his family was steeped in this Samurai heritage. So, he got to talking then about Bushido and Budo, and this was something that was obviously a part of his life given his family background and his Samurai background and so on. He started to explain what Buddha and Bushido and the way of the warrior to him. And he was saying that a lot of people think it's very macho and it's associated with fighting, and swords are very stoic and very serious. He said, no. What Budo means is whatever you're doing, when you're doing it, you give it 100%. And that's all it means. It doesn't matter what you're doing. When you're doing it, it takes 100% of your focus, 100% of your effort, and that's what Budo means. And I just thought that coming from him and giving his background and his lineage, and his understanding of his background and his lineage, that was very powerful explanation of what [20:25](#) he meant. It's something to implement kind of in everyday life. That when I'm doing something now... And it's becoming so much more difficult, I think, in everyday life to when you are doing something, you have to give it 100%. Because your phone is in your backpack and you've got 15 alerts and you've got 14 browsers open in your laptop or whatever, and it's becoming increasingly difficult. When you're doing something, give it 100%. Even when you're talking to somebody, give that person 100% of your attention while you're talking to them. And that's the kind of the martial arts sort of Budo attitude that I try to take into everything else. And obviously, from a martial art - very direct martial arts - perspective, when you're fighting, you gotta make that you give everything 100%. You gotta make sure of your attack. You attack 100%. So, it has a very obvious application there. But I think it has an equally valid application in everything else that you do in life. Whether it's talking to somebody, working on a project, writing an email - whatever it is. While you're doing it, that's what you're doing 100%. And then, I think, regardless of what happens after that, whether things go well or things go bad, you can look back and you can say, yep. gave it 100%, couldn't have done anymore. And that gives you a certain degree of satisfaction as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

At least it should, right?

Liam Murphy:

It should, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And there are people who don't find that satisfaction. But I think knowing that you've given your all...



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Liam Murphy:

Yeah. If you...

Jeremy Lesniak:

... comfort in that.

Liam Murphy:

Definitely. And if you can look back - doing well or doing badly - if you look back and go, you know what, I don't think I could have done anything else. There's a certain degree of solace in that regardless if things go well or things go bad. But I think that's kind of a lesson from... I'm sorry if I kind of... [22:11](#) to get to the answer. But that's something from kind of martial arts that was explained to me, and that I try to apply in all the aspects of life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. Circuitous is just fine.

Liam Murphy:

That's good, that's good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Don't worry. Now, if you... Here's kind of a hypothetical for you...

Liam Murphy:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If we were to roll back to those first few classes that you were training and you didn't find what you wanted - maybe you had a terrible instructor or for whatever reason it didn't work out - how do you think it'd be different now versus...

Liam Murphy:

That's a really interesting question. And it's really difficult to answer because it's... Training has played such a vital role in everything that I've done since then. It's very difficult to step back and say, well, what



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would have been different? Would I have channeled my energies into something else, and maybe, maybe not. Maybe I just would have gone home and sat on the sofa. Maybe I would have channeled those energies into some other physical activity. Maybe I would have channeled those energies into some professional activity. So, it's really difficult to tell. But on the whole, I would hope that it's had a net positive impact on my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, I think it would be really hard for it not to. I can't say that I've ever met someone whose life wasn't positively impacted.

Liam Murphy:

And even if nothing else... I've met great people along the way that I wouldn't have met otherwise.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's right. Now, one of those things that we haven't talked about are the people that you have trained with and currently train with. So, you know, you gave me a little bit of context for the environment that you're training in and how it might be a little bit different than what most folks are used to. So, why don't you take a minute and tell us about your school and the organization.

Liam Murphy:

Sure, yeah. So, the group that I belong to here is JKA Shotokan Ireland. It's Japan Karate Association Shotokan Ireland, and we're one of the representative branches of the JKA in Ireland. And we're a nonprofit organization so we don't have any kind of a mass network or schools or clubs or anything like that. And everybody who's involved in it are involved... They're longtime Karate practitioners. Generally, we're all kind of 5th Dans involved, been training to get it for a very long time. We continue to train because it's what we love to do. We're not doing it because we're trying to take over the world or try to have a dojo on every corner [24:48](#) We're doing it because we love doing it, and it's something that we want to pass on to other people as well. So, we're based at some of the main universities in Ireland, WCT University, University College Dublin and many other universities just outside of Dublin. And then we'd have [25:06](#) in various different kind of local community centers and so on. One of our main clubs where we all come together is the YMCA in Dublin City Centre. So, if you come along there on a Thursday night, maybe five 5th Dans all training along with a bunch of other people and sweating it out on a Thursday evening. So, that's kind of the club and the structure. As I've said, we're aligned with Japan Karate Association (JKA) and our main instructor is Kawasoe Sensei who's a 7th Dan, and he's based over in the UK. We get to train with him a number of times a year. He comes over and trains with us, and we go over and train on his various international course and try to [25:47](#) so on. So, that's kind of the lineage, if you like. But one of the things that has been a very important part of our training as a group is that we've



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always been very open to training with our instructors and other associations, and it's something... I mentioned my original instructor, [26:08](#) or I think I did. I should have if I didn't. And he was always very open to seeing what can be learned from other styles and other instructor whether it's looking at a Thai boxers and seeing how they generate more power as they pivot through kicks, or whether it's looking at Kobudo practitioners and seeing how they manipulate weapons, or whether it's looking at Okinawan practitioners and seeing how they apply kata moves and so on. So, looking at all of these different instructors and different styles and seeing what we can take from those and incorporate into our own training even though our own training is still very much focused on the Shotokan lineage, if you like. So, you know, we do follow that Shotokan lineage. I think we're all very open to taking those influences to augment and to support what we're doing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. Now, how much of who you are as a martial artist today is from this... I heard the name but names don't click well for me. So, this gentleman, the 7th Dan, versus other people along the way?

Liam Murphy:

Sure. You know, that's interesting because when you ask people who are the biggest influences in terms of their martial arts development, they'll very often say that they'll mention a 7th Dan or an 8th Dan or a 10th Dan or somebody who's the head of their group or their lineage or whatever. And that's obviously gonna play an important part for me. It does, definitely. But I also thing, realistically, the people who influence who you are as a martial artist and your standard and your level as a martial artist, it's people who you train with week in and week out in your dojo. They're the ones who you're pacing yourself against. They're the ones who you're [27:55](#) yourself against. They're the ones who you're trying to get the better of and you're getting ideas from when you're swapping ideas with. So, I really think your development as... or the greatest influence in your development as a martial artist is really the people who you see in your dojo week in, week out. So, that would be my opinion. Obviously, as I said, Kawasoe Sensei, one of the reasons that he, for me, is such an inspiration is because he's now into his 70's and he's still moving and kicking like somebody 40 years his junior. And that, for me, is down to his attention to technique. And that his attention to technique allows him to continue practicing at such a high level, at such an advance stage. And he's just one. He's obviously an important factor with me along the way. I would have, and everybody else in the group, would have trained with a number of other instructors, and we would have got something from each of those. Whether it's a particular technique or a particular way of training or a particular understanding of a kata or a particular approach to training kata or whatever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting. And let's kinda flip that question on its head. You've probably heard me ask this one before, who would you want to train with?



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Liam Murphy:

Yeah, that's a good one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's one of my favorites.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think it tells us a lot about your people feel not only their strengths lie but also their potential deficiencies.

Liam Murphy:

You know, it's funny. The martial arts world is such now that if there was somebody somewhere who you really wanted to train with, you probably could.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Probably could, yeah.

It might mean hopping on a plane and flying to another continent or another country. But if there was somebody out there who you really thought you could learn from, there's an avenue to get it. So, for that reason, I'm not gonna say anybody living. Because if I were to say somebody living, some smart aleck is gonna go well, you know where he lives. Just go train with him. So, I'm gonna go for the dead option here. As a Shotokan practitioner, I guess the obvious dead option would be Funakoshi. But I'm gonna go step beyond that, I'm gonna go one step back and one of his instructors Anko Itosu who's accredited with having develop the hand katas. And hand katas or the Pinan katas, they form such a vital part of the Shotokan Karate, and [30:32](#) development in Shotokan Karate. And the reason why I want to bypass Funakoshi on this one is because from a little bit of reading, I understood that even though Funakoshi was his student, he didn't actually learn the hand katas from him. That he had stopped training with him when he developed the hand katas, and that Funakoshi actually learned the hand katas from an intermediary rather than from his original instructor who had developed them. So, I'd like to train with him just to see what exactly he was thinking when he developed hand katas, what his objectives were, what he was trying



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to teach, what he was trying to convey or what he was trying to hide in developing the five katas that would then go on and be taught for kind of, you know, another hundred years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.

Liam Murphy:

And is that what he had intended for the hand katas. Maybe we're practicing them down in a way that he never intended them to be practiced. So, I think it would be really interesting just to see what his thought process was in kind of codifying the moves of those kata.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And it's such a great choice. I'm fairly certain you're the first person to name him as the person you would want to train with, and definitely one of a very small group of people who have even named Anko Itosu on this show which I find ironic. Because if you know your martial arts lineage, if you know that Japanese tree trunk of martial arts lineage, he is so important. In fact, we did a research episode on him, episode 321.

Liam Murphy:

Okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That people can find. And if you're new to the show at this point, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com - that's where you can find all that. And as we put that together, when I was introducing it, I believe I referred to him as the most important martial artist that virtually no one's ever heard of.

Liam Murphy:

Right. Okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because I know so few people who know who he is, and yet you can't deny the influence that he had on so many.

Liam Murphy:



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Definitely, yeah. So many of the modern Japanese schools owe something to his teachings.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right. And then of course, any martial arts today, I think, you can make an argument for how Japanese martial arts influenced Korean martial arts and... Yeah. It's a spiderweb at this point. Anybody who's claiming any true purity, I think, is probably at least a little misguided. There's some cross-contamination, at least slightly, from everything to everything else.

Definitely, yes. Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, you brought up competition and the ability to train for competition being something that you can do to not get bored as one of those many options. Is competition something that you're into?

Liam Murphy:

It... Excuse me. It definitely was, and I've competed up to kind of European Championship, World Championship level in both kata and Kumite. But when I competed, it was never with the objective of winning a trophy or becoming a champion or anything like that. I always look at competing as another avenue of improving, and another opportunity to train and to test myself. And so, I always look at... If I were competing and preparing for something, to test myself. To see, okay, I can do these techniques in the dojo or I can do this kata in the dojo, but how do they work under pressure when I'm out there on the floor in front of people, in front of judges, facing a competitor I've never seen before. How do things still work? Or do these still work? So, I enjoyed competing from the perspective of putting myself under that little bit of pressure just to see do my techniques still work? And also, the opportunity to train with other people, and to [34:33](#) myself against other people who are also heading in that direction. So, I always saw competition as just another way of improving, another way of kind of stress-testing what I was doing. And along the way, I kinda picked up a couple of little tin cups and metals and stuff. I don't even have those anymore. They were in the attic in my parents' house and got torn out or something, I don't know. So, that was never my objective. My objective was always the kind of journey and the experience of competing and what I would get out of that for all they've done. The kind of little blue ribbon at the end of the day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And how has your time competing influenced the way you teach?



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Liam Murphy:

That's a good question. I think the, again, it gives you another opportunity to present information to students, and another opportunity to breaking it down and practice things in another way. So, I think whether you have a set of techniques and you're looking to present it from a self-defense point of view or competition point of view, they all follow very similar principles, and that the principles are gonna be the same. You're gonna be talking about creating angles, controlling distance, using feints, you're blocking for openings and opportunities, using your opponent's momentum against them and so on.. So, I think the principles are all gonna be similar. And then having the competition aspect just gives you a little bit more of variety to experiment and to play with those principles. So, it may be at a slightly different distance or with a slightly different dynamic than if it was just two people more statically standing in front of each other. So, like we were talking about earlier, it gives you another option or more variety to practice your techniques - another excuse to practice your techniques.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think there's something pretty magical about competition because it allows you to practice all the things that you've been working on - maybe not all but quite a few of them - in a relatively safe environment. But yet, for most of us, something that still gets that heart going.

Liam Murphy:

Definitely, yeah. And I think that it is necessary test yourself, that's it all very well when you're in a more comfortable environment in the dojo. But you do need something to see if the technique still work when your heartbeat is up. And I heard a story about Tiger Woods, I have absolutely no idea if it's true or not. That when he was practicing his [37:21](#) , what he would do is he would sprint to the green and then while his heart was still pounding after sprinting to the green, he would then try to execute the [37:29](#) And he was saying for him, it was the only way in practice that he could replicate putting on the [37:35](#) in front of thousands of people and the stress that that induces.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes. That can make so much sense. Even if it's not true, it should be.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, exactly. One of those things you'll really want to be true. So, I think, yeah. When you're in the dojo and you're always practicing in a nice, safe environment and you know what's happening next, that's not really... You know, even from a self-defense point of view, if you're ever gonna have to use your Karate in a real situation, you're gonna be in distress. Your heart's gonna be pumping. There's gonna be an adrenaline. And how do you replicate that? Well, competition is kind of a nice way - as you said, in a safe



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controlled environment - to try to replicate that extra stress that you're gonna be under as you're trying to execute those techniques.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think everybody should try it at least a couple of times, at least once. Do you have any requirement for that? Some schools require...

Liam Murphy:

Absolutely no. Again, as you said there, I definitely encourage it because I think it's a great way of expressing your Karate in a different environment. But we don't have any requirements for it. No.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good. Let's kinda shift gears, talk about some pop culture stuff. You know, it's funny. I think we've gotten pretty deep here and we really haven't talked about Bruce Lee or Chuck Norris.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Movies or TV or books or anything - that's kinda rare for us to get so deep without the influence of pop culture coming up in the conversation.

Liam Murphy:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is that part of your martial arts conversation?

Liam Murphy:

You know, when it comes to martial arts movies, I like the old school ones. I'd always go back to the old black-and-white Kurosawa Samurai movies. The likes of Seven Samurai, Yojimbo - the ones with Toshiro Mifune. Although it's kind of black-and-white, Japanese, they're the martial arts movies I really like. And even moving forward a little bit, one of my favorite ones is a Japanese movie called Zatoichi. There's a



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bunch of Zatoichi movies. I think this was in probably the late 1990's, Japanese actor called Takeshi Kitano. If you haven't seen it, definitely recommend you check it out. It's your typical revenge Samurai sword play movie, but it's got some really, really nice, little quirky bits in the end sequences. Kind of not what you'd expect. So, definitely, if you're looking for a martial arts movie, you like your Samurai movies, check out Zatoichi. But, yeah. It's kind of the old school ones that I prefer rather than... I wouldn't be running out and checking out the latest Donnie Yen movie or anything like that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. Are there any favorite actors? Is it... You know, a lot of times, the older actors were so prolific. Turning out movies... some of those [40:27](#) actors were turning out movies monthly. Are there any people that you found yourself following from one movie to the next?

Liam Murphy:

You know, a little bit and I it probably would be Jackie Chan. The reason I like what he does, it's the fight scenes and his moves are so creative. They're really, really athletic, really, really creative. And then when you look at the behind the scenes - especially in his early career - the crazy stuff that he was doing just to get a shot or to get a stunt and jumping off buildings. That was amazing - what he was doing. And the fact that he's still alive; did it all and he's still alive and still going strong.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. He's utterly fantastic, continuing to be fantastic. I mean, these... I'm not gonna get his age exactly right but late 50s, early 60s at this points, and still showing up and showing up well when he does.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I find that mind-blowing. How about books?

Liam Murphy:

Books, yeah. I think I... Probably anybody who practices Shotokan, they're gonna name Dynamic Karate as one of their favorite books by Master Masatoshi Nakayama. Again, it's kind of an old school - mid-1960's when it was first published. But the photographs in the book are absolutely amazing. They were taken of kind of the young [41:51](#) of JKA, Japan Karate Association, instructors back in the 1960's. All in their prime, all in their turkeys. The photography is amazing. It's taken kind of on rooftops across Tokyo,



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or it's taken on Karate beaches and they're squaring off against each other. Really, really atmospheric, all black-and-white, really kind of broody shots. And a lot of them... Some of them, unfortunately, have passed away. But a lot of them are still very active now, and into their 70's and beyond. Still very active, indeed, the Karate scene. But just... And I remember, probably my first in training in Karate, I think I got that book out of the library at the start of the summer. I just spent the whole summer leafing through the book, looking at the pictures in it. And whenever I look at that book now, it takes me back to being a white belt or being an orange belt and looking at these pictures, and these guys were like total superheroes. So, it's a real nostalgia type of book for me. But the images in it are fantastic. Other books that I think - from a martial arts perspective - that I think work really well. And there's two that spring to mind, and I like the two of them as a pair because it complement each other really well. And one is called *Moving Zen* by C.W. Nicol. And again, it's kind of early 1960's. He was one of the first foreigners to go and train in Japan, Japan Karate Association, [43:20](#) to go there specifically to train in martial arts. And obviously, being a foreigner in Japan in the 1960's is a whole different experience. But what's interesting about him was that he came from a very physical background. He was an arctic explorer, he was a professional wrestler, and he admits he had a very short temper. But through his training in Karate, he managed to find his gentler side, his more sedate side. And the intense training managed to calm him down. The subtitle of the book is *Karate as a Way to Gentleness*. So, it's interesting that he came to Karate from a very physical and very visceral perspective, but his training showed him the flipside of his personality or exposed the flipside of his personality, which was gentler and was softer. The flipside to that book then is one called *Angry White Pajamas*.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. Have you come across it?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, it's a great book. And again, it's the flipside and that the author is much more academic. He's living in Tokyo. He's a writer. He's earning a living teaching English. He realized that he's totally out of shape. Want to get in shape, he's in Japan. I'll do martial art. And he starts training in Aikido, and the Aikido club that he's training at happens to be where the Tokyo [44:38](#) intense with your training course. So, he falls into this - Aikido course with his very, very intense, very, very aggressive, very robust. And it's through his training in Aikido, he finds his physical side, I mean, his physical expression. So, even though he starts off



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approaching martial arts from a very academic perspective, through Aikido, he finds his physical side, his physical expression. Versus C.W. Nicol who approached martial arts from that very physical side, and through his training, he found his flipside of that. He found his gentle side. So, I think that's nice, that when you approach martial arts, very often it will bring out parts of your personality that maybe need bringing out, or that you haven't explored.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree. And I think this comes back to... You know, we talked about it a couple of different times in a slightly language form. But this idea that martial arts gives so much back to you based on what you put it, and martial arts' ability to find what you need and if you're willing to listen.

Liam Murphy:

Exactly, yeah. Exactly. And just like... There are two little books that are kind of very simple reads. It's not very complicated. They're kind of written decades apart but I think as a set, they work really, really well in explaining how martial arts, as you said, can bring out that part of your personality that may be you haven't explored previously.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree. Let's talk about the future. Here you are, you've been training a while. You're still training. Clearly, you're still engaged, you're still engaged, you're willing to give your time to come on this show. So, that tells me that martial arts is still very important part of your life. Which begs the question, why? Why after all these time, are you still fired up?

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. That's a good question. And possibly, it's because I'm afraid of what will happen if I stop. And that's kind of a negative reason to continue training, but I think that a little bit, a grain of that. You asked me, what would I be doing if I weren't training; I'm not sure. So, I'm not sure what would happen to me either in physically or personality wise. But if I stop, that might be a little bit scary. But I think one of the reasons, apart from that kind of slightly negative [47:01](#) one of the reasons is that I'm always looking for a way to improve. Ad martial arts and Karate, I think it offers you that. No matter how long you're training, there's always going to be something tweaking. It's always gonna be something that you can change or something you can improve. Or you watch somebody else doing something even if it's not Karate - if it's somewhat a physical activity, you're going, I little bit of that in what I'm doing. So, there's always going to be that the [47:25](#) and he continuous incremental improvement. So, there's always gonna be an opportunity to be a little bit better. And then, as I said, looking to the future, you're kinda going, well, in a year's time, before I'm focusing on this, what can I be doing better? What do I need to be doing better in a year's time, and how am I gonna address that? So, like I was saying at the beginning, one of the reasons that I continue



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training beyond the first year classes, is because I realized that there was a real pathway to improvement, and a real correlation between hey, you're trying to get better. So, I think it's not feeling of if I keep training, I'm gonna keep getting better, I'm gonna keep improving. And as you go a little bit older, your body inevitably starts to give out in different places. Then, it becomes more challenging, You have to find out, okay,, well, I'm a little bit stiff and a little bit sore. But there's still somewhere where I can improve. I can't just go oh, I'm stiff, I'm sore - that's it. No jobs done, days over. You have to be able to say, okay, I'm a little bit less sore, a little bit stiff, but yeah. I can still keep working. I can still keep improving in other ways. So, it's that constant challenge, I think, keeps me coming back.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think one of the thing that I find most fascinating and simultaneously frustrating is that, as we keep progressing, we keep learning. It becomes harder and harder to stay skilled at all of the things that we're learning.

Liam Murphy:

Definitely, yeah. The more you learn, the more you realize you don't know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is a beautiful and painful realization.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah, yeah. Definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Unfortunately, for someone like myself and - I don't know if you're one of these folks - who like checking off boxes. Oh, I know this. I've got this. I've done this.

Liam Murphy:

Yeah. I think in martial arts, it's more difficult to do that. It's very difficult to say. Yeah, definitely I've got this. I don't have to do it again - it's done. There's always... You know, when you're returning to it, because you've gained a little bit of experience somewhere else, you go back to something thought you knew, and your realize oh, hold on. There's a whole area I haven't explored here. So, when you start to improve in one area, you see the potential for improvement and improvements in other area And that goes back to what you were saying about training and competition. Sometimes, that opens up areas of improvement in non-competitive aspect of the art. But you suddenly realize there's improvements there because you



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go, hold on. When I was competing, I was able to move this way or I was able to move a little bit faster. I was able to use these angles. Now, I have to use the same angles and speed and whatever else in this other area of my training.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Definitely. Now, if people have been listening and, you know, maybe they're interested in stopping by, maybe taking a class with you or jumping, maybe they're on vacation or they just want to reach out and say, thank you or hello, follow you on social media - any of that. How would people find you online?

Liam Murphy:

Sure. On me personally, the best way to reach out is probably go through Twitter or Instagram. I'm old-boy karate. I'm so, happy to chat with anybody. And if you want to train with our group or any other class, we get a lot of his, a lot of histories, a lot of tourist passing through the city, and they bring their Karate gi with them on holidays, for some unknown reason. And then they come down and join us for a couple of classes. If you go onto Facebook and look for JKA Shotokan Ireland, you'll find our groups. You can ask some questions there, and somebody will get back to you. And then, also, I take classes in WCT University in DCU. So, again, on Facebook, ECU Karate, or dcu@karate.com. Any of those will get you through to us.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. And of course, we'll...

Liam Murphy:

Oh, I must...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, go ahead.

Liam Murphy:

Sorry, sorry. One of the things I mentioned, I also write for a magazine called Shotokan Karate Magazine. So, I've written a bunch of articles about different things. So, if anybody's interested in kind of hearing about my onions about kata or training or... as you're getting older. Whatever else, I happen to writing in that Shotokan Karate Magazine. [I51:34](#) publish the [51:34](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Cool. And of course folks, we're gonna link all that stuff - the ways to get a hold of Sensei on the show notes, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. I thank you for being here. This has been a lot of fun, learned a lot. You've got me wanting to go train which is gonna be difficult because I've got another interview right away. So, there's a catch-22 there. But before I do let you go, if I could ask you for one more thing, and that's what parting words you'd give to everyone listening today?

Liam Murphy:

Sure. First piece of advice, I guess, would be don't look to people like me for advice. But if you're hear and you're listening, I think just to go back to what I said when we're talking about Bushido and what it means and what you can take from your martial arts into other aspects of your life. Whatever you're doing, try to give it 100% even though it's becoming increasingly difficult. So many distractions and the world that we live in now. But I think if you just kind of focus on giving that whatever it is you're doing or whoever it you're talking to, keeping that 100% [52:41](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

A lot of the people that we have on the show check this box for being perpetual students. There is a humility. There is a confidence in what they do, but a recognition that there's so much more to know, in fact, more than they ever will know. And I think that's a pretty apt description for Sensei Murphy. His love of Karate doesn't blind him from the fact that he's part of it. It's not something he's going to ever grab all of. It's something that is going to keep him fueled, driving forward, working to get better. And that was the thing that stuck out most for me. And it's something that I admire and I really try to cultivate myself. Hopefully, all of you as well. So, thank you so much, sir. I appreciate your time on the show.

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